А. ЧЕХОВ

ТРИ ГОДА

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ
НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
Москва

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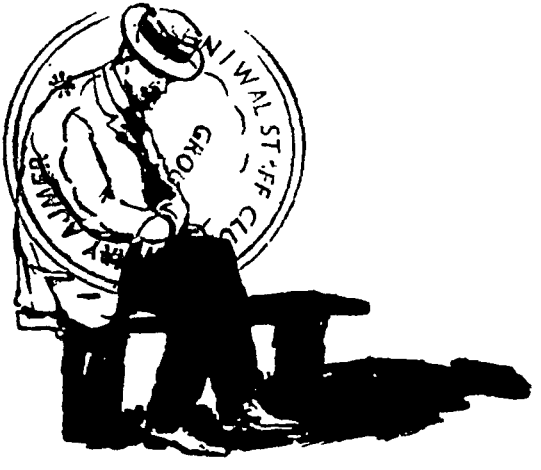

I

It was still dark, except for lights in the windows here and there and the pale moon rising behind the barracks at the far end of the street. Laptev sat on a bench outside his house, waiting for vespers to end at the Church of Peter and Paul. Yulia Sergeyevna would be coming by on her way home from church, he hoped, and he would speak to her and perhaps spend the whole of the evening with her.

He had been waiting for more than an hour and his thoughts had strayed back to his Moscow flat, his Moscow friends, his servant Pyotr and the desk in his study. He stared at the dark, motionless trees, thinking how strange it was that, instead of renting some country-house in Sokolniki, he should be living in this provincial town, where the cattle raised clouds of dust as they tramped by to the sound of cow-horns morning and evening. His thoughts shifted to the endless arguments with his friends in Moscow about life being quite possible without love, about love being a psychosis, and finally about there being no such thing as love, but only the physical attraction of the sexes, and so on. And he thought sadly that if anyone were to ask him about love now, he would hardly know what to say.

The service was over, and the crowd poured out of the church. Laptev peered at the dark figures moving down the street. The bishop had already driven by in his carriage, the ringing had ceased, and the red and green lights on the bell-tower—illuminations in honour of the church feast—went out one by one, but the street was still full of people who strolled along or stopped to talk under the windows of the houses. At last Laptev heard a familiar voice and his heart beat fast. But Yulia Sergeyevna was not alone, she was accompanied by two other ladies.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" he said in a despairing whisper. "This is awful!"

At the corner of the street she stopped to take leave of her companions and, looking up, she saw Laptev.

"I was just coming to see your father," he said. "Is he at home?"

"I suppose so," she replied. "It is too early for his club."

The street was lined with gardens, and in the moonlight the gates and fences on one side of it were thrown into deep shadow by the tall lime-trees that grew along them, and from the darkness came the low murmur of women's voices and laughter and the faint strumming of a balalaika. These sounds and the scent of the lime blossoms and hay stirred him; he wanted to throw his arms around his companion, shower her face, hands, shoulders with kisses, fling himself weeping at her feet and tell her how long he had waited for her. An elusive smell of incense clung to her person, reminding him of the time when he, too, believed in God and attended vespers and yearned for pure, poetic love. And because he knew she did not love him he felt that the happiness he had dreamed of then would never come.

She spoke with sympathy about the illness of his sister Nina Fyodorovna. Two months before Nina had had an operation for cancer and now everyone was expecting a relapse.

"I went to see her this morning," Yulia Sergeyevna

said. "I thought she looked different—not thinner than she was last week, but somehow faded."

"Yes," said Laptev. "There is no actual relapse, but I can see that she is growing weaker and weaker every day, wasting away before my eyes. I wonder what's the matter with her."

"To think that she was so healthy, so plump and pink-cheeked!" said Yulia Sergeyevna after a moment's silence. "'The Moscow girl,' everyone here used to call her. And how she could laugh! She would dress up as a peasant girl on holidays and it suited her so well!"

Sergei Borisych, the doctor, was at home. Stout, red-faced, in a long coat that reached below his knees and made him look short-legged, he was pacing up and down his study, with his hands in his pockets, humming to himself his usual "Ru-ru-ru-ru!" His grey side whiskers were uncombed, his hair was untidy as if he had just risen from bed. His study too, with the cushions on the sofa, the stacks of old papers in the corners and the old, sick poodle under the table, looked as untidy and frowsy as the doctor himself.

"Monsieur Laptev wishes to see you," his daughter said to him as she entered his study.

"Ru-ru-ru-ru," the doctor trumpeted and turned into the drawing-room. "Well, what are the good tidings?" he said shaking hands with Laptev.

It was dark in the drawing-room. Laptev stood, hat in hand, and, apologizing for the intrusion,

asked what could be done to help his sister to sleep at night and why she was growing so thin, and as he spoke, he had an uneasy feeling that he had asked the very same questions during the doctor's morning visit.

"Perhaps we ought to invite a specialist from Moscow," he said. "What do you think?"

The doctor sighed, shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands.

He was clearly offended. In general he was an exceedingly touchy person, always imagining that he was not trusted, not properly appreciated and respected, that his patients exploited him and his colleagues were ill-disposed towards him. He would laugh bitterly at himself, saying that fools like him were made to be put upon.

Yulia Sergeyevna lit the lamp. Laptev could see by her pale, languid features and her listless movements that she was tired after the church service and wanted to be alone. She sat on the couch, her hands in her lap, musing. Laptev knew that he was not handsome, and now he was almost physically conscious of the fact. He was shortish and slightly built, with pink cheeks and hair already thinning at the top so that his head was sometimes sensitive to cold. His face had none of that simple charm that makes even plain faces pleasant; with women he was awkward, too talkative, and affected in his manners. Now he almost despised himself for this. He knew he ought to be making conversation

if he did not want Yulia Sergeyevna to be bored with his company. But what should he talk about? His sister's illness again?

He began to talk about medicine, said all the usual things, commended hygiene, and declared that he had been planning for a long time to open a lodging-house in Moscow and that the estimates had already been drawn up. A workman who would come to his lodging-house for the night would get a plateful of hot cabbage soup with bread, a clean warm bed with a blanket and a place to dry his clothing and footwear—all for five or six kopeks.

Yulia Sergeyevna was usually silent in his presence, but in some strange way, by lover's intuition perhaps, he guessed her thoughts and intentions. Now, too, he was thinking that since she had not gone to her room to change and drink tea after vespers she must be going out again.

"But I am in no hurry with the lodging-house," he went on with irritation, addressing the doctor, who stared at him blankly, evidently wondering why he had brought up the subject of medicine and hygiene. "Most likely I shall have no need of those estimates for some time to come. I am afraid the lodging-house will fall into the hands of our sanctimonious hypocrites or those philanthropic ladies who ruin all good undertakings."

Yulia Sergeyevna rose and held out her hand.

"Excuse me," she said, "I must go. Please give my regards to your sister."

"Ru-ru-ru-ru," trumpeted the doctor. "Ru-ru-ru-ru."

Yulia Sergeyevna went out, and soon after she had gone, Laptev took leave of the doctor and went home. All those lime-trees, shadows, clouds, all those smugly indifferent beauties of nature seemed paltry to him now, as they always do when a man is dissatisfied and unhappy. The moon rode high in the heavens and the clouds raced swiftly under it. "What a naïve provincial moon, what pitiful wisps of clouds!" he thought. He was ashamed of himself for having talked about medicine and his lodging-house, and was horrified to think that tomorrow again he would be unable to resist the temptation of seeing her and speaking to her, and would again convince himself that she cared nothing for him. And the same would happen the day after. When and how was all this going to end?

As soon as he came home he went to his sister's room.

Nina Fyodorovna was still quite healthy in appearance, and one would not have thought her ill were it not for the ghastly pallor that gave her face a deathlike look as she lay on her back, her eyes closed.

Sasha, her eldest daughter, aged ten, was sitting beside her, reading aloud from a school-book.

"Alexei is here," murmured the sick woman.

By a tacit agreement of long standing, Sasha and her uncle took turns at the sick-bed. Sasha closed

her book and slipped out without a word. Laptev took a historical novel off the dressing-table, found the right page, and began to read aloud.

Nina Fyodorovna was a native of Moscow. She and her two brothers had spent their childhood and youth in the home of their merchant father in Pyatnitskaya Street. It had been a long, dreary childhood. Her father had been very strict with her and had even flogged her more than once, and her mother, after a long illness, had died. The servants had been slovenly, coarse and hypocritical, and the monks and priests who came to the house were coarse and hypocritical, too; they ate and drank heartily and flattered her father whom they despised. The boys had been fortunate enough to go to school, but Nina had remained uneducated, had barely learned to write, and she read nothing but historical novels. When she was twenty-two—some seventeen years before—she met her present husband, Panaurov, during a summer in the country at Khimki, fell in love with him and married him secretly, against her father's wishes. The old man considered the handsome, rather arrogant landowner, who whistled and lighted his cigarettes at the icon-lamp, an absolute nonentity, and when his son-in-law began to send him letters demanding a dowry, he wrote to his daughter saying that he was sending her the fur coats, silver and other things that had belonged to her mother, plus 30,000 rubles, but refused to give her his blessing. Some time

later, he had sent her another 20,000 rubles. Before long the money and the dowry were gone, the country-house was sold, and Panaurov moved with his family to town to take a post in the gubernia administration. There he acquired another family, a fact which gave rise to a great deal of gossip, since he made no attempt to hide it.

Nina Fyodorovna adored her husband. And now, as she listened to the historical novel, she was thinking of all she had gone through in the past years, and how very sad the story of her own life would be if anyone were to write it. Since the tumour was in her breast, she was convinced that her illness was the result of unhappy love, that tears and jealousy had robbed her of her health.

Alexei Fyodorovich closed the book.

"That's the end, and let God be praised," he said. "Tomorrow we shall begin another."

Nina Fyodorovna laughed. She always laughed easily, but Laptev had begun to notice that at times her illness seemed to be affecting her mind, for she would laugh at every trifle and often without any reason at all.

"Yulia was here this morning when you were out," she said. "I don't think she has much faith in her father. 'Let my father attend you,' she said, 'but I would advise you to write to the holy man secretly as well and ask him to pray for you.' There is some holy old man in town, you know. Yulia forgot her umbrella, you must send it to her tomorrow," she

went on after a slight pause. "But when the end comes neither doctors nor holy men can help."

"Nina, why don't you sleep at nights?" Laptev asked, to change the subject.

"I don't know. I simply can't. I lie awake and think."

"What do you think about, dear?"

"About the children, about you ... about my own life. I have been through a great deal, Alexei, and when it all comes back—Good heavens!" She laughed. "I have given birth five times, I have buried three children.... Sometimes I would be about to give birth and my Grigory Nikolayevich would be sitting with that woman and there would be nobody to send for the midwife. I'd go out to the hall or the kitchen looking for the servant and there would be Jews, shopkeepers, usurers, sitting there waiting for him to come home. My head would swim.... He didn't love me, though he never said so. Now I don't mind, it doesn't hurt any more, but I was so unhappy when I was younger, so unhappy, dear. I found him in the garden with a lady once—we were living in the country at the time. I turned and walked away not knowing where I was going until I found myself on the steps of the church. I fell on my knees and cried out, 'Holy Mother!' It had grown dark, the moon was shining...."

She paused, gasping for breath; then, after she had rested a little, she took her brother's hand.

"You are so kind, Alexei," she said tonelessly. "So clever.... So good!"

Laptev left his sister's room at midnight, taking Yulia Sergeyevna's umbrella with him. In spite of the late hour, he found the servants at tea in the dining-room. There was no order in the house, he thought. The children were still up, and in the dining-room too. They were all talking in low, uneasy tones, not noticing that the flickering lamp was about to go out: both adults and children had been disturbed latterly by a number of evil omens: the mirror in the hall had cracked, the samovar whistled every day, indeed, it was whistling even now as if for spite; they said that a mouse had jumped out of Nina Fyodorovna's shoe just as she was about to put it on. Even the children already knew the dread significance of those omens. Sasha, the eldest girl, a thin, dark-haired child, was sitting motionless at the table looking frightened and distressed, and little plump fair-haired Lida, aged seven, was standing beside her, frowning at the fire.

Laptev went down to his apartments on the ground floor, stuffy low-ceilinged rooms smelling of geraniums. He found Nina's husband in his sitting-room reading a newspaper. Laptev nodded and sat down opposite him. Neither of them spoke. They could spend whole evenings together in this way without exchanging a single word.

The little girls came down to say good-night.

Without a word, Panaurov leisurely made the sign of the cross over them and allowed them to kiss his hand. They curtsied and went over to Laptev, who also crossed them and gave them his hand to kiss. This ceremony was repeated every evening.

When the little girls had gone, Panaurov laid aside his newspaper and said:

"It's so dull in this god-fearing town! I confess, my dear fellow," he added with a sigh, "that I am very glad you have found something to amuse yourself at last."

"What are you talking about?" Laptev asked.

"I saw you coming out of Dr. Belavin's house the other day. I trust you did not go there for the sake of the father?"

"Of course not," said Laptev, reddening.

"Naturally. By the way, that father of hers is a frightful old dolt. You can't imagine what a stupid, clumsy, incompetent boor the man is! You people in the capital still see only the picturesque side of the provinces, the landscape and Anton Goremyka, so to speak, but I assure you, my friend, there is nothing picturesque about it at all. It's all barbarism, baseness, and filth, and nothing else. Take our luminaries of learning, our so-called intelligentsia. There are twenty-eight doctors in this town, all of them have made a fortune and live in houses of their own. Yet the population is just as helpless as before. When Nina had to have an operation, a simple operation, mind you, we were obliged to

invite a surgeon from Moscow—there was not a single surgeon here who would undertake it. Imagine that! They know nothing, understand nothing and are interested in nothing. Try and ask them what cancer is, for example, what it is, where it comes from."

Panaurov proceeded to explain what cancer was. He was an expert in all branches of science and had a scientific explanation for everything, though entirely his own. He had his own theory of blood circulation, his own chemistry, his own astronomy. He spoke slowly, with ingratiating smoothness, his eyes half closed, exclaiming, "Imagine that!" in an almost pleading whisper between languorous sighs and benign smiles. He was clearly charmed with himself, and utterly unmindful of his fifty years.

"I'm hungry," said Laptev. "Some pickled stuff would be just the thing."

"Well, that can be easily arranged."

A little later Laptev and his brother-in-law were sitting upstairs in the dining-room having supper. Laptev drank a glass of vodka and followed it with wine. Panaurov did not drink anything. He never drank or played cards, yet he had managed to spend his own and his wife's fortune and got himself deeply in debt besides. It takes not so much vice as a peculiar kind of talent to fritter away so much money in so little time. Panaurov had a weakness for good food, elegantly served, music at dinner, speeches, bowing lackeys to whom he would

fling a ten and sometimes twenty-five ruble bill as a tip; he invariably took part in all subscriptions and lotteries, sent flowers to all his lady friends on their name-days, bought cups, glass-holders, sleeve-links, ties, canes, perfume, cigarette-holders, pipes, dogs, parrots, Japanese knick-knacks, and all kinds of curios; he wore only silken night-shirts, his bed was of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl, his dressing-gown was genuine Bokhara, and so on, and all this cost him "pots of money" as he put it.

All through supper he sighed and shook his head.

"Yes, everything comes to an end in this world," he said softly, his dark eyes narrowed. "You will fall in love and suffer, and fall out of love again; she will be unfaithful to you, for every woman is, sooner or later; you will suffer and despair and in the end you will be unfaithful to her yourself. But the time will come when all that will be nothing but a memory and you will talk about it coldly and consider it all sheer nonsense."

Laptev, tired and slightly intoxicated, looked at Panaurov's shapely head with the black, neatly-clipped beard and felt he understood why women were so fond of this handsome, pampered, self-confident man.

After supper Panaurov went off to his other flat. Laptev accompanied him part of the way. Panaurov was the only person in the town who wore a top hat, and beside the grey fences, the wretched wooden houses and the clumps of nettles his ele-

gant foppish figure, his top hat and yellow gloves looked odd and somehow pathetic.

Laptev said good-bye to him and walked slowly home. The moon shone so brightly that every blade of grass was visible and Laptev felt as if the moonlight were caressing his bare head with a feathery touch.

"I am in love!" he said aloud. He wanted to overtake Panaurov, embrace him, forgive him all his faults, present him with a large sum of money and then run off somewhere to the fields or the woods without turning to look back.

When he reached home he saw on a chair the umbrella Yulia Sergeyevna had forgotten. He snatched it up and pressed it to his lips. It was a silken umbrella, by no means new, held together with an old rubber band and with a handle of cheap white bone. Laptev opened it and held it over his head and it seemed to him that he felt the very breath of happiness.

He settled himself comfortably in a chair and, still holding the umbrella, began a letter to one of his friends in Moscow.

"My dear, dear Kostya, I have some news for you: I am in love again! I say *again* because about six years ago I was in love with a Moscow actress whom I never even succeeded in meeting, and during the past year and a half I lived with the 'person' you know of—a woman neither young nor beautiful. Ah, my dear friend, how unlucky I have

been in love! I have never been a success with women and if I say *again,* that is only because it is painful and sad to admit to myself that my youth has gone by without love and that it is only now at the age of thirty-four that I have really learned what love is. And so let it be *again.*

"If only you knew this girl! You would not call her a beauty—she has prominent cheek-bones, and she is very thin, but what kindness her face expresses, how wonderful is her smile! And her voice sings. She never talks to me, I cannot say that I really know her, yet when I am near her I feel I am in the presence of a rare, extraordinary being, infinitely wise and lofty. She is religious, and you cannot imagine how deeply that moves me and exalts her in my eyes. On this score I am prepared to argue endlessly with you. Granted you are right, have it your own way, yet I love when she prays in church. She is a provincial girl, but she was educated in Moscow and she loves our Moscow, dresses in the Moscow fashion, and for that too I love her, love her, love her. I can see you frowning and rising to deliver a long lecture to me about what love is and whom one ought and ought not to love, etc., etc. But, dear Kostya, until I myself loved, I too knew exactly what love was.

"My sister thanks you for your regards. She often remembers how she took little Kostya Kochevoi to the preparatory class, and she still calls you 'poor Kostya' because to her you are still a little

orphan boy. And so my poor little orphan boy, I am in love. So far it is a secret, so please do not say anything to the 'person' in question. I believe that will be satisfactorily settled, or, as the lackey in Tolstoi's novel said, everything will right itself. . . ."

The letter finished, Laptev went to bed. His eyelids were heavy with weariness, yet for some reason he could not sleep; he thought it was the street noises that kept him awake. He heard the cattle being driven past the house and the sound of the cow-horn, and soon afterwards the church bell rang for early mass. Then a cart went lumbering by, then came the voice of some peasant woman on her way to market. And the sparrows kept up a ceaseless chirping.

II

It was a bright, festive morning. At about ten o'clock Nina Fyodorovna, wearing a brown dress and with her hair neatly combed, was led out into the drawing-room. She walked about the room a little and stood at the open window, smiling her wide, childlike smile; looking at her, one remembered that a local artist, a man who liked his drink, had once said that her face was like a holy image and had wanted her to pose for a picture of Russian Shrovetide. That morning everybody—the children, the servants, her brother Alexei and even

she herself—was suddenly quite certain that she was going to get well. The little girls ran after their uncle, squealing with laughter, and the house came to life again.

People came to inquire after her health, bringing holy wafers and saying that there had been services for her that day in nearly every church in town. She was well known for her charity and people loved her. She dispensed charity with a light hand, like her brother Alexei, who also gave away money freely, without stopping to think whether it was wise to give or not. Nina Fyodorovna paid tuition fees for needy scholars, gave tea, sugar and jam to old women, equipped impecunious brides, and if a newspaper came her way the first thing she looked for was some appeal for help or a notice inserted by someone in distress.

Now too she held in her hand a sheaf of notes by which the needy had purchased food on credit and which the grocer had now submitted for payment.

"Dear me, what a lot they have taken! Have they no conscience at all?" she said, hardly able to decipher her own handwriting on the notes. "Think of it! Eighty-two rubles! What if I don't pay?"

"I shall pay him today," said Laptev.

"No, no, you mustn't," Nina Fyodorovna said in agitation. "It is enough that I receive 250 every month from you and Fyodor. God bless you both," she added softly so that the servants might not hear.

"But I spend two thousand five hundred a month myself!" he said. "I tell you again, my dear, you have as much right to spend money as Fyodor or I. Please understand that once and for all. There are three of us and one kopek out of every three belongs to you."

But Nina Fyodorovna could not understand, and from the expression on her face she seemed to be puzzling over a complicated mathematical problem. This inability of hers to grasp anything relating to money matters always distressed Laptev. He suspected too that she had her own debts which she was ashamed to confess and which caused her to suffer.

Just then footsteps and the sound of laboured breathing were heard on the staircase. It was the doctor—as untidy as usual.

"Ru-ru-ru," he hummed. "Ru-ru."

To avoid meeting him, Laptev went out through the dining-room and down to his own quarters. He could never become intimate enough with the doctor to be a frequent visitor in his house. Besides, he could not stand the "old dolt," as Panaurov called him. That is why he saw so little of Yulia Sergeyevna. It occurred to him now that the father was not at home and that if he were to take Yulia Sergeyevna her umbrella now, he would doubtless find her alone, and his heart leapt with joy. He must hurry, hurry!

He took the umbrella and, all a-tremble, flew

to her on the wings of love. It was hot outside. A score of boys—children from the three shabby old annexes which the doctor had been intending to repair for years—were playing ball among the weeds and nettles of the doctor's vast yard and the air rang with their lusty cries. In the far corner of the yard, beside her own porch, stood Yulia Sergeyevna watching the game with hands clasped behind her back.

"Good-day!" Laptev called to her.

She turned and he saw that her face which was usually cold and indifferent, or tired as it had been the day before, was as lively and flushed as the faces of the boys around her.

"Look, you never see jolly games like that in Moscow," she said, coming forward to meet him. "But of course the yards there are so much smaller, no room to run about. Papa has just gone to your house," she added, turning back to look at the children.

"I know. I have come to see you, not him," said Laptev, admiring her youthfulness which he had just discovered and her slender white neck with the thin gold chain. "I have come to see you," he repeated. "Your umbrella. My sister told me to bring it to you. You forgot it yesterday."

She stretched out her hand to take the umbrella, but he suddenly pressed it to his breast.

"Please let me keep it," he said passionately, impetuously abandoning himself to that strange delight he had experienced the evening before

when he had opened the umbrella. "I shall cherish it in memory of you ... of our friendship. It is so wonderful!"

"You may keep it," she said and blushed. "But there is nothing wonderful about it."

He gazed at her in mute ecstasy, at a loss for words.

"Dear me, why I am keeping you out here under the hot sun?" she said after a brief silence, and laughed. "Come inside."

"Shall I not be disturbing you?"

They went in. Yulia Sergeyevna ran upstairs, her white flowered dress rustling.

"It is impossible to disturb me," she replied, pausing on the stairs. "Because I never do anything. Every day is a holiday for me, from morning till night."

"That is something I cannot understand," he said going up to her. "I was brought up among people who worked every day, you know. Both men and women."

"But what if there is nothing to do?" she asked.

"One must arrange one's life so that work is a necessity. Without work a pure, joyous life is impossible." He pressed the umbrella to him again and to his own surprise heard himself saying softly in a voice he hardly recognized as his own:

"If you would agree to be my wife I would give all I possess. Everything. ... There is nothing, no sacrifice I would not make."

She started and looked at him with fear and surprise.

"Oh, no!" she said, turning pale. "That is impossible. I assure you. Excuse me."

She ran swiftly up the stairs, her gown rustling, and disappeared behind the door.

His mood changed sharply as if a light had gone out in his soul. He hurried out of the house, burning with shame and humiliation at the thought that he had been spurned, that he was disliked, that he was repulsive, disgusting even.

"I would give all I possess," he mocked at himself as he walked home under the blazing sun, remembering all the details of his confession. "I would give all—how like a merchant! As if anyone wanted your *all*!"

Everything he had said was revoltingly stupid. Why had he lied about having grown up among people who worked every day? Why had he moralized about pure and joyous living? It was stupid, uninteresting, false—false Moscow cant. But little by little his mood changed to one of utter indifference like that of a criminal after the sentence has been pronounced, and he now thanked God it was all over and that awful uncertainty gone. Now all was clear. There was to be no happiness for him, no hopes, no dreams, no yearning; and to avoid the boredom that nauseated him, he would occupy himself with the happiness of other people. Before he knew it, old age would

come and nothing would matter. He did not care a whit now and was able to consider the whole thing dispassionately; yet, his face, especially beneath the eyes, felt strangely heavy; his forehead was taut as rubber—as if the tears were about to gush forth. Limp and weak, he lay down on his bed and within five minutes was fast asleep.

III

Laptev's unexpected proposal of marriage caused Yulia Sergeyevna deep distress.

She knew Laptev only slightly, she had met him by chance. He was a rich man, member of the well-known Moscow firm of Fyodor Laptev and Sons, always very serious, apparently clever and greatly concerned about his sister's health. She had believed him to be hardly aware of her existence and was herself quite indifferent to him—and now this proposal on the stairs, the pitiful, exalted look on his face....

She was upset because it had all happened so suddenly, because he had used the word *wife* and because she had had to refuse him. She could not remember what she had said to him, but the feeling of distaste that had swept her still lingered. She did not like him. He looked like a salesman, he was not in the least interesting, and she could not

possibly have accepted him. Yet she felt uncomfortable.

"Good heavens—on the staircase, without even going into the room," she told herself in despair, turning to the little holy image that hung over her bed. "Without courting, even, and in that absurd way!"

Left to herself, her agitation increased hourly until she simply had to talk to someone, had to be assured that she had done the right thing. But there was no one to talk to. Her mother was long since dead and her father was not a man to whom she could talk seriously. His caprices, his painful sensitiveness and vague gestures annoyed her; besides, no matter what she talked to him about he always turned the conversation to himself. Nor was she altogether frank in her prayers, for she did not quite know what to pray for.

The samovar was brought in. Yulia Sergeyevna, looking very pale and tired and with an air of helplessness about her, came into the dining-room and brewed the tea—her daily duty—and poured her father a glass. Sergei Borisych in his long coat reaching below his knees, red-faced, unkempt, his hands thrust into his pockets, paced the dining-room like a caged animal. Now and again he paused by the table to sip noisily from his glass and resumed his pacing with the same abstracted air.

"Laptev proposed to me today," said Yulia Sergeyevna, and blushed.

The doctor glanced at her; he seemed not to understand.

"Laptev?" he asked. "Panaurova's brother?"

He loved his daughter and realized that sooner or later she would marry and leave him, but he tried not to think about it. The prospect of having to live by himself in this big house frightened him; though he would not admit it, he was secretly convinced that if he did, he would some day be seized with apoplexy.

"Indeed, I am very glad," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I congratulate you with all my heart. Now you have a splendid opportunity to leave me. And you are quite right. To live with an old father, a sick, half-demented creature, must be very hard for a young person. You are quite right. And the sooner I croak, the sooner the devil takes me, the happier everyone will be. I congratulate you, my dear."

"I refused him."

The doctor was much relieved at this but he could not restrain himself.

"I often wonder why I have not been put away in a lunatic asylum yet," he went on. "Why am I wearing this coat instead of a strait jacket? I still believe in truth, in goodness, I am one of your foolish idealists, and is that not insanity in our time? And what do I get for my truth, for my honesty? People almost throw stones at me and take advantage of me. Even my nearest kinsmen

try to ride on my neck, damned old fool that I am."

"It is impossible to talk to you, Father!" said Yulia.

She rose quickly from the table and went to her room, seething with anger. He was so often unjust to her. But soon she felt sorry for him, and when the time came for him to go to his club, she escorted him downstairs and closed the door after him herself. It was a windy, restless night. The door trembled under the impact of the wind, and the draught on the porch was so strong that it nearly blew her candle out. Upstairs she went through all her rooms and made the sign of the cross over all the windows and doors. The wind howled and she thought she heard someone walking on the roof. Time dragged, she had never felt so lonely.

She asked herself whether she had done right in refusing Laptev just because she did not like his appearance. True, she did not love him, and to marry him would mean bidding farewell for ever to her dreams, to what she had imagined happiness and married life to be, but would she ever meet the man she dreamed of? She was already twenty-one. There were no eligible men in the town. She thought of all the men she knew—government officials, teachers, officers, and found that some of them were already married and leading incredibly dull, empty lives, others were

uninteresting, colourless, stupid, or immoral. Laptev, after all, was a Moscovite, he had graduated from University, and spoke French; he lived in the capital where there were a great many clever and remarkable people, where life was gay, where there were all sorts of wonderful theatres, musical evenings, excellent dressmakers and cakeshops.... The Bible said that a wife must love her husband, and the novels made so much of it, but perhaps all that was exaggerated. Was marriage not possible without love? Did people not say that love soon passes and only habit remains, and that the purpose of marriage was not love, not happiness, but duty, for example, bringing up children, running a household, and so on. Even love in the Bible sense perhaps meant respect, forbearance, loving one's husband as one's neighbour.

Before going to bed Yulia Sergeyevna read her evening prayers carefully, knelt down, pressed her hands to her breast, and gazing at the flame of the candle under the icon, she pleaded:

"Help me, Holy Mother! Help me, O Lord!"

She thought of all the old maids she had happened to meet, poor drab creatures who bitterly regretted having once refused offers of marriage. Might the same not happen to her? Perhaps she ought to go to a nunnery or become a sister of mercy?

She undressed and lay down in her bed, crossing herself and the air about her. Just then the bell pealed loudly in the corridor.

"Good heavens!" she said, feeling a painful tremor run through her at the sound. She lay still, thinking how dull and dreary provincial life was, and at the same time how nerve-racking. You were constantly being startled or frightened, or losing your temper or feeling guilty about something, and finally your nerves were so shattered that at times you had to hide under the blanket.

Half an hour later the bell rang again as loudly and insistently as before. The servants must have been sleeping and did not hear. Yulia Sergeyevna lit the candle and dressed hurriedly, shivering, annoyed at the servants, but when she went out into the passage the parlourmaid was already locking the door.

"I thought it was the master, but it was just a call," she said.

Yulia Sergeyevna returned to her room. She took a pack of cards out of the chest of drawers and told herself that if she shuffled the cards thoroughly and then cut them, and if the card at the bottom was a red one, that would mean *yes*, that is, she must marry Laptev, but if it was black, the answer would be *no*. The card at the bottom of the pack was the ten of spades.

This calmed her and she fell asleep, but in the morning it was neither *yes* nor *no* again. Now if she wished she might change her whole life. She was so tired of thinking about it that she felt almost ill. But shortly after eleven she dressed and went

to call on Nina Fyodorovna. She wanted to see Laptev. Perhaps now he would seem better to her than before; perhaps she had been mistaken about him.

She walked along, struggling against the wind, holding her hat with both hands, blinded by the dust.

IV

Coming upon Yulia Sergeyevna unexpectedly in his sister's room, Laptev was again overcome by the bitter sense of humiliation he had experienced the day before. If after what had happened she could so light-heartedly visit his sister and risk meeting him that meant she did not notice him or else considered him beneath contempt. But when he shook hands he noticed her pale face and the dust under her eyes, and from the sorrowful and guilty look she gave him he knew that she too was suffering.

She was not well. After a brief visit, a mere ten minutes, she got up and took her leave.

"Will you see me home, Alexei Fyodorych?" she said to Laptev as she went out.

They walked in silence, holding on to their hats, he, a few paces behind, trying to shield her from the wind. When they turned into the side street the wind was less violent and they walked side by side.

"I was unkind yesterday, forgive me," she began, and her voice shook as if she were about to

weep. "Oh, I am so unhappy! I could not sleep all night."

"Really? I slept very well," said Laptev, without looking at her. "But that does not mean that I am happy. My life is ruined, and since yesterday I have felt as though I had been poisoned. The worst was over yesterday, today I no longer feel constrained and I can speak quite frankly to you. I love you more than my sister, more than my mother . . . I can live without my sister and my mother, but without you my life is meaningless, I cannot. . . ."

As usual, he guessed her intentions. He knew that she had asked him to see her home because she wanted to continue yesterday's conversation and that she was now leading him to her house. But what could she add to her refusal? What had she thought of now? He sensed by her glances, her smile, even by the way she carried her head and shoulders as she walked beside him, that she still did not love him. What, then, could she have to say to him?

Doctor Sergei Borisych was at home.

"Come in, you are very welcome, Fyodor Alexeich," he said, confusing Laptev's name and patronymic. "I'm very glad to see you."

The doctor had never been so cordial before and Laptev concluded that he already knew of the proposal and this irritated him. He sat now in the doctor's drawing-room, a strange room with shabby, pretentious furniture and bad paintings, which in

spite of its huge lampshade and arm-chairs looked more like a spacious barn than a living room, the sort of room only a man like the doctor could be comfortable in. The next room, nearly double the size, was called the hall and contained nothing but chairs ranged along the walls as in a dancing-class. As he sat there talking to the doctor about his sister, Laptev was troubled by the uneasy thought that Yulia Sergeyevna had called on his sister Nina and then brought him here solely in order to tell him that she had changed her mind. Oh, how terrible, he thought. But worse still was the knowledge that such suspicion could have entered his mind. He imagined the father and daughter sitting up far into the night, earnestly discussing the matter, arguing about it even, and finally agreeing that Yulia had been foolish to have refused such a wealthy man. He could even hear the words parents usually say on such occasions:

"True, you do not love him, but think of all the good you will be able to do!"

The doctor got up to go on his rounds. Laptev was about to leave with him, but Yulia Sergeyevna said, "Don't go, I beg you."

She had lost heart and she assured herself miserably that to refuse a kind, decent man who loved her simply because she did not like him, particularly when this marriage would give her an opportunity to change this dull, dreary, idle existence of hers, when her youth was going and the future held no

brighter prospect, to refuse under these circumstances would be madness, foolish caprice, and God might indeed punish her for it.

When the doctor's footsteps died away, she turned suddenly to Laptev, very pale in the face, and said in a resolute tone:

"I thought over your proposal for a long time yesterday, Alexei Fyodorych.... And I have decided to accept it."

He bent down and kissed her hand, and she pressed her cold lips awkwardly to his head. He felt that this declaration of love lacked the main thing—her love, and there was much that was terribly superfluous, and he wanted to cry out, to run away, to leave at once for Moscow, but she was standing there so close to him that passion overwhelmed him suddenly, and realizing that it was too late to think now, he pressed her to him, murmuring endearments and kissing her neck, and then her cheek and her hair.

She went over to the window, alarmed by these caresses, and both of them were already regretting having spoken and they were asking themselves in confusion, "Why did this happen?"

"If you only knew how miserable I am!" she said, clasping her hands helplessly.

"But why?" he asked, going over to her and also clasping his hands. "What is it, dear, for God's sake tell me the truth, I implore you, only the truth!"

"It is nothing," she said, forcing a smile, "I promise to be a faithful, devoted wife to you. Please come this evening."

Later on, as he sat with his sister reading a historical novel to her, he recalled what had happened and it hurt him to think that his emotion had been answered in such a paltry fashion; she did not love him, yet she had accepted him—doubtless because he was rich, she had preferred what he valued least in himself. It was possible that, being a pure young woman who believed in God, she had not thought of his money at all, but after all she did not love him, she did not love him, and hence she had some practical reason—vague and indefinite perhaps, but practical nonetheless—for wanting to marry him. The middle-class pretentiousness of the doctor's house and the doctor himself, a mean, oily skinflint, something like Gaspar from *Les Cloches de Corneville*, disgusted him, the very name of Yulia sounded vulgar to him now. They would go to the altar, utter strangers to each other, without an ounce of feeling on her side, just as if the marriage had been arranged by a matchmaker, and his only consolation now, as banal as the marriage itself, was that thousands of people did the same, and that in time, when she came to know him better, Yulia might learn to love him.

"Romeo and Juliet!" he said, closing the book with a laugh. "I am Romeo, Nina. You may con-

gratulate me, I proposed to Yulia Sergeyevna today."

Nina Fyodorovna thought he was joking, but when she saw that he was serious she began to cry. The news upset her.

"I suppose I must congratulate you," she said. "But is this not rather sudden?"

"No it is not sudden. It has been going on since March, only you have not noticed anything. I fell in love with her in March when I met her here in your room."

"I thought you would marry some Moscow girl," said Nina Fyodorovna, after a pause. "A girl from our own circle, it would be so much simpler. But your happiness is what matters, Alexei. My Grigory Nikolayevich never loved me and you can see for yourself how we live. Of course any woman could love you, you are kind and clever, but Yulia is a lady, she was educated in an exclusive school, and kindness and brains are not enough. She is young, but you are not so young any more, Alyosha, nor are you handsome."

To soften the last words she stroked his cheek.

"You aren't handsome," she said, "but you are very nice."

She grew very excited, so much so that a faint flush rose to her cheeks. Would it be proper for her to give Alyosha her blessing? After all, she was his elder sister and took his mother's place. She tried to persuade her sorrowful brother that the

wedding must be a grand, gay affair that would do credit to his name.

He began visiting the Belavins as the prospective bridegroom three or four times a day, so that he had no longer any time to relieve Sasha and read historical novels to her mother. Yulia received him in her own two rooms at the far end of the house, a long way from the drawing-room and her father's office. He liked these rooms, liked the dark walls and the icons in the corner and the smell of expensive perfume and icon-lamp oil. Yulia's bed and dressing-table were screened off, the doors of the bookcase were lined with green cloth, and the floor was so thickly carpeted that her footsteps could barely be heard—and he inferred that she had a reserved nature and that she sought a quiet, peaceful, secluded life. She was still treated as an adolescent, she had no money of her own, and often while out walking she would discover to her dismay that she had not a kopek with her. Her father gave her small sums for clothes and books, not more than a hundred rubles a year. He himself was doubtless hard up in spite of his considerable practice. He played cards every evening at his club and invariably lost. Moreover he bought houses through the mutual credit society and let them to tenants who did not pay their rent regularly. He maintained, however, that the deal was extremely profitable. The house he and his daughter occupied was mortgaged and the money had

gone to buy a vacant lot on which he had already begun to build a large two-story house with the intention of mortgaging it too.

Laptev now lived in a sort of haze, as though he were not himself but his double, and he did many things he would not have dreamed of doing formerly. He went three times with the doctor to the club, had supper with him and offered him money for his building venture. He even visited Panaurov at his other flat. Panaurov had invited him to dinner one day and Laptev had accepted without thinking. He was met by a tall, thin woman of about thirty-five with greying hair and dark eyebrows, who did not look Russian. Her face was covered with white dabs of powder, she smiled a sugary smile and shook his hand with a jerk that made the bracelets on her white arms jingle. It occurred to Laptev that she smiled like that because she was unhappy and wished to hide the fact from herself and from others. He saw two little girls aged five and three who looked like Sasha. Dinner consisted of milk soup, cold veal with carrots and chocolate for dessert, all flat and tasteless, but the table gleamed with gold forks, elegant bottles for sauce and pepper, a little bowl of extremely elaborate design and a gold pepperpot.

It was only after he had eaten the milk soup that Laptev realized that it had been extremely tactless of him to have come here at all. The lady was

obviously embarrassed, she continually smiled and showed her teeth, while Panaurov gave a scientific explanation of love and its origin.

"What is in question," he said, addressing his lady in French, "is a purely electrical phenomenon. The skin of each of us contains microscopic glands which generate electric current. If you happen to meet a person whose currents run parallel to your own the result is love."

When Laptev returned home and his sister asked where he had been he felt ashamed and made no reply.

Throughout the weeks before the wedding he was conscious of the falseness of his position. His love increased from day to day, and he thought Yulia a poetic and exalting being, yet the fact remained that she did not reciprocate his love, that she was selling herself to him. At times the thought drove him to despair and more than once he had been on the point of giving up the whole thing. He could no longer sleep, and he would lie awake all night, thinking. What would he say to that lady in Moscow whom he referred to in his letters to his friends as the "person," when he met her after his marriage? What would his father and brother, who were hard to get on with, think of his marriage and of Yulia? He was afraid that at their first meeting his father might be rude to Yulia. As for his brother Fyodor, something strange had been happening to him latterly. He wrote long letters about the im-

portance of good health, the effect of illness on the mind, and about the essence of religion, but not a word about Moscow and the business. These letters annoyed Laptev and it seemed to him that his brother's character was changing for the worse.

They were married in September, at Peter and Paul's after mass, and the same day the couple left for Moscow. When Laptev and his wife, who no longer looked a young girl in her black dress and train, said good-bye to Nina Fyodorovna, the sick woman's face twisted but her eyes remained quite dry.

"If I die, take my little girls."

"Oh, I shall, I promise you!" replied Yulia Sergeyevna, and her lips and eyelids began to twitch.

"I shall come and see you in October," said Laptev, deeply touched. "Get well, my dearest."

They travelled in a private compartment. Both felt unhappy and ill at ease. She sat in a corner, with her hat on pretending to be dozing, and he lay opposite her on the couch thinking a host of disturbing thoughts: of his father, of the "person," and of whether Yulia would like his Moscow flat. And, looking at his wife who did not love him, he thought despondently, "Why has this happened?"

V

The Laptevs in Moscow were in the wholesale drapery business, dealing in braid, tape, trimming, crochet cotton, buttons, and similar merchandise.

Their sales amounted to two million rubles a year; what the net profit was nobody knew except the old man. His sons and the salesmen estimated it at some three hundred thousand, and they said it could have been a hundred thousand more if the old man would stop "throwing money around," in other words, if he did not give credit so freely. In the past ten years the firm had accumulated nearly a million rubles' worth of hopeless bills, and whenever the subject came up the senior clerk with a sly wink would remark cryptically:

"Psychological consequences of the century."

The main business was transacted in the city arcade..in what was known as the warehouse, reached through a gloomy courtyard that smelt of sacking and echoed to the clatter of horses' hoofs. An unobtrusive iron-studded door led from the yard into a room with one narrow, grated window and damp-stained walls covered with charcoal scrawlings; to the left was another room, the office, larger and cleaner, with an iron stove and two tables in it, but with the same jail-like window. From here a narrow stone staircase led up to the upper floor where the main premises were. This room was quite large, but the pervading gloom, the low ceiling, the heaps of crates and bales, and the people hurrying back and forth made it as unattractive as the two rooms on the ground floor. The goods lay piled up on shelves in bundles, packages and cardboard boxes, and were it not for

the bits of crimson cotton, a tassel, or a piece of braid that peeped out of holes in the paper packages, nobody would have guessed what sort of merchandise was sold here. And it was hard to believe that fortunes were made out of these crumpled packages and untidy boxes and that some fifty people, not counting the customers, were kept busy with them every day.

When Laptev came here at noon the day after his return to Moscow, the workmen crating the merchandise were making such a noise with their hammers that no one either in the ground room or in the office heard him come in; nor did a postman who came downstairs carrying a bundle of letters and frowning at the noise. The first to meet him upstairs was his brother Fyodor who resembled him so closely that they were often taken for twins. This resemblance constantly reminded Laptev of his own appearance, and now at the sight of this drab, common-looking man, short in stature, with pink cheeks and thin hair and narrow, mean hips he asked himself, "Do I really look like that?"

"I *am* glad to see you!" said Fyodor, kissing his brother and pressing his hand. "I have been waiting for you every day, my dear chap. I have been consumed with curiosity ever since you wrote that you were getting married. And I have missed you too—it's half a year if a day since we saw each other last. Well, what is the news? How is Nina? Bad? Very bad?"

"Yes, very bad."

"It is God's will," said Fyodor with a sigh. "Now tell me about your wife. She is beautiful, I suppose? I am fond of her already, she is my little sister now. I shall help you to pamper her."

Laptev caught sight of the broad, bent back of his father Fyodor Stepanych. The old man was sitting on a stool at the counter talking with a customer.

"Father, look what the good Lord has sent us!" cried Fyodor. "Alexei has come!"

Fyodor Stepanych, a tall man with a powerful frame, looked healthy and robust in spite of his eighty years and his wrinkles. He spoke in a heavy booming bass which issued from his broad chest as from a barrel. He was clean-shaven but for a brief, soldierly moustache and he smoked cigars. Since he always felt hot, he wore a loose linen jacket at all times of the year. He had recently had a cataract removed from his eye and, his sight being poor, he no longer ran the business, but confined himself to chatting with customers and drinking tea with jam.

Laptev bent down and kissed his father's hand, then his lips.

"It's a long time since we've seen you, my boy," said the old man. "A long time indeed. I suppose you want me to congratulate you on your marriage. Very well, I congratulate you."

He raised his face and Laptev bent down again and kissed him.

"Have you brought your young lady with you?" the old man asked and without waiting for an answer, he went on, turning to the customer: "Dear Father, this is to let you know that I have married so-and-so. Yes. Dear Father's advice and blessing are not wanted. They are much too clever nowadays. I was over forty when I got married, yet I went down on my knees to my father and begged his advice. There's none of that any more."

The old man was glad to see his son, but felt that it was improper to make much of him or show his joy in any way. The sound of his voice, his manner of speaking and his "young lady" had the same depressing effect on Laptev as his visits to the warehouse always had. Every detail here reminded him of the days when he had been flogged and kept on bread and water; he knew that boys were still flogged and knocked about here and that when these boys grew up they in turn would maltreat others. And it was enough for him to be in the warehouse five minutes to feel that at any moment someone was bound to scold him or box his ears.

"Here, Alyosha," said Fyodor, slapping the customer on the back, "let me introduce you to our Tambov contractor Grigory Timofeich. He is an example to the modern youth: past fifty and the father of infants."

The sales clerks laughed, and the customer, a skinny old man with a pale face, laughed too.

"The extraordinary performance of Nature," remarked the senior clerk at the counter. "What goes in is bound to come out."

The senior clerk, a tall man of about fifty, with a dark beard, spectacles and a pencil behind his ear, had a habit of expressing himself in the vaguest of terms and far-fetched allusions, smiling slily to emphasize the subtlety of his remarks. He was fond of obscuring his meanings with bookish expressions interpreted in his own way. He even used ordinary words in an unusual sense, the word "besides" for instance.

"Besides!" he would say, extending his right hand whenever making a categorical statement.

The surprising thing was that the other sales clerks, and the customers too, understood him perfectly. He was called Pochatkin, and he came from Kashira.

"You have performed a deserving feat of courage," he said by way of congratulating Laptev, "inasmuch as the female heart is like Shamil."

Another important personage in the warehouse was Makeichev, a stout, thickset man with a wreath of fair hair around a bald pate, and side-whiskers. He went up to Laptev and said in a respectful undertone:

"I have the honour, sir.... God has heard your esteemed parent's prayers. Glory to God, sir."

After this the other clerks approached one by one to congratulate the young master. They were all fashionably dressed and looked extremely respectable and well-bred. They accented their "o"s, and used the hard "g", and since the little speeches they reeled off were abundantly punctuated with polite hisses their congratulations sounded something like a whip swishing through the air.

Laptev was soon bored and wanted to go home, but for the sake of appearances he had to stay for a couple of hours at least. He moved away from the counter to speak to Makeichev, asking him whether they had had a successful summer and whether there was any news, to which the other gave respectful replies, keeping his eyes averted. A boy in a grey blouse with close-cropped hair handed Laptev a glass of tea without a saucer; a little later another boy bumped into a crate in passing and nearly fell, whereupon the staid Makeichev turned on him with a terrible face and roared:

"Look where you're going!"

The sales clerks were glad that the young master had married and come home. They glanced at him with affectionate interest and each man who went past him tried to say something at once respectful and pleasant. But Laptev was convinced that it was all insincere and that they were flattering him merely because they were afraid of him. He could not forget how fifteen years ago one of the clerks had

gone out of his mind and run out on to the street in his underclothes, shaking his fist at his masters' windows and cursing them. When the poor man recovered, everyone took a special delight in reminding him how he had shouted at his masters and called them "explanters" instead of "exploiters." The way the Laptevs' employees were treated had long been the talk of the whole arcade, and the worst of it was, there was something Asiatic in old Fyodor Stepanych's policy towards them. To begin with, no one knew how much he paid his favourites Pochatkin and Makeichev; they received no more than three thousand a year including premiums, but he let it be thought that he paid them seven; premiums were given every year to all the clerks, but secretly—so that every clerk out of pride would say that he had received more than was actually given; an apprentice did not know when he would be promoted, a clerk, whether the master was satisfied with him or not. Nothing was expressly forbidden and hence nobody knew what exactly was allowed. They were not forbidden to marry, but they did not marry for fear of displeasing their master and losing their job. They were permitted to have friends and go visiting, but by nine o'clock the gates were locked, and every morning, to make sure that none of them had been drinking, the master summoned them one by one and ordered them to breathe in his face.

On every church feast they were expected to go

to early mass and stand in church so that their master might see them all. Fasts were strictly observed. On the birthday of the master or any member of his family and on other festive occasions the clerks were expected to club together and present a cake or an album. They lived on the ground floor and in the wing of the house on Pyatnitskaya, three or four of them to a room, and ate out of a common bowl, although there were plates for each of them. If any of their masters happened to come in while they were eating they all stood up.

Laptev had long realized that only those of them who had been warped by the old man's schooling could seriously consider him their benefactor, the rest must surely regard him as their enemy. And after six months' absence, he saw no change for the better; indeed, there was some new element that boded no good. His brother Fyodor, once a quiet, thoughtful and very tactful man, now bustled about the place with a pencil behind his ear and an extremely preoccupied air, slapping customers on the back and calling the clerks "friends." He was obviously acting a part and Alexei could hardly recognize him.

The old man's voice boomed incessantly. Having nothing better to do, he amused himself by lecturing his customers on how to live and how to conduct their affairs, setting himself up as an example. Laptev had heard that boasting tone of heavy

authority for ten, fifteen, twenty years. The old man adored himself. To listen to him, one would have thought that he had made his late wife and her relatives supremely happy, had gratified his children and had been a benefactor to his employees, and had indeed given the entire street and all his acquaintances cause for eternal gratitude; whatever he did was good, and if others had trouble with their business, that was solely because they refused to take his advice; nothing could be successful without his advice. In church he always stood in front of everyone else and even reproved the priests when he thought they did not conduct the service properly, and he believed he was serving God thereby since he was in God's grace.

By two o'clock everyone in the warehouse was busy except the old man, who continued to boom. Laptev, not wishing to stand about doing nothing, accepted some trimming from one of the seamstresses, then attended to a customer, a merchant from Vologda, and turned him over to one of the sales clerks.

"T, V, A!" echoed all over the warehouse (the letters stood for the prices and numbers of the goods), "R, I, T!"

Laptev said good-bye only to Fyodor before he left.

"I shall bring my wife over to Pyatnitskaya tomorrow," he said. "But I warn you that if Father says a single offensive word to her I shall leave at once."

"You're still the same," sighed Fyodor. "Married but unchanged. You must humour the old man a little, Alexei. Very well, tomorrow at about eleven we shall expect you. Come straight from mass."

"I don't attend mass."

"Well, that doesn't matter. The main thing is not to be later than eleven so as to have time for prayers and for lunch together as well. Give my regards to my little sister and tell her I kiss her hand. I know I'm going to like her," Fyodor added, with perfect sincerity. "I envy you, brother!" he called after Alexei as he went downstairs.

"Why does he keep squirming in that queer manner as if he were naked?" Laptev asked himself as he walked along Nikolskaya Street, puzzling over the change that had come over Fyodor. "And how oddly he speaks, 'brother, dear brother, God is gracious, pray to God.' Just like Shchedrin's Judas."

VI

At 11 o'clock the following morning, which was Sunday, Laptev and his wife were driving along Pyatnitskaya Street in a light carriage. He did not look forward to the coming visit, for he was afraid of what Fyodor Stepanych might do. After two nights in her husband's home, Yulia Sergeyevna already considered her marriage a mistake, a calamity, and if she had been obliged to live in

any other town but Moscow she thought she would never have been able to endure it. Moscow fascinated her; she liked the streets and the houses and the churches, and if she could ride about in one of those wonderful sleighs drawn by thoroughbred horses from morning till night, breathing in the cool autumn air, she might not feel so unhappy.

The coachman reined in his horse beside a white, newly-plastered two-story house and turned right into a courtyard. They were obviously expected, for two policemen and the porter in a new caftan, high boots and goloshes stood at the gate and the street outside and the courtyard had been strewn with sand right up to the doorstep. The porter doffed his cap, the policemen saluted. Fyodor met the couple at the door, his face very grave.

"I am very happy to meet you, little sister," he said, kissing Yulia's hand. "Welcome to our home."

He led her up the steps and along a crowded corridor. The hallway too was packed with people and smelt of incense.

"I shall now introduce you to our father," Fyodor whispered amid solemn silence. "A venerable old man, a *pater familias*."

In the large hall beside the table prepared for the service stood Fyodor Stepanych, the priest in a calotte and the deacon. The old man gave Yulia his hand without a word. Everyone was silent and Yulia grew embarrassed.

The priest and the deacon put on their vestments. The censer, scattering sparks and smelling of incense and charcoal, was brought in. Candles were lit. The clerks came into the hall on tiptoe and stood in two rows against the walls. It was very quiet, not even a cough was heard.

"Give us Thy blessing, O Lord!"

The service was held with all solemnity, nothing was omitted and two acathisti were read: one to Jesus and one to the Holy Mother. The choristers sang from sheet music and at great length. Laptev had observed his wife's confusion, and while the acathisti were being read and the choir sang a triple "Lord Have Mercy Upon Us!" in all keys, he waited tensely, expecting the old man to turn round at any moment and make some remark, such as, "You don't know how to make the sign of the cross." The presence of all these people, the whole ceremony with the priests and choristers was disagreeable to him. It was so heavy and old-fashioned. But when he saw Yulia bend her head under the Bible with the old man and kneel down several times he realized that all this appealed to her, and he felt better.

Towards the end of the service when the "Long Life" was being sung, the priest gave the old man and Alexei the cross to kiss, but when Yulia Sergeyevna approached he covered the cross with his hand and indicated that he wished to speak. Someone waved the choir to silence.

"The prophet Samuel," began the priest, "came to Bethlehem at the Lord's bidding. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming and said: 'Comest thou peaceably?' And the prophet said: 'Peaceably; I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.' Comest thou, God's servant Yulia, peaceably to this house?"

Yulia's face was red from emotion. When he had finished, the priest gave her the cross to kiss and said in an entirely different tone:

"And now 'tis time Fyodor Fyodorych were wed. High time."

The choir struck up again, the crowd stirred to life and there was noise and movement in the hall. The old man, tears of emotion in his eyes, kissed Yulia thrice, made the sign of the cross over her face and said:

"This is your house. I am an old man, I need nothing."

The clerks came forward with their congratulations which were drowned by the choir. Lunch was served and there was champagne. Yulia sat beside the old man and he told her that it was not good to live separately, that they all ought to live together in one house, for partition and discord always led to ruin.

"I made money, and my children spend it," he said. "Now you must live here in this house and help me. I am old. It is time for me to rest."

Fyodor, looking very much like her husband but more nervous and bashful, hovered about her all the time and kissed her hand frequently.

"We are simple folk, little sister," he said, and red spots stood out on his face. "We live simply, like simple Russians, like Christians."

On the way home Laptev, greatly relieved that everything had gone off so well and that his fears had been unfounded, said to his wife:

"You may wonder that a large, powerful man like my father should have such puny sons as Fyodor and myself. Yet the explanation is so simple! Father married my mother when he was forty-five, and she was only seventeen. She was terrified of him. Nina was born first when Mother was still comparatively healthy, and that is why she was always stronger and healthier than we; Fyodor and I were conceived and born when mother was already worn out by perpetual terror. I remember how Father first began to teach me, or rather to beat me, when I was scarcely five years old. He flogged me, pulled my ears, punched my head and the first thought in my mind each morning was whether Father would beat me or not that day. Neither Fyodor nor I were allowed to play or run about; we had to go to early morning mass, kiss the hands of priests and monks, and read the acathisti at home. You are religious and you love all that, but I am afraid of religion and whenever I pass a church I remember my childhood and am filled with

terror. I was eight when I was taken to work in the warehouse as an ordinary errand-boy, which was very bad for me because I was beaten nearly every day. Later, when I was sent to school, I had lessons until dinner-time and spent the rest of the day in that warehouse. And that went on until I was twenty-two, when I went to University and met Yartsev who persuaded me to leave home. That Yartsev has done me a great deal of good. I say," Laptev said, laughing with pleasure, "let's go and pay him a visit now. He is one of the finest people I know! He will be delighted to see us!"

VII

One Saturday in November Anton Rubinstein was conducting a symphony concert. The hall was very crowded and stuffy. Laptev stood behind the columns, and his wife and Kostya Kochevoi were sitting far ahead in the third or fourth row. The intermission had just begun, when suddenly he saw the "person," Polina Nikolayevna Rassudina. Ever since his marriage he had dreaded the prospect of meeting her. Now, when her clear, direct gaze met his, he remembered that he had not even written her a short friendly note of explanation, and he reddened with shame. She gave him a firm, impetuous handshake and asked:

"Have you seen Yartsev?"

And before he had time to reply, she hurried on

with swift, broad strides as if someone were pushing her from behind.

She was extremely thin and plain, with a long nose and a look of such weariness on her face that it seemed to cost her a great effort to keep her eyes open and stay on her feet. She had fine dark eyes which lent her an expression of kindness and intelligence, but her movements were angular and abrupt. It was not easy to talk to her for she was a poor listener and she could not speak calmly. To love her was difficult. She would cover her face with her hands and laugh for a long time, declare that love was not the chief thing in her life, and, like a girl of seventeen, she would make him blow out all the candles before kissing her. She was already thirty. She had been married to a schoolteacher, but had been separated from her husband for many years. She earned her living by giving music lessons and playing in quartets.

She passed him as if by chance when they were playing the Ninth Symphony, but could not get through the crowd behind the columns. Laptev noticed that she had on the same velvet blouse she had worn to concerts for the past two seasons, new gloves and a new, but cheap, fan. She loved to dress well, but she lacked the gift and grudged the money for clothes, with the result that she dressed carelessly, and anyone seeing her on the street hurrying to her lessons with her long, loose stride would have taken her for a young acolyte.

The audience applauded and called for an encore.

"You shall spend the evening with me," said Polina Nikolayevna, coming up to Laptev and fixing him with a stern look. "We shall go away from here and have tea together. You hear me? I insist. You owe me a great deal, and you have no moral right to refuse me this trifle."

"Very well," Laptev agreed.

After the symphony there were endless curtain calls. The audience was in no hurry to leave the hall. But Laptev could not go off without saying anything to his wife. And so he had to stand by the doors and wait.

"I am dying for a cup of tea," Rassudina complained. "My soul is afire."

"We could get some tea here," said Laptev. "Let us go to the refreshment bar."

"I cannot afford to throw away money just like that. I'm not a wealthy merchant."

He offered her his arm but she refused with the tiresome explanation he had heard from her many times before to the effect that she did not consider herself a member of the weaker sex and hence had no need to lean on any man.

While she spoke she kept her eyes on the crowd and frequently exchanged greetings with acquaintances—mostly fellow students from the Guerrier music courses and the Conservatoire, and also her pupils. She shook hands with them in her quick,

jerky manner, but then she began shivering, as though in fever.

"Whom have you married?" she murmured at last, regarding him with horror. "Where were your eyes, you fool? What did you see in that stupid, empty creature? I loved you for your mind, for your soul, but that china doll wants nothing but your money!"

"Don't, Polina, please," he implored. "All that you can say about my marriage I have told myself over and over again. Please, do not give me unnecessary pain."

Yulia Sergeyevna appeared in a black dress with a large diamond brooch which her father-in-law had sent her after the service. She was followed by her suite—Kostya, two doctor friends, an officer and a stout young man in student uniform, named Kish.

"Kostya will take you home," Laptev said to his wife. "I'll come later."

Yulia nodded and moved on. Quivering nervously, Polina Nikolayevna followed her with eyes full of disgust, hatred and pain.

Laptev was reluctant to go to her house, for he anticipated an unpleasant scene, tears and hard words, and so he suggested that they go to some restaurant instead.

"No, no," she urged. "Let us go to my place. Don't dare to talk to me about restaurants."

She did not like restaurants because she thought

the air was poisoned with tobacco and men's breath. She was strangely prejudiced against all men she did not know, considered them all to be seducers liable to assault her at the slightest provocation. Moreover, restaurant music gave her a headache.

Emerging from the Nobility Club, they hired a cab, and Laptev kept thinking of her as they drove to Ostozhenka and turned off into Savyolovsky Street where Rassudina lived. She was right, he did owe her a great deal. He had met her at the house of his friend Yartsev to whom she taught musical theory. Her love for him was genuine and totally unselfish, and even after they began living together she continued to give lessons and work as before to the point of exhaustion. It was she who had taught him to understand and love music.

"My kingdom for a cup of tea!" she said in her deep voice, covering her mouth with her muff so as not to catch cold. "I gave five lessons today, damn them! And such stupid pupils, such blockheads, I nearly died with vexation. I don't know when this slavery will end. As soon as I've saved three hundred rubles I shall drop everything and go down to the Crimea. I shall lie on the beach and inhale oxygen. How I love the sea!"

"You will not go anywhere," said Laptev. "In the first place you will never save anything up and, secondly, you will grudge the money. Excuse me, but I must say this again: is it really less humiliating to collect those three hundred by the kopek

from idle people who take lessons from you out of sheer boredom, than to borrow that sum from your friends?"

"I have no friends!" she said irritably. "And please do not talk nonsense. I belong to the working class and that class has one privilege: the knowledge that it is incorruptible, the right not to borrow from wretched merchants, the right to despise. No, sir, you cannot buy me! I'm not Yulia!"

Laptev did not pay the cabman, knowing that this would merely evoke another torrent of words he had heard so many times before. He let her pay the fare herself.

She rented a small furnished room and board from a lady who owned a flat. Her large Becker piano stood at Yartsev's house in the Bolshaya Nikitskaya Street, and she went there every day to practise. The room was furnished with chairs in slip covers, a bed with a thin white counterpane and potted plants belonging to the landlady; the walls were hung with prints, and there was nothing in the room to suggest that its occupant was a woman, and a former student besides. There was no dressing-table, no books, not even a desk. It was obvious that she went to bed as soon as she came home and left the house soon after she rose in the morning.

The cook brought in the samovar. Polina Nikolayevna made tea, and, still shivering, for it was

cold in the room, began to criticize the singers who had performed in the Ninth Symphony. Her eyelids drooped with fatigue. She drank one glass of tea, then another, then a third.

"And so you are married," she said. "But don't worry, I shan't pine away, I shall be able to tear you out of my heart. Yet it hurts me sorely to see that you are as bad as all men, that what you need in a woman is not her mind, but her body, her beauty, her youth.... Youth!" she repeated in a nasal voice as if mimicking someone, and laughed. "Youth! You want purity, *Reinheit*! That's it, *Reinheit*!" and she burst out laughing, throwing herself against the back of her chair. "*Reinheit*!"

When she stopped laughing her eyes were full of tears.

"Are you happy, at least?" she asked.

"No."

"Does she love you?"

"No."

Deeply disturbed and unhappy, Laptev got up and paced the floor.

"No," he repeated. "As a matter of fact, I am very unhappy, Polina. But what am I to do? I have made a bad blunder and now it cannot be helped. I must be philosophical about it. She married without love, foolishly, yes, for mercenary reasons perhaps, but not entirely, and now she has obviously realized her mistake and is suffering. I can see it. During the day she is afraid to remain

alone with me even for five minutes and so she seeks amusement, society. With me she feels frightened and ashamed."

"But not ashamed to take your money?"

"That's stupid, Polina!" Laptev cried. "She takes money from me because it is all the same to her whether she has money or not. She is a good, pure-minded woman. She married me simply because she wanted to get away from her father, that's all."

"Are you sure she would have married you if you had not been rich?" Rassudina asked.

"I am sure of nothing," Laptev replied miserably. "Nothing. I understand nothing. For God's sake, Polina, let us drop the subject."

"Do you love her?"

"Madly."

There was a long silence. She drank a fourth glass of tea, while he paced the room thinking of his wife, now probably having supper at the doctor's club.

"But is it possible to love without knowing why?" she asked shrugging her shoulders. "No, this is nothing but animal passion! You are infatuated! You are blinded by that beautiful body, that *Reinheit*! Get away from me, you are dirty! Go to her!"

She pointed to the door, then took up his hat and threw it at him. He put on his coat in silence and went out, but she ran after him and clung convulsively to his shoulder in a fit of weeping.

"Please, Polina! Don't!" he said, trying vainly to loosen her grasp. "Calm yourself, I beg you!"

She closed her eyes and went pale, and her long nose turned an unpleasantly waxen hue like that of a corpse, and Laptev could not unclasp her fingers. She had fainted. He lifted her gently and laid her on the bed and sat beside her for about ten minutes until she came to herself. Her hands were cold, her pulse beat faintly and irregularly.

"Go home," she said, opening her eyes. "Go, or else I shall start crying again. I must take myself in hand."

He left her and went home instead of to the doctor's club where the others were expecting him. All the way home he asked himself bitterly why he had not married this woman who really loved him and had once been his wife and friend. She was the only person who was attached to him, and, besides, would it not have been a fine and worthy thing to give happiness, a home and a peaceful life to this clever, proud, hard-working creature? Who was he, he asked himself, to lay claim to beauty, to youth, to that happiness which was beyond his reach and which, as if in punishment or in mockery, had been keeping him in this gloomy depressed state of mind for three months now? His honeymoon had long since passed, and absurd as it might seem he did not know yet what sort of person his wife was. She wrote letters five pages long to her school friends and to her father, and she seemed to find plenty to

write about, but to him she only talked about the weather or that it was time to dine or sup. When he watched her saying her prayers before retiring and kissing her little crosses and images he could not help thinking with hatred, "What is she praying for?" In his thoughts he insulted her and himself by saying that in going to bed with her and taking her in his arms he was taking that which had been bought and paid for, but it sounded too terrible; if only she had been a healthy, bold, sinful woman it would have been different, but she was so young, so devout and meek, and she had such innocent eyes! When she had been his bride her piety had touched him, but now he saw that conventional set of ideas and convictions as a wall shutting out the truth. Already his life was sheer torment. When his wife sat beside him at the theatre and sighed or laughed heartily it hurt him to see that she could enjoy herself without sharing her pleasure with him. And the remarkable thing was that she seemed to get along splendidly with his own friends, they all knew her quite well already, but he knew nothing, he could only mope and suffer the torments of jealousy in silence.

On coming home, Laptev put on his smoking-jacket and slippers and sat down in his study to read a novel. His wife was not at home yet. But about half an hour later the bell rang and he heard Pyotr hurrying to open the door. It was Yulia. She

came into the study in her fur coat, her cheeks pink from the frost.

"There is a big fire over at Presnya," she said breathlessly. "The sky is blazing red. I want to drive over there with Kostya."

"Go, by all means."

The sight of the healthy freshness and childish fright in her eyes calmed Laptev. He read for another half an hour and went to bed.

The next day Polina Nikolayevna sent him to the warehouse two books which she had once taken from him, all his letters and photographs. Enclosed was a note consisting of only one word: "Basta!"

VIII

In the latter part of October Nina Fyodorovna's condition took a definite turn for the worse. She lost weight rapidly and a change came over her features. In spite of the severe pain she imagined that she was recovering, and every morning she dressed as though she were perfectly healthy, and then spent the whole day lying in bed with her clothes on. Towards the end she became very talkative. She would lie on her back talking in a low voice and panting with the exertion. Death came suddenly.

It was a clear moonlit night, the townsfolk were sleigh-riding on the fresh snow and the noise from the street could be heard in the room. Nina

Fyodorovna was lying in bed, and Sasha who now had nobody to relieve her, sat dozing beside her.

"I don't remember his patronymic," Nina Fyodorovna was saying in her quiet voice. "But his Christian name was Ivan and his surname Kochevoi. He was a government official, but very poor, and a frightful drunkard, God rest his soul. He used to come to us regularly, and every month we gave him a pound of sugar and a packet of tea. Money too, sometimes. Then, one fine day, our Kochevoi drank a bit too much and died, burnt himself up with vodka. He left a son, a little boy of about seven. A poor little orphan. We took him and hid him in the sales clerks' quarters and for a whole year Father knew nothing about it. And when he found out, he didn't say anything. When Kostya, the orphan boy, was going on for nine—I was already engaged by that time—I took him around to all the grammar schools. But nobody would take him. And he cried, the poor boy. 'What are you crying for, you silly boy?' I said to him. I took him to the grammar school in Razgulai, and there, thank the Lord, they accepted him. And every day that little boy had to walk all the way from Pyatnitskaya to Razgulai, and from Razgulai to Pyatnitskaya. Alyosha paid for his tuition. The boy, thank heavens, studied hard and did quite well. Now he is a lawyer in Moscow, a friend of Alyosha's, and as well educated as he. It is a good thing we took the poor boy in and gave him a home and now

he most likely remembers us in his prayers.... Yes...."

Her voice grew fainter and fainter and the pauses grew longer, then after a brief silence, she suddenly sat up.

"I do not ... feel very well," she said. "God have mercy on me! I can't breathe!"

Sasha knew that her mother was soon to die, and when she saw how sunken her cheeks had suddenly become she guessed that the end was near and she was frightened.

"Mother darling, don't!" she sobbed. "Don't!"

"Run into the kitchen, dear, and tell someone to go and get your father. I feel very ill."

Sasha ran through all the rooms calling the servants, but there was no one in the house except Lida who was sleeping on a trunk in the dining-room fully dressed and without a pillow. Sasha, not stopping to put on her coat or goloshes, ran out into the yard and on to the street. The nurse was sitting on a bench outside the gate watching the sleigh-riding. A military band was playing down on the river where the skating-rink was.

"Nurse, Nurse, Mother is dying!" cried Sasha, sobbing. "We must get Father at once."

The nurse went upstairs to the bedroom, took one look at the sick woman and thrust a lighted wax candle into her hands. Sasha ran to and fro in a panic, begging someone, anyone to go for her father, then she put on her coat and shawl and

ran outside. She had heard the servants say that her father had another wife and two little girls who lived on Bazarnaya Street. She ran down the street, weeping and shying from passers-by stumbling into the deep snow-drifts and shivering with cold.

A cab came down the street but she did not hire it for fear the driver might take her out of town, rob her and throw her into a graveyard (she had once heard the servants tell of a case like that over their tea). She hurried on and on, breathless with exhaustion, and sobbing as she went. When she reached Bazarnaya she stopped to ask a woman passing by where Mr. Panaurov lived. The woman proceeded to give detailed directions, but seeing that the child understood nothing of what she was saying, led her by the hand to a one-story house. The front door was not locked. Sasha ran through the entrance hall and along a corridor and found herself in a warm, brightly lit room, and saw her father sitting beside a samovar drinking tea with a lady and two little girls. But by now Sasha was past speaking, she could only sob. Panaurov guessed at once why she had come.

"Is it Mother? Is she bad?" he asked. "Tell me, child, is Mother bad?"

He got up quickly and sent for a cab.

When they arrived, Nina Fyodorovna was sitting up in bed surrounded by pillows and holding a candle. Her face was dark and her eyes were

already closed. The bedroom was full of people—the nurse, the cook, the parlourmaid, Prokofy, the hired man, and several strangers crowded in the doorway. The nurse was whispering some instructions, but no one could understand what she wanted them to do. Beside the window at the far end of the room stood Lida, pale and not yet fully awake, staring at her mother with stern eyes.

Panaurov took the candle out of Nina Fyodorovna's hand and flung it on the dresser with a frown of distaste.

"This is dreadful!" he said and his shoulders shook. "Nina, you must lie down," he said tenderly. "Lie down, darling."

She looked at him but did not know him. They helped her to lie down.

When the priest and Dr. Sergei Borisych arrived, the servants were already crossing themselves devoutly and murmuring prayers for their mistress' soul.

"Very sad," said the doctor absently, going into the drawing-room. "She was still young. Not forty yet."

The little girls could be heard sobbing pitifully. Panaurov, pale, his eyes moist, came over to the doctor and said in a faint, languid voice:

"My dear man, do me a favour and write a telegram to Moscow for me. I'm positively worn out."

The doctor got some ink and wrote a telegram to his daughter: "Panaurova passed away eight

p.m. Tell husband house on Dvoryanskaya being sold in payment of debt, add nine. Auction twelfth. Do not miss."

IX

Laptev lived in one of the side streets off Malaya Dmitrovka, not far from the old St. Pimen's Church. Besides the big house, which faced the street, he rented a two-story wing in the yard for his friend Kostya Kochevoi, a young barrister whom all the Laptevs called simply Kostya since they had known him from childhood. A French family, a husband, wife and five daughters, lived opposite in a similar wing.

It was a very cold day, and the windows were frosted over. Kostya woke up in the morning, took fifteen drops of some medicine with a worried look on his face, then got a pair of dumb-bells out of the bookcase and did some exercises. He was tall and very thin and wore a heavy ginger moustache; but the most remarkable thing about him were his extraordinarily long legs.

Pyotr, a middle-aged footman, in a jacket and cotton trousers thrust into top-boots, brought in the samovar and made tea.

"It's a fine day, sir," he said.

"That may be, my friend, but the trouble is you and I haven't much to be pleased about."

Pyotr heaved a polite sigh.

"What about the little girls?" Kostya asked.

"The priest hasn't come yet. Alexei Fyodorych is giving them a lesson himself."

Kostya found an unfrozen spot on the pane and trained his opera-glasses at the windows of the house where the French family lived.

"Can't see anything," he said.

In the meantime Alexei Fyodorych was giving Sasha and Lida a Scripture lesson. They had been living in Moscow for six weeks now, occupying the lower floor of the wing together with their governess. A tutor from the city public school and a priest came to them three times a week. Sasha was learning the New Testament and Lida had recently begun the Old. At the last lesson Lida had been told to learn the text up to Abraham.

"Now then, Adam and Eve had two sons," said Laptev. "Very well. What were their names? Do you remember?"

Lida, grave-faced as usual, stared down at the table, her lips moving; the older girl looked at her anxiously.

"You know very well. Don't be nervous," said Laptev. "Well, what were Adam's sons called?"

"Abel and Cabel," whispered Lida.

"Cain and Abel," Laptev corrected her.

A large tear slid down Lida's cheek and dropped on to the book. Sasha, also on the verge of tears, lowered her eyes and flushed. Laptev could not speak from pity. He got up and lit a cigarette. Just

then Kostya came in from upstairs with a newspaper in his hands. The little girls rose and curtsied without looking at him.

"For God's sake, Kostya, take them with their lesson, please," Laptev begged him. "I'm afraid I'll start crying myself, and besides I must be at the warehouse before dinner."

"All right."

Alexei Fyodorych went out. Kostya, frowning and looking very stern, sat down at the table and moved the Bible over to him.

"Now then," he said. "Where were you?"

"She knows about the Flood," said Sasha.

"Does she? Good, we'll have a chat about the Flood. Fire away about the Flood."

Kostya ran his eyes over the brief description of the Flood in the book and said: "I must tell you, though, that there was no such flood as is described here. And there was no Noah either. Thousands of years before the Birth of Christ there actually was an inundation, you can find reference to it not only in the Hebrew Bible but also in the books of other ancient peoples such as the Greeks, the Chaldeans and the Hindus. But however big a flood it was, it could not possibly have flooded the whole earth. The plains, perhaps—but not the mountains. There's no harm in reading this book, but you needn't believe all it says."

Lida's tears began to flow again, she turned away and suddenly burst out into such a loud fit of weep-

ing, that Kostya started up from his chair in dismay.

"I want to go home," she sobbed. "To Papa and the nurse."

Sasha too began to cry. Kostya went upstairs and telephoned to Yulia Sergeyevna:

"My dear girl, the children are crying again. I don't know what to do."

Yulia Sergeyevna came hurrying over from the big house with a woollen shawl thrown over her dress, shivering a little from the cold.

"Listen to me, listen," she pleaded, clasping them to her. "Your Papa is coming today, he sent me a wire. It is very sad about Mama, my heart aches for you both, but what can we do? We cannot go against God!"

When they ceased crying, she bundled them up and took them out for a drive. They drove up Malaya Dmitrovka, then past Strastnoi on to Tverskaya. At the Iversky Chapel they each placed a candle before the images and knelt down and prayed. On the way back they got off at Filippov's and bought some *baranki* with poppy seeds.

The Laptevs dined between two and three. Pyotr served at table. Pyotr did everything: during the day he ran errands to the post-office, to the warehouse, to the district court for Kostya, and served the meals besides; in the evenings he made cigarettes, at night he answered doorbells, and at five in the morning he was already up heating the stoves.

No one knew when he slept. He was very fond of opening soda-bottles and did it very skilfully, never spilling a drop.

"Here goes," said Kostya, tossing off a glass of vodka before his soup.

Yulia Sergeyevna did not like Kostya at first; his gruff voice, the expressions he used such as "kicked him out," "pushed in his mug," "rot," "improvise a samovar," his habit of clinking glasses and making speeches over every glass of wine, struck her as very common. But when she came to know him better she felt very much at ease in his company. He was frank with her, he liked to chat with her quietly in the evenings and even allowed her to read his novels, which he still kept secret even from close friends like Laptev and Yartsev. She read the novels and praised them so as not to hurt his feelings, and he was very pleased, for he believed that sooner or later he would be a famous writer. He wrote exclusively about peasants and gentry, although he had lived in the country only on the few occasions when he had visited friends and had been inside a manor-house only once in his life when he had been in Volokolamsk on legal business. He avoided writing about love, as if the subject embarrassed him, but he frequently described Nature, having a weakness for such expressions as "the fantastic contours of the hills," "grotesque shapes of the clouds," or "a symphony of mysterious

harmonies." His novels were never printed, a fact for which he blamed the censorship.

He liked being a barrister, but believed that literature and not law was his vocation. Art had always fascinated him and he was sure that his was a fine artistic nature. He could not sing or play any instrument and he had no musical ear whatever, but he went to all the symphony and philharmonic concerts, arranged all sorts of charity affairs, and got himself introduced to musicians.

There was much talk at dinner.

"Believe it or not, but my Fyodor has popped up with another surprise," said Laptev. "He says we must find out when the firm will have its centenary so that we may petition for elevation to the nobility. He is quite serious about it. I don't know what to do. Frankly, I am beginning to be alarmed."

The talk turned to Fyodor, and how fashionable it had become nowadays to affect some sort of pose. Fyodor, for instance, was trying to play the hearty Russian merchant, something which he was no more, and he would speak with gruff condescension to the teacher of the school old Laptev patronized when the man came for his salary.

After dinner, having nothing better to do, they went to the library. They talked about the decadents, about the "Maid of Orleans," and Kostya recited a long monologue from the play in what he believed to be a perfect imitation of Yermolova. After that they sat down to a game of *vint*. The

little girls did not go to their own quarters but sat side by side in an arm-chair, pale and sad, starting up at the sound of every carriage driving past in the hope that their father had come. They were very unhappy, especially in the evenings, even when the candles were lit. The talk of the grown-ups at the card-table, Pyotr's footsteps and the crackling of the wood in the fire-place upset them. They were too miserable to watch the flames, they could not even cry any more, but it was all terrifying and their hearts were heavy. And they could not understand how anyone could talk and laugh when Mother was dead.

"What did you see through your opera-glasses today?" Yulia Sergeyevna asked Kostya.

"Nothing today, but yesterday I saw the old Frenchman taking a bath."

At seven o'clock Yulia Sergeyevna and Kostya left for the Maly Theatre. Laptev stayed at home with the little girls.

"Your Papa ought to be here by now," he said, glancing at his watch. "The train must be late."

The children sat silent, huddled together in the arm-chair like little animals that are cold, and Laptev paced up and down the room, glancing at his watch impatiently every few minutes. The house was very still. Around ten o'clock the doorbell rang. Pyotr went to open the door.

At the sound of their father's voice the little girls cried out, and flew to meet him, sobbing wild-

ly. He was wearing a luxurious fur coat, and his beard and moustache were coated with hoar-frost.

"There, there," he murmured to Sasha and Lida who, laughing and weeping at once, covered his cold hands, his hat, his fur coat with kisses. Handsome, languid, pampered by love, he fondled them absently, then went into the study and said, rubbing his hands:

"I shan't stay long, my friends. Tomorrow I leave for Petersburg. I have been promissed a post in another city."

He had stopped at the "Dresden."

X

Ivan Gavrilych Yartsev was a frequent visitor at the Laptevs'. He was a sturdily-built man, with black hair and a pleasant, intelligent face. He was generally considered handsome, but latterly he had grown stout and this spoiled his appearance as did the fact that he wore his hair closely cropped. In his university days his athletic build had earned him the nickname of "the chucker-out."

He had graduated from the philological department together with the Laptev brothers, had afterwards taken up natural sciences and now had a degree in chemistry. He did not hope for a Chair in chemistry and did not even work in a laboratory but taught physics and natural history in a trade school and two women's grammar schools. He was

most enthusiastic about his pupils, especially the girls, and maintained that a splendid generation was growing up. Besides chemistry, he studied sociology and Russian history on his own and contributed brief items to the newspapers and magazines which he signed with the initial Y. Whenever he talked about botany or zoology he sounded like a historian, and when he dealt with some historical problem one could have taken him for a natural scientist.

Another close friend of the Laptevs was Kish, otherwise known as "the eternal student." He had spent three years at medical school, then shifted to mathematics and spent two years in each course. His father, a provincial apothecary, sent him forty rubles a month, to which his mother secretly added another ten. This was enough for him to live on and even to afford such a luxury as an overcoat with a collar of Polish beaver, gloves, perfume and photographs (he often took photographs of himself and presented them to his acquaintances). He was a neat little man, slightly bald, with reddish sidewhiskers at his ears, and modest, bland manners. He was forever doing favours for people, either running around with some subscription list, or else standing half-frozen in a box-office queue early in the morning to buy a theatre ticket for some lady of his acquaintance, or hurrying off to buy a wreath or a bouquet of flowers for someone. People were always saying: Kish will go, Kish will see to it,

Kish will buy it. He usually bungled his errands and reproaches were heaped upon him for his pains, and very often people forgot to pay him for the things he bought for them, but he never complained, and merely sighed. He never displayed either pleasure or annoyance, his conversation was dull and long-winded, and people only laughed at his jokes because they were not funny. "Pyotr, you are a trotter," he had once said to Pyotr. Everyone had laughed, and he was very pleased with himself for having been so witty. At the funeral of some professor you would be sure to find him in front with the torch-bearers.

Yartsev and Kish usually came for tea in the evening. If their hosts did not happen to be going to the theatre or to a concert, tea would last until supper-time. One February evening, as they were sitting in the dining-room, the talk turned to art.

"A work of art is of value only if it treats of some serious social problem," Kostya was saying, glancing sternly at Yartsev. "A work of art which is a protest against serfdom or which expresses its author's indignation at the corruptness of high society, is important and valuable. But novels and tales that are full of ohs and ahs, stories about her falling in love with him, and him falling out of love with her—such books, I tell you, are utterly worthless and may they be damned."

"I quite agree with you, Kostya," said Yulia

Sergeyevna. "One writer describes a lovers' tryst, another writes about infidelity, a third tells of lovers reunited. Is there nothing else to write about? There are so many sick, unhappy, poverty-stricken people who must be revolted when they read such things."

Laptev disliked to hear his wife, a young woman not yet twenty-two, talking so rationally and so coldly about love. He thought he guessed why.

"But if poetry does not solve the problems which seem so important to you, why not turn to technical literature, books on law or finance, or scientific articles," said Yartsev. "Why should *Romeo and Juliet* deal with, say, freedom of tuition or the disinfection of prisons instead of love, if you can find all that in special articles and reference material on the subject?"

"Now you are going to extremes, man!" Kostya interrupted him. "We aren't talking about giants like Shakespeare or Goethe, we are talking about the hundreds of talented and mediocre writers who would do much more good if they were to leave love alone and devote themselves to bringing knowledge and humane ideas to the masses."

Kish, speaking with a burr and a slight nasal twang, began to relate a story he had read recently. He told it slowly deliberately and in great detail; three minutes, five minutes, ten minutes passed and he was still talking, and no one could understand

what it was all about, and the more he talked the more wooden and dull his expression became.

"Oh Kish, do hurry up with your story," Yulia Sergeyevna cried impatiently. "You torture us!"

"Please stop, Kish!" cried Kostya.

Everyone laughed, Kish as well.

Fyodor arrived, his face covered with a spotted flush. He hastily shook hands all round and took his brother off to the study. He had latterly begun to shun large gatherings.

"Let the young people enjoy themselves, you and I can have a nice quiet talk by ourselves," he said, settling himself in an arm-chair away from the light. "Well, old chap, I haven't seen you for a long time. When were you last in the warehouse? More than a week ago, isn't it?"

"Yes. There's nothing for me to do there. Besides, the old man gets on my nerves, I must confess."

"Of course the warehouse can manage quite well without either of us, but one has to do something. By the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat thy bread, you know. God loves those who toil."

Pyotr brought in a glass of tea on a tray. Fyodor drank it down without sugar and asked for another. He always drank great quantities of tea, sometimes as many as ten glasses in an evening.

"Look here, Alexei," he said, getting up and going over to his brother. "Why don't you stand for the city Duma? Gradually, little by little we

will make you a councillor, and later on deputy mayor. You are intelligent, well-educated. In time you are bound to be noticed and invited to Petersburg—rural and urban leaders are very much in vogue there at present, and, who knows, you may be a privy councillor with a ribbon over your shoulder before you're fifty."

Laptev said nothing; he knew that Fyodor wanted these things—the Privy Councillorship, the ribbons and all the rest of it—for himself, and he did not know what to say.

The brothers sat in silence. Fyodor pulled out his watch, opened it and stared fixedly at it for a long time as if he wanted to catch the movement of the hands. His expression struck Laptev as queer.

Supper was announced. Laptev went to the dining-room but Fyodor remained in the study. There was no argument at supper, instead Yartsev held forth in the tone of a lecturer:

"Equality is physically impossible owing to differences in climate, energy, tastes and ages. But a cultured person can render this inequality harmless just as he has done with swamps and bears. We all know of the scientist who taught a cat, a mouse, a merlin and a sparrow to eat from the same plate, and education, we hope, will do the same for human beings. Life goes forward all the time, culture is making tremendous progress and no doubt the time will come when the present position of factory workers, for instance, will seem as

absurd as serfdom when peasant girls were exchanged for dogs."

"It will be a long time before that comes to pass," said Kostya with a little laugh. "A long, long time before Rothschild will consider his vaults of gold absurd, and in the meantime the poor worker has to bend his back and starve. No, sir, that won't do. We must not wait, we must fight. If a cat eats from the same plate as a mouse do you think that means she has seen the error of her ways? Nothing of the kind. She has been forced to do it."

"Fyodor and I are rich, our father is a capitalist, a millionaire, hence people must fight us!" Laptev said, rubbing his forehead. "Fight *me*—I cannot understand it! I am rich, yes, but what have I gained by my riches, what have I gained by that power? Am I any happier than you? My childhood was downright slavery, and my money never saved me from being flogged. My money didn't help Nina when she was sick and dying. If I am not loved I cannot force anyone to love me even if I spend millions on it."

"But you can do a great deal of good," said Kish.

"Nonsense! You asked me yesterday to help some mathematician find a position. Believe me, I can do just as little for him as you can. I can give him money, yes, but that is not what he wants. I once asked a famous musician to find work for a poverty-stricken violinist and he said, 'If you were a musician you would never have asked me.' And so I can

say the same to you: if you had ever been in a rich man's shoes you would never have come to me so confidently for help."

"I don't understand the analogy at all," said Yulia Sergeyevna and blushed. "What has the famous musician to do with it!"

Her face quivered with hatred and she dropped her eyes quickly to hide it. But neither her husband nor any one else at the table had failed to notice that look.

"What has the famous musician to do with it?" she repeated in a low voice. "It is the easiest thing in the world to help a poor man."

A silence fell. Pyotr served the grouse, but no one touched anything but the salad. Laptev had already forgotten what he had said and it did not matter anyway. He knew that it was not his words but the very fact that he had spoken that was hateful to her.

After supper he went into the study and sat there, his heart beating fast as he listened tensely to the talk in the drawing-room and waited for further humiliations. They were arguing again. Then Yartsev sat down at the piano and sang a sentimental song. He was a very versatile person: he could sing and play the piano and even do a few conjuring tricks.

"I don't know about you, gentlemen, but I have no desire to stay at home," Yulia declared. "Let us go somewhere."

They decided to go for a drive out of town and

Kish was sent to the Merchants' Club to hire a troika. They did not invite Laptev to join them because he did not usually go for drives out of town and also because his brother was with him, but he took it as a sign that he was too dull for them, and that in this company of gay young people he was out of place. He felt so bitter about it that he could have wept. He was even glad that they mistreated and ignored him, that he was a dull clod of a husband, a wretched money-bag; it would be better still, he thought, if his wife were unfaithful to him, if she ran off with his best friend that very night and confessed afterwards with eyes full of hatred.... He was jealous of everyone—of her student friends, actors, singers, of Yartsev and even of passers-by. How he longed for her to be unfaithful, so that he might catch her with someone and then take poison and end the nightmare.

Fyodor sat sipping his tea noisily, but finally he too rose to go.

"I'm afraid the old man is going blind," he said, putting on his coat. "His sight is failing."

Laptev also put on his coat and went out. He accompanied his brother up to Strastnoi Boulevard, and then took a cab out to the Yar.

"This is what they call wedded bliss!" he mocked himself. "Love, indeed!"

His teeth were chattering, whether from jealousy or something else he did not know. When he reached the restaurant, he wandered about among the

tables and listened to the singer in the hall, wondering what he would say if he chanced to meet his wife and her friends. He knew in advance that if he did meet them he would only smile pitifully and stupidly and everyone would know why he had come. He felt faint from the bright lights, the loud music, the scent of face powder and the way the women stared at him. He stopped in the doorway, trying to see and hear what was going on in the private cubicles, and he felt that he and the singer and these women were together playing some low contemptible game. After a while he drove out to the Strelna, but his wife was not there either and it was only on the way back, as he was approaching the Yar again that a noisy troika overtook him and above the wild shouts of the drunken driver he heard Yartsev's loud "Ho! Ho!"

It was nearly four o'clock when at last he reached home. Yulia Sergeyevna was already in bed. Noticing that she was not asleep, he went up to her and said sharply:

"I can understand your disgust, your hatred, but you might have spared me before strangers."

She sat up and lowered her feet, her eyes large and dark in the light of the icon-lamp.

"I'm sorry," she said.

He stood dumbly, too agitated to say anything. She too was trembling, sitting before him guiltily.

"This is agony. I can't endure it!" he clutched his head. "I think I'm going mad!"

"Do you think it's easy for me?" she cried. "God alone knows how I feel."

"You have been my wife for half a year, yet you have not a spark of love for me in your heart, not a glimmer. Why did you marry me?" Laptev went on in despair. "Why? What fiend thrust you into my arms? What did you hope for? What did you want?"

She continued to stare at him with horror as if she feared that he would kill her.

"Did you care for me? Did you love me?" he went on breathing hard. "No! Then what? What? Speak!" he cried. "It's that cursed money! That cursed money!"

"I swear to God, it was not that!" she cried out and crossed herself; she had recoiled at the insult, and for the first time he heard her weep. "I swear to God, no!" she repeated. "I did not think of your money, I don't want it, I simply thought that if I refused you I would be doing wrong. I was afraid to ruin our lives, yours and mine. And now I'm paying for the mistake. I can't bear it!"

She sobbed bitterly, and he realized how much she suffered, and not knowing what to say, he fell on his knees before her.

"Don't cry, don't," he muttered. "I insulted you because I love you madly." Suddenly he kissed her foot, and embraced her passionately. "A spark of love is all I ask!" he murmured. "Lie to me, please! Lie to me! Don't say it was a mistake!"

But she continued to weep, and he saw that she

suffered his caresses only as punishment for her mistake. She drew away the foot he had kissed and folded it under her like a bird. He suddenly felt sorry for her.

She lay down and drew the covers over her head. He undressed and lay down beside her. In the morning they both felt embarrassed and did not know what to say, and he even fancied that she stepped less firmly on the foot he had kissed.

Just before dinner Panaurov came to say goodbye. Yulia was seized with a sudden yearning for her native town. How good it would be, she thought, to escape from this awkward situation and the perpetual sense of having done wrong. At dinner it was decided that she would leave with Panaurov and spend two or three weeks with her father.

XI

Yulia Sergeyevna and Panaurov had a compartment to themselves. Panaurov wore a lambskin cap of a curious shape.

"No, I am not at all satisfied with St. Petersburg," he said with a sigh. "I have a great many promises but nothing definite. Yes, my dear. I have been a justice of the peace, a permanent member and chairman of a rural court, and finally councillor of the gubernia; I have served my country well, and I believe I'm entitled to some con-

sideration. Yet you see I am unable to obtain a transfer to another town."

He closed his eyes and shook his head.

"I am not appreciated," he went on languidly. "Of course, I am not a brilliant administrator, but I am honest and conscientious, and these are rare qualities nowadays. I confess that I may have been somewhat faithless to women, but in my relations with the Russian Government I have always been a gentleman. But enough of that," he said, opening his eyes. "Let us talk about you. What is the reason for this sudden visit to your father?"

"Oh, just a little misunderstanding with my husband," said Yulia, glancing at his cap.

"Yes, he is a little queer. All the Laptevs are. Your husband is not so bad, but that brother of his, Fyodor, is a downright fool."

Panaurov sighed, then inquired earnestly:

"Have you a lover?"

Yulia looked at him in amazement and laughed.

"Good heavens, what a thing to say."

Around eleven o'clock they got off at a large station and had supper together in the station restaurant. When they returned to their compartment, Panaurov took off his coat and cap and sat down beside Yulia.

"You are very sweet, I must say," he began. "Forgive me for the prosaic comparison, but you remind me of a crisp, freshly pickled little cucumber; it still smells of the hothouse, yet it already contains a

little salt and the fragrance of dill. You have the makings of a very fine woman, a lovely, elegant woman. If we had travelled together five years ago," he sighed, "I would have considered it my pleasant duty to join the ranks of your admirers, but now, alas, I am an invalid."

He smiled a sad, yet gracious smile and put his arm around her waist.

"You must be mad!" she gasped, blushing and almost numb with fright. "Leave me alone, Grigory Nikolayevich!"

"What are you afraid of, my dear?" he asked, softly. "What's the matter? You're simply not used to it."

When a woman resisted his advances he merely took it as a sure sign that he had made a conquest. Holding Yulia firmly by the waist, he kissed her cheek, then her lips, fully confident that he was giving her the greatest pleasure. Yulia, having recovered from her fear and embarrassment, began to laugh.

"That is all you can expect from an invalid," he said, kissing her once more and putting on his comical cap. "There was once a Turkish pasha, a nice old man, who was presented with a whole harem, or inherited it, I forget which. When his lovely young wives lined up before him he went down the row, kissed each one in turn and said, 'There, that is all I can give you now.' That is what I say too."

All this seemed very odd and foolish to her but

it amused her. She felt in the mood for mischief. She climbed on to the seat and, humming under her breath, took a box of sweets from the shelf, and threw him a chocolate. "Catch!"

He caught it. She threw him another one, laughing gaily, then a third, and he caught all of them and popped them into his mouth, gazing at her pleadingly, and she could not help thinking that there was something very effeminate and childlike about his face and his manner. And when she sat down again all out of breath and continued to look at him with amusement, he touched her cheek with two fingers and said in mock dismay, "Why, you naughty child!"

"Take it," she said, handing him the box. "I don't care for sweets."

He gobbled up all the sweets and put the empty box into his suitcase; he had a weakness for boxes with pictures on them.

"Now that's enough tomfoolery," he said. "It's the invalid's bedtime."

He got out his Bokhara dressing-gown and pillow and lay down covering himself with the gown.

"Good-night, my sweet," he whispered, and sighed deeply as if his whole body ached.

In a few minutes he was snoring. Yulia, feeling not the least shy, also lay down and was soon asleep.

When next morning she drove home from the station, the streets of her native town seemed des-

olate, the snow grey and the houses small and somehow flattened out. On the way, she passed a funeral procession, an open coffin on a bier surrounded with church banners.

"They say it is good luck to meet a funeral," she thought.

She noticed "To Let" signs posted in the window of the house where Nina Fyodorovna had lived.

With a fast beating heart she drove into her own yard and rang the bell. The door was opened by a new maid, a plump, sleepy-eyed girl in a warm, padded jacket. As she climbed the now dirty, unswept stairs, Yulia remembered that it was here that Laptev had proposed to her. Upstairs in the unheated corridor her father's patients waited their turn, huddled in their heavy overcoats. For some reason her heart beat very fast and her limbs felt weak.

The doctor, stouter then ever, his face as red as a brick and his hair uncombed, was drinking tea. He was happy to see her, he even wept a little. She was the only joy in the life of this old man—in a rush of emotion she gave him a warm hug and said that she had come to stay with him for a long time, till Easter. After she had changed, she came to the dining-room for tea, but he paced up and down the room with his hands thrust into his pockets humming, "Ru-ru-ru," a sign that he was displeased about something.

"You live a gay life in Moscow," he said. "I am

very glad for your sake. As for me, what does an old man like myself need? I shall soon croak and everyone will be much relieved. The surprising thing is that I have such a devilishly strong carcass, I still go on living! Amazing!"

He said that he was an old, hard-working donkey whom everybody rode. It was he who had had to attend Nina Fyodorovna, to take care of her children and arrange for her funeral besides; that fop Panaurov had refused to do anything, in fact he had even borrowed a hundred rubles and had not yet returned the money.

"You'd better take me to Moscow and put me in an insane asylum!" said the doctor. "I am a madman, a naïve child for I still believe in truth and justice!"

Then he went on to reproach her husband for being so short-sighted and not buying houses that were going cheap. Yulia ceased to feel that she was the only joy in this old man's life. While he was receiving his patients and making his rounds, she wandered aimlessly through all the rooms. She felt somehow different in her native town and her own home; she had no desire to go out or to visit anyone, and when she thought of her girlhood friends and her life before marriage she felt no sadness, no regrets.

In the evening she put on her best gown and went to vespers. But there were none but plain folk in the church and her magnificent fur coat

and hat made no impression whatever. It seemed to her that something had changed both in the church and within herself. How she had loved to hear the canon read at vespers, and the choir singing hymns, especially "I Lift Up My Voice," and then to move slowly with the crowd towards the middle of the church where the priest stood and to feel the touch of the holy oil on her forehead. But now she was impatient for the service to end, and coming out of church she only hoped the beggars would not ask her for alms—it would be a nuisance to have to stop and search in her pockets, besides she did not carry copper coins in her pockets now, only rubles.

She went to bed early but she could not fall asleep for a long time. And when she did, she dreamed of some portraits and of the funeral procession she had seen that morning; she dreamed that the open coffin was brought into the yard, swung back and forth for a long time and then suddenly hurled against the door. She woke up and jumped out of bed in fright. Downstairs someone was knocking at the door; the wire from the doorbell scraped against the wall but the bell did not ring.

She heard the doctor cough and the maid go downstairs and return. There was a knock at her door.

"Madam," said the maid's voice. "Madam!"

"What is it?" Yulia asked.

"A telegram for you!"

Yulia took up a candle and went out into the passage. Behind the maid stood the doctor with a coat thrown over his night-shirt; he too was holding a candle.

"The bell is out of order," he said, with a yawn. "It ought to have been mended long ago."

Yulia opened the telegram. "We drink to your health. Yartsev, Kochevoi," she read.

"What fools!" she said and burst out laughing. She felt suddenly light-hearted and gay.

Returning to her room, she washed slowly and dressed and spent the rest of the night packing. At noon the following day she left for Moscow.

XII

One day during Easter Week the Laptevs went to an exhibition of painting at the Art School. As is the custom in Moscow the whole family went, including the two little girls, their governess and Kostya.

Laptev knew the names of all the famous artists and he never missed an exhibition. He sometimes sketched landscapes himself during his summers in the country and he believed that he had a great deal of taste and that if he had studied art he might have been a good artist. When abroad, he would drop into antique shops, examine the objects with the air of a connoisseur, express his opinion and finally buy something for which the

shopkeeper would charge him any price he fancied, and the purchased object would lie about afterwards in a packing-case in the carriage shed until it disappeared no one knew where. Or else he would go into some engravers' shop, study the prints or bronzes carefully, comment on the workmanship and then buy some cheap little frame or a box of rubbishy paper. All the pictures in his house were large-sized but mostly bad; what good paintings he had, were poorly hung. He often paid large sums of money for pictures that afterwards turned out to be crude copies. And the remarkable thing was that though extremely timid in most things, he was extraordinarily bold and self-assured at art exhibitions.

Yulia Sergeyevna examined the paintings as her husband did, through opera-glasses or through her fist and marvelled that the people on the pictures looked as if they were alive and the trees looked like real ones. But most of the pictures looked alike to her, and she believed the sole purpose of art was to make the people and objects on the paintings look real when you closed one eye and looked at them through your fist.

"That's a Shishkin forest," her husband told her. "He doesn't point anything else. Look at that snow! Snow is never purple like that.... And that boy's left arm is shorter than his right."

When at last they were all worn out and Laptev had gone off to look for Kostya so that they could

go home, Yulia paused in front of a small landscape and regarded it casually. There was a small river with a wooden bridge, and the path on the other bank merged with a dark meadow fringed with woods at the right. There was a camp-fire too evidently built by cattleherds, and the sky was still smouldered on the horizon.

Yulia imagined herself walking over the bridge and along that path on and on in the hushed twilight where landrails croaked sleepily and a fire glowed in the distance. Those clouds, that forest and the meadow too seemed oddly familiar, she had seen them many times before, long ago, and an intense loneliness came over her, and she wanted to walk down that path and away toward the sunset and to the mysterious strip of sky.

"What a wonderful picture!" she said amazed at discovering that she understood the painting. "Look, Alexei! Can't you feel the quiet of it?"

She tried to explain why she liked the landscape, but neither her husband nor Kostya understood her. She gazed at the landscape with a sad smile, distressed because no one else found anything remarkable about it. She went back through the halls looking at all the pictures again, and she no longer thought them all alike. When she came home the large picture which hung above the piano in the drawing-room caught her attention for the first time.

"Why should anyone wish to possess such pictures!" she said with sudden revulsion.

After that, the gilded cornices, the Venetian mirrors with the floral design and other pictures like the one that hung over the piano, as well as her husband's and Kostya's discussions about art filled her with disgust and resentment, and sometimes even with hatred.

Life flowed on uneventfully from day to day with nothing to look forward to. The theatre season was over and it had turned warm. There was a long spell of perfect weather.

One morning the Laptevs went to the district court to hear Kostya conduct the defence of a reservist charged with burglary. They left home rather late and by the time they reached the court the witnesses were being examined. There was a large number of witnesses, all laundresses; they testified that the defendant had often visited the owner of the laundry, their mistress. On the eve of Holy Cross day he had turned up late at night after a drinking bout, asking for money for another drink but had been refused. In an hour he had returned bringing beer and peppermint biscuits for the girls. They had all spent the night together drinking and singing and in the morning they discovered that the attic had been broken into and that three men's shirts, a skirt and two sheets had been stolen from the clothes-line. Kostya with a mocking smile asked each witness in turn whether she had had any of the beer the defendant had brought on the eve of Holy Cross day. He was evidently trying to prove

that the laundresses had stolen the things themselves. He delivered his speech without the slightest sign of emotion, his eyes fixed sternly on the jury throughout.

He explained the difference between burglary and ordinary theft. He spoke earnestly and at great length, displaying a remarkable gift for discussing with serious mien what had long been a commonplace. Yet it was hard to understand what it was all about. The only conclusion a juryman might draw from his speech was that there had been a burglary but no theft, since the stolen laundry had gone to provide the beer which the laundresses had drunk, and that if there had been a theft, then it was without burglary. But evidently all this was as it should be, for both the jury and the public seemed much affected by his speech, which was quite a success. When the court returned a verdict of not guilty, Yulia nodded to Kostya and afterwards shook his hand warmly.

In May the Laptevs moved to their country-house at Sokolniki. Yulia was already pregnant at the time.

XIII

More than a year later, Yulia and Yartsev were sitting on the grass in Sokolniki not far from the Yaroslavl railway line. Kostya lay stretched out a few yards away from them, his head resting on his

arms and staring up at the sky. They were all tired of walking and were now waiting for the six o'clock train to go by before returning home for tea.

"Mothers always think their children remarkable, that is only natural," Yulia was saying. "They can stand for hours beside the baby's cot, gazing at its little ears, its eyes, its nose. The poor thing believes it gives everyone the greatest pleasure to kiss her child. And she can talk of nothing but her baby. I know that maternal weakness and I try to watch myself, but my little Olga really is remarkable. She has such a clever little face, and how she sucks! How she laughs! She is only eight months old but I have never seen a child of three with such intelligent eyes."

"By the way, tell me this," Yartsev asked her. "Whom do you love more, your husband or your baby?"

Yulia shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know," she said. "I never loved my husband very much. Olga is actually my first love. You know I was not in love with Alexei when I married him. I was very foolish then, I suffered a great deal because I believed I had ruined his life and my own, but now I see that love is not essential, it is all nonsense."

"But what binds you to your husband if you don't love him? Why do you live with him?"

"I don't know.... Habit, I suppose. I respect

him, I miss him if he is absent for a long time, but that is not love. He is a clever, honest man, and that is quite enough to make me happy. He is very kind, and good. . . ."

"Alexei is clever, Alexei is kind," drawled Kostya, raising his head lazily, "but, my dear girl, one must eat three poods of salt with him to find out how clever, kind and interesting he is. Besides, what's the good of his kindness and cleverness? He gives you as much money as you wish, that he can do, but when a little firmness is needed, when it is a matter of dealing with scoundrels and ruffians he retreats into his shell. Men like your Alexei are excellent people but as fighters they are useless. And in general they are not much good for anything."

At last the train appeared. A pink steam poured out of the chimney and spread over the woods, and two windows in the last car flashed so brightly in the sunlight that it hurt to look at them.

"Tea-time!" said Yulia Sergeyevna, getting up.

She had filled out latterly and she walked now with the slightly languid gait of a mature woman.

"Just the same, it is bad without love," said Yartsev walking behind her. "We talk so much and read so much about love, but we ourselves love very little and that is no good."

"All that is rubbish," said Yulia. "That is not happiness."

They had tea in the little garden where mignonette, tobacco and gilly-flowers grew and where the

early sword-lilies were beginning to bloom. Yartsev and Kochevoi could see by Yulia Sergeyevna's face that she was in a blissful state of contentment, that she wished for nothing more than what she had, and looking at her they too felt at peace with the world. Everything that was said was clever and to the point. The pine-trees were beautiful, the smell of resin richer than usual, the cream was excellent, and Sasha was a sweet child.

After tea they went inside and Yartsev sang love songs, accompanying himself on the piano; now and then Yulia would rise and tiptoe out of the room to look at her baby and at Lida, who had been in bed with a fever for two days and ate nothing.

" 'My love, my dearest love,' " sang Yartsev. "No, my friends," he declared, tossing his head. "Say what you will, but I cannot understand why you are opposed to love! If I were not busy fifteen hours a day I should most certainly fall in love."

Supper was served on the terrace. It was a warm quiet evening, but Yulia wrapped herself up in a shawl and complained of the dampness. When darkness fell, she grew uneasy, kept shivering and urging her guests to stay awhile. She ordered the servants to bring wine and, after supper, cognac. She did not want to be left alone with the children and the servants.

"My neighbours and I are planning to put on a play for the children out here in the country," she said. "We have everything we need—a theatre, and

actors, all we lack is a play. We have received a dozen or two plays of various kinds but not one of them is suitable. You like the theatre and you know history so well," she said, turning to Yartsev, "could you write a historical play for us?"

"I wouldn't mind."

The visitors drank up all the cognac and prepared to take their leave. It was already after ten o'clock, which is a late hour for the country.

"How dark it is, I can't see a thing!" said Yulia as she saw them to the gate. "I don't know how you will find your way home. Dear me, it *is* chilly!"

She wrapped her shawl more tightly around her and went back to the house.

"My Alexei must be playing cards somewhere," she called after them. "Good-night!"

After the brightly lit rooms, Yartsev and Kostya could see nothing. They groped their way blindly to the railway line and crossed it.

"Can't see a damn thing," boomed Kostya, stopping to stare up at the sky. "But look at the stars, like brand new fifteen-kopek pieces!"

"What?" came Yartsev's voice out of the gloom.

"I said it was pitch dark. Where are you?"

Yartsev came up, whistling, and took his arm.

"Hey there, good people!" Kostya suddenly roared out at the top of his voice. "They've caught a Socialist!"

He was always very noisy when in his cups, he

shouted a great deal, picked quarrels with policemen and cabbies, sang and roared with laughter.

"Nature, the devil take you!" her roared.

"Now then," Yartsev remonstrated. "Stop that, for goodness sake."

Their eyes soon grew accustomed to the darkness and the shapes of the tall pines and telegraph-poles began to emerge. Now and again a locomotive whistled in the Moscow station yards and the telegraph wires hummed plaintively. But not a sound came from the woods, and there was something proud, strong and mysterious about that silence, and the tips of the pines seemed to touch the sky. The two friends found their lane and turned into it. The darkness here was complete and only by the thin strip of star-studded sky and the stamped earth under their feet could they tell that they were on the right path. They walked side by side without speaking, and it seemed to both that someone was walking towards them in the darkness. The effects of the wine began to wear off. It occurred to Yartsev that these woods might perhaps be haunted by the spirits of the Moscow tsars, boyars and patriarchs, and he wanted to tell this to Kostya, but changed his mind.

By the time they reached the outskirts of the city the first glimmer of daybreak had touched the sky. They walked past the cheap frame houses, taverns, and lumber yards, under the railway bridge where they caught a whiff of dampness pleasantly spiced

with the scent of lime blossom, and out on to a long wide street utterly deserted and dark.... When they came to Red Pond it was already daylight.

"Moscow will yet have to go through a great deal of suffering," remarked Yartsev, as they were passing Alexeyevsky Monastery.

"What made you think of that?"

"Oh, I don't know. I love Moscow."

Both Yartsev and Kostya had been born in Moscow; they loved it and were for some reason prejudiced against all other cities. They were convinced that Moscow was a remarkable city, and Russia a remarkable country. In the Crimea, the Caucasus or abroad they felt bored and uncomfortable, and they thought there was nothing healthier or more delightful than the dreary Moscow climate. The sort of days when the cold rain beats against the window-panes and dusk falls early and the walls of houses and churches turn a dismal brown, and you don't know what to put on when you go out, seemed to them exhilarating.

At last they reached the station and hired a cab.

"What if I really do write a historical play," said Yartsev. "But without the Lyapunovs and the Godunovs, you know, something fresh from the Yaroslav or Monomach period. I detest all Russian historical plays, except Pimen's monologue. Historical sources or even Russian history books make everything about Russia seem extraordinarily talent-

ed and fascinating, but when I see a historical play Russian life begins to strike me as fatuous, unhealthy and unoriginal."

The friends parted near Dmitrovka and Yartsev drove on to his place on Nikitskaya Street. He sat dozing in his seat, swaying from side to side and thinking of the play he would write. Suddenly he thought he heard a fearful noise, the clank of armour and shouts in some strange tongue which might have been Kalmuck; he saw a village wrapped in flames, and the surrounding forests, covered with hoar-frost lurid from the fire, were so distinct that each little fir-tree stood out separately. Through the village swept savage men on horseback and on foot, men and horses as lurid as the sky.

"The Polovtsi," thought Yartsev.

One of them, an old man with a fearful, bloody face, his body covered with burns, was tying a young girl with a white Russian face to his saddle. The old man was shouting wildly and the girl stared before her with sad, thoughtful eyes.... Yartsev shook himself awake.

" 'My love, my dearest love,' " he hummed.

He paid the cabbie and walked upstairs to his rooms but still he could not shake off the dream, and he saw the flames spread over the village, while the forest smoked and crackled, and a huge wild boar, mad with fright, dashed through the village.... And the girl, bound to the saddle, looked on.

It was broad daylight when he entered his room. Two candles were burning themselves out on the table beside some open music. Rassudina in a black dress, with a newspaper in her hands, lay fast asleep on the sofa. She had evidently been playing for a long time while waiting for him and had fallen asleep.

"Poor thing, she must be tired," he thought.

Gently taking the newspaper out of her hands, he covered her with a blanket, snuffed out the candles and went to his bedroom. He got into bed still thinking of the historical play, and "My love, my dearest love" kept ringing in his ears.

Two days later Laptev dropped in for a few minutes to tell him that Lida had been taken ill with diphtheria and that Yulia Sergeyevna and the baby had caught it from her, and in another five days came the news that Lida and Yulia were recovering, but that the baby had died, and the Laptevs had hurried back to town.

XIV

Laptev could not bear to stay at home now for any length of time. His wife frequently withdrew to the other side of the house on the plea that she had to give the little girls a lesson, but he knew that she went there to weep in Kostya's room. On the ninth day, the twentieth day and the fortieth day after the baby's death they had to go to the

Alexeyevsky Cemetery for memorial services, and for Laptev there followed long days of mourning, of thinking of nothing but the unfortunate infant and uttering all sorts of banalities to console his wife. He rarely visited the warehouse now and had taken to philanthropy, inventing various occupations for himself and welcoming any excuse to spend a day driving about on some trifling matter. He was now planning to go abroad to make a study of the organization of doss-houses there, and for the moment he was quite taken with the idea.

It was an autumn day. Yulia had just gone to the other side of the house to cry, and Laptev was lying on the sofa in his study wondering where to go, when Pyotr came in and announced Rassudina. Laptev jumped up in delight and hurried out to meet his unexpected visitor. He never thought about his former mistress now. He found her just the same as when they had parted on that final evening.

"Polina!" he cried, holding out his hands to her. "It's ages since we've met! You cannot imagine how glad I am to see you! Come in!"

Rassudina jerked his hand in greeting, marched into his study without taking off her hat or coat and sat down.

"I shall not keep you more than a few minutes," she said. "I have no time to chat with you. Be so kind as to sit down and hear what I have to say. Whether you are glad to see me or not is a matter

of complete indifference to me since I place no value whatever on the gracious favours of the male sex. I have come to you only because I have been to five other places already and have been refused everywhere, and the matter is urgent. Listen," she went on, looking him straight in the eye. "Five student acquaintances of mine, foolish and thriftless people perhaps but unquestionably poor, have failed to pay their tuition fees and are now about to be expelled. Your wealth makes it incumbent on you to go to the University at once and pay for them."

"With pleasure, Polina."

"Here are their names," said Rassudina, handing him a slip of paper. "Go at once, you can enjoy your domestic bliss later on."

At that moment a faint rustle was heard behind the door leading to the drawing-room—a dog scratching itself perhaps. Rassudina reddened and sprang up.

"Your spouse is eavesdropping," she said. "How disgusting!"

Laptev was stung by this insult to Yulia.

"She is not here," he said. "She is at the other side of the house. And please don't speak of her like that. Our child has died recently and she is terribly upset."

"You may console her," said Rassudina caustically, resuming her seat, "she will have a dozen

more. Surely one does not need brains to bear children."

Laptev remembered having heard something of the sort many a time long, long ago, and for a moment he was swept by the sweet recollection of bygone days, the free days of bachelorhood when he had felt that he was young and that there was nothing he could not do, and when there had been no love for his wife, no memories of his child.

"Let us go together," he said, stretching himself.

Rassudina waited outside the University while Laptev went to the office.

"Where are you going now?" he asked when he returned and gave her the five receipts.

"To Yartsev's."

"I shall go with you."

"He is working. You will only disturb him."

"No, I won't, I promise you!" he said, looking at her pleadingly.

She wore a black hat with a crêpe trimming as if she were in mourning and a very short shabby coat with gaping pockets. Her nose looked longer than ever and there was not a drop of colour in her face in spite of the frost. Laptev took pleasure in walking meekly behind her, obeying her and listening to her grumblings. He walked along marvelling at the inner strength of this woman who in spite of being so unattractive, so angular and so restless, in spite of her impossible clothes, her

untidy hair and her ungainly appearance, nevertheless had a certain charm.

They entered Yartsev's flat through the back door which led into the kitchen where they were met by the cook, a neat little old woman with grey curls, who was much embarrassed.

"This way, please," she said with a sugary smile that made her little face look like a pastry.

Yartsev was not at home. Rassudina sat down at the piano and began an endless series of dreary and difficult exercises, ordering Laptev not to disturb her. He made no attempt to talk to her but sat in a corner leafing through the *European Herald*. After practising for two hours—her daily portion—she had a quick meal in the kitchen and went off to her lessons. Laptev read the continuation of some novel, then sat for a long time not reading, not bored, glad that it was already too late to go home for dinner.

Yartsev's loud "Ho! Ho! Ho!" sounded in the hall and he came in healthy, vigorous, red-cheeked, in a brand-new frock-coat with shiny buttons. "Ho! Ho! Ho!"

The two friends dined together. After dinner Laptev stretched out on the sofa while Yartsev sat down beside him and lit a cigarette. Dusk was falling.

"I must be getting old," said Laptev. "Ever since my sister Nina died I find myself often thinking about death."

They talked about death, about the immortality of the soul, of how good it would be if one really could come to life again and fly to Mars or some place where one could be idle and happy for ever, and moreover, where one would be free to live the life of the spirit.

"Still I do not want to die," Yartsev said softly. "There is no philosophy that can reconcile me to the thought of death. I regard it as the end of everything. I want to live."

"Do you love life?"

"Yes, I do."

"As for me, I cannot understand myself at all. I am constantly torn between black despair and utter indifference. I am timid, I have no confidence in myself, my conscience is cowardly, and I am utterly incapable of adapting myself to life and becoming the master of my own destiny. Other men talk nonsense or swindle each other and get pleasure out of it, while I only feel uneasy or indifferent even when I consciously try to do good. I think all this is because I am a slave, the grandson of a serf. Many of us plebeians will perish before we work out our own salvation!"

"All that is good, my friend," said Yartsev and sighed. "It only shows once again how rich, how varied is the life of Russia. Ah, how rich! I am becoming more and more convinced from day to day that we are living on the eve of some great triumph and I would like to live to take part

in it. Believe it or not, I feel it is a remarkable generation that is growing up now. When I teach the children, and especially the little girls, I am filled with joy. Wonderful children!"

Yartsev went over to the piano and struck a chord.

"I am a chemist, I think in terms of chemistry and I shall die a chemist," he went on. "But I am insatiable, I am afraid I shall die before I have had my fill; chemistry is not enough for me, I must take up Russian history, the history of arts, pedagogics, music.... Some time last summer your wife suggested that I write a historical play, and now I believe I could sit writing for three days and nights in succession without getting up. My head is crammed so full of ideas that it is ready to burst, and I can feel it throbbing. I don't aim to be anything out of the ordinary, I don't expect to create a masterpiece, I simply want to live, and dream, and hope, and miss nothing.... Life, my dear fellow, is very short, and we must make the most of it."

After that friendly talk which lasted far into the night Laptev began to visit Yartsev nearly every day. He was drawn to him. He usually came towards evening, lay down on the sofa and waited patiently for Yartsev to come. After dinner, Yartsev would sit down to work, but in a little while Laptev would ask him some question. This would start a conversation, work would be forgotten and

at midnight the friends would part, feeling much pleased with one another.

But this did not last long. Once, on coming to Yartsev's, Laptev found Rassudina seated at the piano playing her exercises.

"Will you kindly tell me when this is going to stop?" she said without giving him her hand and looking at him almost with hostility.

"What do you mean?" Laptev asked at a loss.

"You come here every day and keep Yartsev from his work. Yartsev is not a merchant, he is a scientist and every minute of his life is precious. You ought to realize that and have a little more tact."

"If you really think I am in the way," said Laptev timidly, taken aback, "I shall stop coming."

"Splendid. Now please go, or else he may come and find you here."

The tone in which this was said, and the look of indifference in her eyes upset him completely. He saw that she no longer had the slightest feeling for him, she only wanted him to go away. How different it had been before! He went out without shaking hands, expecting to be called back, but she resumed her scales at once and as he walked slowly downstairs he felt that he was already a stranger to her.

Some three days later Yartsev came to him to spend the evening.

"I have some news for you," he said with a little

laugh. "Polina Nikolayevna has come to live with me." He looked a little confused as he went on in a lower tone. "Well, well. Of course we are not in love with one another, but I don't think it really matters. I am glad to be able to give her a home and to enable her not to work if she falls ill. She believes that my life will be more orderly if she lives with me and that under her influence I shall become a great scientist. That's what she thinks. Let her continue to think so. 'A fool is richer for his thoughts,' as the southerners say. Ho! Ho!"

Laptev said nothing. Yartsev began to pace the room, pausing to stare at the pictures which he had seen many times before.

"Yes, my friend," he said with a sigh. "I am three years older than you and it is already too late for me to think of true love. As a matter of fact a woman like Polina Nikolayevna is a godsend to me and no doubt I shall live peacefully with her to a ripe old age. But just the same I can't help feeling I have missed something, I still yearn for something, and I keep imagining myself 'lying in a valley in Daghestan and dreaming of a grand ball.' In other words, man is never satisfied with what he has."

Then he went into the drawing-room and sang some love songs quite as though nothing had happened and Laptev sat in his study with his eyes closed trying to understand why Rassudina had

gone to live with Yartsev. It made him sad to think that there was no such thing as a firm, lasting attachment and he was angry with Polina Nikolayevna for having gone to Yartsev and angry with himself because he no longer loved his wife as he once had.

XV

Laptev sat reading in his arm-chair, thoughtfully rocking from side to side. Yulia was reading too. They had not exchanged a word since morning; there seemed nothing to talk about. "What's the difference whether one marries for love or not?" he thought, glancing at her over his book from time to time. How far away seemed the days when he had been jealous, those days of anxiety and suffering! Since then he had been abroad and was now resting from his trip; he had liked England and planned to return there in the spring.

Yulia Sergeyevna was accustomed to her grief by now and no longer withdrew to weep. That winter she did not drive to fashionable shops and went neither to theatres nor concerts. As she did not like the large rooms, she spent her time either in her husband's study or in her own room where she kept the icons that had been part of her dowry and the landscape she had liked at the exhibition. She spent scarcely any money on herself—no more than when she had lived with her father.

It had been a very dull winter. Everyone in Moscow played cards that season, and when they tried to amuse themselves by singing, reading or drawing the result was even more boring. Since there was very little talent in Moscow and the same singers and elocutionists performed everywhere, even art palled and became for many people nothing but a dull and tiresome duty.

Moreover, each day brought the Laptevs some fresh trouble. Old Fyodor Stepanych's sight was very poor. He no longer went to the warehouse and his doctor predicted that he would soon go blind. Fyodor too had stopped going to the warehouse for some reason and spent all his time at home, writing. Panaurov, who had succeeded in getting himself transferred to another town and promoted to the rank of councillor of state, now lived in the "Dresden" hotel and came to Laptev nearly every day to borrow money. Kish had finally been graduated from the University and, while waiting for Laptev to find him some suitable position, spent days on end in their house telling his interminable stories. All this irritated and wearied Laptev and made his life most unpleasant.

Pyotr came into the study to announce that a lady wished to see the master. He handed Laptev a visiting card with the inscription: "Josephina Iosifovna Milan."

Yulia Sergeyevna rose languidly and went out, limping slightly from a cramp in her foot. A lady

dressed all in black appeared in the doorway; she was thin, with dark eyebrows that stood out on her pale face.

"Monsieur Laptev, save my little ones!" she said pressing her hands to her bosom.

The jingling bracelets and the patches of powder were familiar to Laptev; it was the lady in whose house he had dined so inappropriately just before his marriage—Panaurov's second wife.

"Save my little ones!" she repeated and her face quivered and suddenly looked old and pitiful as her eyes reddened. "You alone can save us. I spent my last money to come here to Moscow. My children will die of starvation."

She made as if to fall on her knees. Laptev in fright seized her arm.

"Sit down, please, sit down," he murmured, leading her to a chair. "I beg you."

"We have no money even for bread," she said. "Grigory Nikolayevich is going away to take up a new position, but he does not want to take me and the children with him and the money you so generously send us he spends on himself. What shall we do? My poor, unfortunate children!"

"Compose yourself, I beg you. I shall instruct my clerks to send the money to you personally."

She wept aloud, but presently she grew calm and he noticed that the tears had made paths on her heavily powdered cheeks and that she had a moustache.

"There is no limit to your generosity, Monsieur Laptev. But please be our guardian angel, our good fairy and persuade Grigory Nikolayevich not to desert me. Tell him to take me with him. I love him, I love him madly, he is my only consolation."

Laptev gave her a hundred rubles and promised to talk to Panaurov. He escorted her to the door, fearing all the time that she might burst into tears or fall on her knees again.

After she had gone Kish arrived. Then came Kostya with his camera. He had taken up photography latterly and took pictures of everybody in the house several times a day. This new hobby of his caused him a great deal of trouble and he had even lost weight on account of it.

Just before tea-time Fyodor came. Installing himself in a corner of the study, he opened a book and sat staring at it for a long time, obviously reading nothing. He lingered a long while over his tea until his face was flushed. His presence was painfully depressing to Laptev; even his silence was unpleasant.

"You may congratulate Russia on the acquisition of a new journalist," said Fyodor. "Joking aside, Alexei, I have produced an article, a trial of the pen so to speak, and I have brought it with me to show you. Read it, there's a good fellow, and tell me what you think of it. But I want your frank opinion, mind."

He took a notebook out of his pocket and handed

it to his brother. The article was entitled "The Russian Soul"; it was written in the dull, colourless language used by untalented but secretly vain people, and its principal idea was that the intellectual has the right not to believe in the supernatural, but he must hide his disbelief in order not to lead others astray and to shake men's faith; without faith there could be no ideals, and idealism was destined to save Europe and guide mankind on to the right path.

"But you don't say what Europe has to be saved from," said Laptev.

"That is obvious."

"It's nothing of the sort," said Laptev and he got up and paced the floor. "Why you wrote the article is not clear either. However, that is your business."

"I intend to publish it as a pamphlet."

"That is your business."

Neither spoke for a few moments.

"I am truly, profoundly sorry that you and I do not share the same views. Ah, Alexei, Alexei my dear brother! You and I are Russians, God-fearing, big hearted men; what do all these rotten German and Jewish ideas mean to us? After all, you and I are not knaves of some sort, we are members of a distinguished merchant family."

"What distinguished family?" retorted Laptev, controlling his anger. "Distinguished family, bah! Our grandfather was thrashed by the landowners

and every wretched little official used to spit in his face. Grandfather thrashed Father, and Father thrashed you and me. What did our distinguished family give either of us? What nerves, what blood have we inherited? You have been going around for nearly three years ranting like a deacon, talking all sorts of nonsense, and now you have written this ... this slavish drivel! And what about me? Look at me.... I have no flexibility, no courage, no strength of character; I am afraid of every step I take as if someone were going to beat me, I tremble before all sorts of nonentities, idiots, swine who are far beneath me both mentally and morally; I am afraid of street-sweepers, of porters, of policemen, of gendarmes, I am afraid of everybody, because I was born of a terrorized woman and because from childhood I was browbeaten and mistreated! You and I would do well never to have children. I trust to God this distinguished merchant family ends with us!"

Yulia Sergeyevna came into the room and sat down at the table.

"You were arguing about something?" she said. "I hope I am not intruding."

"Not at all, little sister," replied Fyodor. "We are discussing a matter of principle. Now, you abuse the family," he went on, turning to his brother. "Nevertheless this family has built up a business worth millions. That is worth something surely!"

"What an achievement—a business worth millions! A man without any particular intelligence or gifts chances to become a shopkeeper, then gets rich and sells his wares day after day without any system or purpose, without even striving to amass wealth, he just goes on selling mechanically, and the money comes pouring in without any effort on his part. He spends his whole life in the business and he loves it simply because it gives him a chance to lord it over his employees and to swindle his customers. He is a church elder because there he can lord it over the choir and make the choristers do his bidding; he is a patron of the school because he likes to feel that the teacher is his subordinate. It is not business the merchant loves but the power it gives him over other people, and your warehouse is not a business firm, but a dungeon! Yes, what you need for your sort of business are dumb, frightened clerks and that's the sort you train by compelling them from early childhood to bow to you for a crust of bread, and from childhood you teach them to regard you as their benefactor. You wouldn't employ a university graduate in your warehouse, not you!"

"University graduates are not suitable for our business."

"That's not true!" cried Laptev. "It's a lie!"

"Excuse me, but it seems to me that you are fouling your own nest," said Fyodor and he got

up. "You detest our business yet you live off its profits."

"Aha, that's just the point!" said Laptev and he gave a dry laugh, his eyes blazing. "Yes, if I did not belong to your distinguished family, if I had a kopek's worth of willpower and courage I would have long ago flung that income away and gone to earn my own living. But you in that warehouse of yours have robbed me of them! I belong to you!"

Fyodor glanced at his watch and hastened to take his leave. He kissed Yulia's hand and went out, but instead of going to the hall, he went into the drawing-room and from there to the bedroom.

"I have lost my way," he said helplessly. "What a strange house. It is a strange house, isn't it?"

He seemed stunned as he put on his coat and there was a look of anguish on his face. Laptev's anger had evaporated; he was frightened now and sorry for Fyodor at the same time, and that warm, genuine love for his brother which he thought had died these past three years reawakened in him and he felt an overwhelming desire to express that love in some way.

"You must come and dine with us tomorrow, Fyodor," he said, stroking his brother's shoulder. "Will you come?"

"Yes, yes. But give me some water, please."

Laptev ran into the dining-room, seized the first thing he found—a tall beer mug—filled it with

water and brought it to his brother. Fyodor drank thirstily, but suddenly he bit the rim of the mug, there was a grinding sound, then a sob. The water spilled over on his overcoat and surtout. Laptev, who had never seen a man weep before, stood frightened and embarrassed while Yulia and the maid took Fyodor's coat off and led him back into the drawing-room. He followed guiltily.

Yulia made Fyodor lie down on the couch and dropped on her knees beside him.

"It's nothing," she said, soothingly. "An attack of nerves...."

"I am so miserable," he said. "I am so unhappy ... but I have been hiding it all the time!"

He put his arm round her neck and whispered into her ear, "I dream of my sister Nina every night. She comes and sits in the arm-chair beside my bed...."

An hour later, he was putting on his coat in the hallway again; he was smiling now, and he felt shy of the parlour maid. Laptev saw him home.

"You must come to dinner tomorrow," he said as they drove to Fyodor's house on Pyatnitskaya. "And at Easter we shall go abroad together. You need a change, you are quite run down."

"Yes, yes. I shall go, I shall.... And we'll take little sister with us."

On returning home, Laptev found his wife in a state of nervous excitement—Fyodor's attack had shaken her badly. She did not weep but she was

very pale and she tossed in bed clutching at the blanket, the pillow, her husband's hands with icy fingers. Her eyes were large and frightened.

"Don't leave me, don't leave me," she begged. "Tell me, Alexei, why have I stopped praying? What has happened to my faith? Ah, why have you talked so much about religion in my presence! You have upset me, you and your friends. I do not pray any more."

He applied cold compresses to her forehead, chafed her hands and gave her tea to drink, and she clung to him in terror.

Towards morning she fell into an exhausted sleep, and Laptev sat beside her, holding her hand. He did not go to bed at all that night, and all the next day he felt weary in mind and body and he wandered aimlessly about the house, his thoughts numbed.

XVI

The doctors said that Fyodor was mentally unbalanced. Laptev did not know what was happening at Pyatnitskaya, and the gloomy warehouse without either the old man or Fyodor made him think of a tomb. When his wife told him that he ought to visit the warehouse and the Pyatnitskaya house every day he either did not reply or began to talk irritably about his childhood, saying that he could not forgive his father for the past, and that

both Pyatnitskaya and the warehouse were hateful to him, and so on.

One Sunday morning Yulia herself drove out to Pyatnitskaya. She found old Fyodor Stepanych in the same drawing-room where the church service had been held on the occasion of her arrival. He wore his old canvas jacket, without a tie, and sat motionless in his arm-chair blinking his sightless eyes.

"It is I, your daughter-in-law," she said going up to him. "I have come to see you."

He began to breathe heavily. Moved by his affliction, and his loneliness, she kissed his hand and he felt her face and head, as if to make sure that it was she, and made the sign of the cross over her.

"Thank you, thank you," he said. "I've lost my sight, you know, I can't see.... I can dimly make out the window and the fire, but people and objects I can't see. Yes, I'm going blind. Fyodor is sick and there's no one to keep an eye on things. Who will punish the culprit if anything goes wrong. The workmen will get altogether out of hand. What's the matter with Fyodor? Has he caught a chill? I was never ill in my life and I never took cures. Never had anything to do with doctors."

As always, the old man began bragging. In the meantime the servant hastily laid the table, setting out an assortment of food and drink. Some ten bottles appeared, one of them resembling the

Eiffel Tower. A large platter of hot pies smelling of boiled rice and fish was served.

"You must have a bite with me, my dear," said the old man.

She took his arm and led him over to the table and poured him out some vodka.

"I shall come again tomorrow," she said, "and bring your granddaughters Sasha and Lida. They will love to see their dear grandad."

"No. Don't bring them. They are illegitimate."

"Why do you say that? Their father and mother were married."

"Yes, but without my permission. I did not give them my blessing and I don't want to have anything to do with them, God be with them."

"That is an odd thing to say, Fyodor Stepanych," said Yulia and sighed.

"The Bible says that children must respect and fear their parents."

"No, it doesn't. The Bible says that we must forgive our enemies."

"There can't be any forgiveness in a business like ours. If you start forgiving everybody you'll go bankrupt in three years."

"But to forgive, to say a kind gentle word even to someone who has wronged you is so much more important than business or wealth!"

Yulia wished to soften the old man's heart, to awaken in him pity and remorse, but he listened

to everything she said as adults listen to the babble of children.

"Fyodor Stepanych," she said firmly. "You are already old and the Lord will soon call you to him; he will not ask you how you conducted your business and whether your firm flourished or not, he will ask you whether you were generous to your fellow-men; whether you were not harsh to those weaker than yourself, to your servants, for instance, and to the sales clerks."

"I have always been a benefactor to my employees, and they ought to be eternally thankful to have had an employer like me," said the old man with conviction. But he was touched by Yulia's earnest tone, and to please her, he added, "Very well, you may bring the little girls tomorrow. I shall order some presents for them."

The old man was untidily dressed and there was cigar ash spilt on his chest and knees; evidently no one bothered to clean his boots or brush his clothes. The rice in the pies was not properly cooked, the table-cloth smelt of soap, and the servant stamped about. The old man and the whole Pyatnitskaya house had an air of neglect and Yulia felt ashamed of herself and her husband.

"I shall come tomorrow without fail," she said.

She went through the rooms and ordered the old man's bed made and his icon-lamp lit. Fyodor was sitting in his room staring blankly at an open book. Yulia talked to him and ordered the servants to

clean up his room. Then she went down to the clerks' quarters. An unpainted wooden prop supported the low ceiling in the middle of the room where the clerks took their meals; the walls were covered with cheap wallpaper, and there was a stuffy odour of cooking. It was Sunday and all the clerks were home sitting on their beds and waiting for dinner. When Yulia entered they sprang to their feet and answered her questions timidly, looking sullenly at her like prisoners.

"Good heavens, what a foul place this is!" she said, throwing up her hands. "Are you not crowded in here?"

"We've no complaints, ma'am," said Makeichev. "We are very grateful to you and pray that the gracious Lord might bless you."

"Correspondence of life and personal ambition," epitomized Pochatkin.

"We are humble folk and we live according to our station," Makeichev hastened to explain.

She looked over the apprentices' quarters and the kitchen, interviewed the housekeeper and went away, much displeased with all she had seen.

"We must move over to Pyatnitskaya as soon as possible," she said to her husband on returning home, "and you ought to go to the warehouse every day."

They sat side by side in the study for a long time, without speaking. His heart was heavy; he did not want to go either to Pyatnitskaya or the

warehouse, but he guessed what his wife had in mind and he had not the strength to oppose her.

"I feel as if our life were already over and a dull sort of semi-existence were beginning for us," he said, stroking her cheek. "When I learned that Fyodor was hopelessly ill, I wept. We spent our childhood and youth together, I loved him dearly once, and now this awful catastrophe. I feel that I am breaking with my past for good. And now when you tell me that we must move to Pyatnitskaya, to that prison, I begin to feel that I have no future either."

He got up and went over to the window.

"Yes, one must banish all thought of happiness for ever," he said, staring out on to the street. "There is no such thing, I never knew it, and I doubt whether it exists at all. I was happy but once in my life: the night I sat under your umbrella. Do you remember the umbrella you left at my sister Nina's?" he asked, turning to his wife. "I was in love with you then, and I remember sitting under that umbrella all night in a state of perfect bliss."

Beside the bookcase in the study stood a chest of mahogany and bronze in which Laptev kept an assortment of useless objects, among them the umbrella. He took it out and handed it to his wife.

"Here it is," he said.

Yulia looked at the umbrella for a minute, recognized it and smiled sadly.

"Yes, I remember now," she said. "You were holding it in your hand when you proposed to me," and, as he was about to leave the room, she said, "Please try to come home a little earlier. I feel lonely without you."

She went up to her room and gazed at the umbrella for a long time.

XVII

Large and intricate though their business was, the Laptevs did not employ a book-keeper and the books kept by the clerk were quite unintelligible. The German and English business agents who came to the warehouse every day discussed politics and religion with the clerks. Another regular visitor was a drunken nobleman, a sickly, pitiful creature, who translated the firm's foreign correspondence; the clerks called him a softie and put salt in his tea. To Laptev the whole establishment seemed an absurdity.

He went to the warehouse every day now and tried his best to change things: he forbade the flogging of apprentices and the swindling of customers, he flew into a rage when he caught the clerks foisting old, unsaleable goods on some provincial customer as the latest thing on the market. But though he was in charge at the warehouse now, he still did not know the exact size of his fortune, or whether the business was flourishing, or how much the senior clerks

earned. Pochatkin and Makeichev considered him too young and inexperienced to be initiated into the firm's secrets, and every evening held long whispered conferences with the blind old master.

One day in early June Laptev and Pochatkin went to the Bubnov pub to have lunch and talk over business matters. Pochatkin had been with the Laptevs from the age of eight. He was considered one of the family and trusted implicitly, and on leaving the warehouse he would take the day's receipts out of the till and stuff his pockets with them. He was the master in the warehouse and in the house, and even in the church, where he fulfilled the duties of elder in place of the old man. His brutal treatment of the apprentices had earned him the nickname of Malyuta Skuratov.

When they entered the pub he called the waiter over, "Bring us half a treasure and twenty-four nuisances."

After a little delay the waiter brought them a tray with half a bottle of vodka and several plates of assorted cold dishes.

"Now then, my man," Pochatkin said to him, "let us have a portion of calumny and scandal with some mashed potatoes."

The waiter looked confused and was about to say something, but Pochatkin glared at him and said, "Besides!"

The waiter thought hard for a moment, then

went off to counsel with his comrades and finally solved the riddle and brought a portion of tongue.

"Look here," Laptev said after they had drunk two glasses of vodka and taken a bite, "is it true that our business has begun to decline in the past few years?"

"Howsomever not."

"Tell me, frankly and honestly, please, how much money has been coming in and what capital have we at the present time? We can't go on groping about in the dark. I saw the warehouse accounts not long ago, but I am sorry to say I don't believe them; for some reason you consider it necessary to keep me in ignorance and tell the truth only to my father. This has been the policy since you were a boy and you can't get along without it. But now it's time to drop it. Please be frank with me. What is the state of our accounts?"

"It all depends on the credit fever," replied Pochatkin after a moment's consideration.

"What do you mean by the credit fever?"

Pochatkin began to explain, but Laptev could make no sense of it and sent for Makeichev. The latter came at once, ate something, after saying grace, and declared in his booming baritone voice that the clerks ought to deliver up prayers of thanks to the Lord day and night for having such benefactors.

"That's fine, but permit me not to consider myself your benefactor," said Laptev.

"Every man must remember who he is and know his place. You, by the grace of God, are our father and benefactor and we are your slaves."

"Look here, I'm sick and tired of all this!" cried Laptev in anger. "Perhaps you will be my benefactor and inform me of the condition of our business. If you don't stop treating me like a child, I shall close the warehouse tomorrow. My father is blind, my brother is in an insane asylum, my nieces are under age; I detest the business heartily, I would gladly give it up, but there is no one to take my place, as you know yourselves. So drop this stupid policy of yours, for goodness' sake."

They went to the warehouse and began going over the accounts. In the evening they continued the counting at home, with the old man lending a hand. From his tone as he initiated his son into his trade secrets one might have thought it was not business but black magic he was engaged in. It turned out that the annual income had increased by approximately one-tenth and that the Laptev fortune in cash and securities alone amounted to six million rubles.

It was after midnight when Laptev went outside for a breath of air; he was still under the spell of those figures. It was a quiet sultry, moonlit night; the white walls of the Moscow houses, the heavily barred gates, the silence and the dark shadows gave the impression of a fortress; only the sentry with his gun was missing. Laptev went into

the little garden and sat down on a bench near the fence that separated their yard from the neighbouring one. The bird-cherry was in bloom, Laptev remembered this tree from his childhood days, it looked exactly as it had then, just as gnarled and not an inch taller. Every corner of the garden and yard brought back memories of the distant past. Then as now, he remembered, you could see the moonlit yard through the sparse trees, then too the shadows had been dark and mysterious and a black dog had sprawled in the middle of the yard and the windows in the clerks' quarters had yawned wide. And none of these were pleasant memories.

He heard light footsteps in the yard next door.

"My dear, my darling," a male voice whispered beside the fence, so close to where he sat that Laptev could hear their breathing. They kissed.

Laptev was certain that the millions and the business he hated so much would ruin his life and make a complete slave of him; he saw himself little by little getting used to his position, gradually assuming the role of the head of a business firm, growing old and senile and finally dying as all worthless people die—wretchedly, dismally, a burden to all around him. But what prevented him from giving up the business and going away from this garden and yard which he had loathed from childhood?

The whispering and the kissing behind the fence stirred him. He walked to the middle of the yard,

unbuttoned the neck of his shirt and stood staring at the moon. In another moment he would order the gate opened and go out of this yard and never come back again; his heart leapt at the thought of freedom, he laughed aloud as he imagined how glorious, romantic, perhaps even saintly, life might be....

But he did not move from where he stood. "What keeps me here?" he asked himself. And he despised himself and that black dog that lay there on the stone slabs instead of running in the fields and woods where it could be happy and free. Evidently both he and that dog were unable to leave this place for the same reason: bondage and slavery had become a habit.

At noon the next day, he went out to Butovo where they were spending the summer, taking Yartsev along for the sake of company. He had not seen his wife for five days. They took a carriage at the station and Yartsev sang songs and praised the fine weather all the way. The house stood in a large garden, and they found Yulia Sergeyevna under a spreading old poplar where the main avenue began near the gate. She wore a handsome summer gown of pale cream trimmed with lace and held her old, familiar umbrella. Yartsev exchanged greetings and strolled towards the house where the voices of Sasha and Lida could be heard, while Laptev sat down to talk to his wife.

"Why were you away so long?" she asked, still holding his hand. "I have been sitting here day after day watching for you. I am so lonely without you!"

She got up and stroked his hair, studying his face, his shoulders, his hat.

"You know," she said, "I am in love with you," and she blushed. "You are very dear to me. Now that you have come, I see you and I am quite happy. Now let us have a chat. Tell me something."

As he listened to her declare her love for him, he felt as if they had been married for ten years, and he wanted his lunch. She threw her arms around his neck, and the silk of her dress tickled his cheek; he gently released himself, got up and went up the path to the house. The little girls ran out to meet him.

"How they have grown!" he thought. "And what a great many changes there have been these three years. To think that one might have to live for another thirteen, or perhaps thirty years. And who can tell what may happen by then. Well, we can only wait and see."

He embraced Sasha and Lida who hung on his neck.

"Grandad sends you his love," he said. "Uncle Fyodor is dying. I had a letter from Uncle Kostya in America, he sends you his greetings. He writes he is tired of exhibitions and he will soon come home. And now Uncle Alexei is hungry."

Afterwards he sat on the terrace and saw his wife coming slowly up the path towards the house. She seemed to be lost in thought, her face looked charmingly sad, and her eyes were brimming with tears. She was no longer a slim, delicate, pale-faced girl, but a mature strong handsome woman. And Laptev noticed the reflection of his wife's new beauty on Yartsev's rapt and wistful face as he went to meet her—as if he now saw her for the first time in his life. And when they were having lunch on the terrace, a shy delighted smile played on Yartsev's lips as he sat gazing at Yulia, at the graceful line of her throat. Laptev could not help watching him, thinking of the thirteen or perhaps thirty years that might still lie ahead. So many things could happen in that time. Who knew what the future held?

"We shall wait and see," he thought.