The Duel

by Alexander Kuprin

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DUEL ***

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THE DUEL

colophon

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Alexander Kuprin was born in 1870. He passed through the Cadet School and Military College at Moscow, entered the Army as lieutenant in 1890, and resigned after seven years to devote himself to literature.

THE DUEL

By A. KUPRIN text decoration

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THE DUEL

I

THE 6th Company’s afternoon drill was nearly over, and the junior officers looked with increasing frequency at their watches, and with growing impatience. The rank and file of the new regiment were being instructed in garrison duty. Along the whole of the extensive parade-ground the soldiers stood in scattered groups: by the poplars that bordered the causeway, by the gymnastic apparatus, by the door of the company’s school, and in the neighbourhood of the butts. All these places were to represent during the drill the most important buildings in the garrison—the commander’s residence, the headquarters, the powder magazine, the administration

department, etc. Sentries were posted and relieved; patrols marched here and there, shouting at and saluting each other in military fashion; harsh non-commissioned officers visited and examined the sentries on duty, trying, sometimes by a trick, sometimes by pretended threats, to fool the soldiers into infringing the rules, e.g. to quit their posts, give up their rifles, to take charge of contraband articles, etc. The older men, who had had previous experience of such practical jokes, were very seldom taken in, but answered rudely, “The Tsar alone gives orders here,” etc., etc. The young recruits, on the other hand, often enough fell into the snare set for them.

“Khliabnikov!” a stout little “non-com.” cried angrily in a voice which betrayed a passion for ruling. “What did I tell you just now, simpleton? Did I put you under arrest? What are you sticking there for, then? Why don’t you answer?”

In the third platoon a tragi-comic scene took place. Moukhamedjinov, a young soldier, Tartar by birth, was not yet versed in the Russian language. He got more and more confused under the commander’s irritating and insidious questions. At last he lost his head entirely, brought his rifle to the charge, and threatened all the bystanders with the bayonet.

“Stop, you madman!” roared Sergeant Bobuilev. “Can’t you recognize your own commander, your own captain?”

“Another step and you are a dead man!” shouted the Tartar, in a furious rage. His eyes were bloodshot, and he nervously repelled with his bayonet all who approached him. Round about him, but at a respectful distance, a crowd of soldiers flocked together, accepting with joy and gratitude this interesting little interlude in the wearisome drill.

Sliva, the captain of the company, approached to see what was going on. While he was on the opposite side of the parade-ground, where, with bent back and dragging steps, he tottered slowly backwards and forwards, a few young officers assembled in a small group to smoke and chatter. They were three, all told: Lieutenant Viätkin, a

bald, moustached man of thirty-three, a jovial fellow, chatterbox, singer, and particularly fond of his glass; Sub-Lieutenant Romashov, who had hardly served two years in the regiment; and, lastly, Sub-Ensign Lbov, a lively, well-shaped young man, with an expression of shrewd geniality in his pale eyes and an eternal smile on his thick, innocent lips. He passed for a peripatetic storehouse of anecdotes, specially crammed with old and worn-out officers' stories.

"This is an out-and-out scandal," said Viätkin, as he looked at his dainty little watch, the case of which he angrily closed with a little click. "What the devil does he mean by keeping the company all this time?"

"You should ask him that question, Pavel Pavlich," replied Lbov, with a sly look.

"Oh, go to the devil! Go and ask him yourself. But the point which I want to emphasize is that the whole business is utterly futile; there is always this fuss before the review, and every time they overdo it. The soldiers are so worried and badgered, that at the review they stand like blockheads. Do you know that story about the two captains who made a pretty heavy bet as to which of them had in his company the best trencher-man? When one of the 'champions' had consumed seven pounds of bread he was obliged to acknowledge himself beaten. His Captain, furious with indignation, sent for his sergeant-major, and said: 'What made you send me a creature like that? After his seventh pound he had to give up, and I've lost my wager!' The poor sergeant-major stared at his superior. 'I don't know what could have happened to him, your Excellency. This very morning I rehearsed with him, and then he ate eight pounds without any ado.' It's the same case here, gentlemen. We rehearse without mercy and common-sense up to the very last, and thus, when the tug-of-war comes, the soldier drops down from sheer weariness."

"Last night," began Lbov, who could hardly get his words out for laughing—"last night, when the drill was over, I went to my quarters. It was past eight, and quite dark then. As I was approaching the barracks of the 11th Company I heard some

ear-piercing music from there. I go there and am told that the men are being taught our horn signals. All the recruits were obliged to sing in chorus. It was a hideous concert, and I asked Lieutenant Andrusevich how any one could put up with such a row so late at night. He answered laughingly, 'Why shouldn't we now and then, like the dogs, howl at the moon?'"

"Now I can't stand this any longer," interrupted Viätkin, with a yawn. "But who's that riding down there? It looks like Biek."

"Yes, it's Biek-Agamalov," replied sharp-sighted Lbov. "Look how beautifully he rides."

"Yes, he does," chimed in Romashov. "To my thinking, he rides better than any other of our cavalrymen. But just look at his horse dancing. Biek is showing off."

An officer, wearing an Adjutant's uniform and white gloves, was riding quietly along the causeway. He was sitting on a high, slim-built horse with a gold-coloured and short-clipped tail, after the English fashion. The spirited animal pirouetted under his rider, and impatiently shook its branch-bit by the violent tossings of its long and nobly formed neck.

"Pavel Pavlich, is it a fact that Biek is a Circassian by birth?" asked Romashov.

"Yes, I think so," answered Viätkin. "Armenians pretend sometimes that they are Circassians or Lezghins,[1] but nobody can be deceived with regard to Biek. Only look how he carries himself on horseback."

"Wait, I'll call him," said Lbov.

Lbov put his hands to his mouth, and tried to form out of them a sort of speaking-tube, and shouted in a suppressed voice, so as not to be heard by the Commander—

"Lieutenant Biek-Agamalov!"

The officer on horseback pulled the reins, stopped for a second, and swung in the

saddle towards the right. Then he also turned his horse to the right, bent slightly forward, and, with a springy and energetic movement, jumped the ditch, and rode in a short gallop up to the officers.

He was a man somewhat below the medium height, lean, muscular, and very powerful. His countenance, with its receding forehead, delicate, aquiline nose, and strong, resolute lines about the mouth, was manly and handsome, and had not yet got the pale and sickly hue that is so characteristic of the Oriental when he is getting on in years.

“Good-day, Biek,” was Viätkin’s greeting. “Who was the girl for whom you were exercising your arts of seduction down there, you lady-killer?”

Biek-Agamalov shook hands with the officers, whilst with an easy and graceful movement he bent slightly forward in the saddle. He smiled, and his gleaming white and even row of teeth cast a sort of lustre over the lower part of his face, with its black and splendidly cultivated moustache.

“Two or three little Jewess girls were there, but what is that to do with me? I took no notice of them.”

“Ah! we know well enough how you play the game with ladies,” said Viätkin jestingly.

“I say!” interrupted Lbov, with a laugh; “have you heard what General Dokturov[2] remarked about the Adjutants in the infantry? It ought to interest you, Biek. He said they were the most dare-devil riders in the whole world.”

“No lies, now, ensign,” replied Biek, as he gave his horse the reins and assumed an expression as if he intended to ride down the joker.

“It’s true, by God it is! ‘They ride,’ said he, ‘the most wretched “crocks” in the world—spavined “roarers”—and yet, only give the order, and off they fly at the maddest speed over stocks and stones, hedges and ditches—reins loose, stirrups dropped, cap flying, ah!—veritable cantaurs.’”

“What news, Biek?” asked Viätkin.

“What news? None. Ah! stay. A little while ago the Commander of the regiment ran across Lieutenant-Colonel Liekh at mess. Liekh, as drunk as a lord, was wobbling against the wall with his hands behind him, and hardly able to stammer out a syllable. Shulgovich rushed at him like an infuriated bull, and bellowed in such a way that it might be heard over the whole market-place: ‘Please remove your hands from the small of your back when you stand in the presence of your commanding officer.’ And all the servants witnessed this edifying scene.”

“Ah! that is detestable,” chimed in Viätkin, laughing. “Yesterday, when he favoured the 4th Company with a visit, he shouted: ‘Who dares to thrust the regulations in my face? I am your regulations. Not a word more. Here I’m your Tsar and your God.’”

Lbov was again laughing at his own thoughts.

“Gentlemen, have you heard what happened to the Adjutant of the 4th Regiment?”

“Keep your eternal stories to yourself, Lbov,” exclaimed Viätkin, interrupting him in a severe tone. “To-day you’re worse than usual.”

“I have some more news to tell,” Biek-Agamalov went on to say, as he again facetiously threatened Lbov with his horse, which, snorting and shaking its head, beslavered all around it with foam. “The Commander has taken it into his head that the officers of all the companies are to practise sabre-cutting at a dummy. He has aroused a fearful animosity against himself in the 9th Company. Epifanov was arrested for having neglected to sharpen his sabre. But what are you frightened of, Lbov? He isn’t dangerous, and you must teach yourself to make friends with these noble animals. It may, you know, some day fall to your lot to be Adjutant; but then, I suppose, you will sit your horse as securely as a roast sparrow on a dish.”

“Retro, Satanas!” cried Lbov, who had some difficulty in protecting himself against the horse’s froth-covered muzzle. “You’ve heard, I suppose, what happened to an Adjutant of the 4th Regiment who bought himself a circus-horse? At the review

itself, right before the eyes of the inspecting General, the well-trained beast began to exhibit its proficiency in the ‘Spanish walk.’ You know, I suppose, what that is? At every step the horse’s legs are swung high in the air from one side to the other. At last, both horse and rider alighted in the thick of the company. Shrieks, oaths, universal confusion, and a General, half-dead with rage, who at last, by a supreme effort, managed to hiss out: ‘Lieutenant and Adjutant, for this exhibition of your skill in riding you have twenty-one days’ arrest. March!’”

“What rot!” interrupted Viätkin in an indignant tone. “I say, Biek, the news of the sabre-cutting was by no means a surprise to us. It means that we do not get any free time at all. Turn round and see what an abortion some one brought here yesterday.”

He concluded his sentence by a significant gesture towards the middle of the parade-ground, where a monstrously ugly figure of raw clay, lacking both arms and legs, had been erected.

“Ha! look there—already. Well, have you tried it?” asked Biek, his interest excited. “Have you had a go at it yet, Romashov?”

“Not yet.”

“Don’t you think I’ve something better to do than occupy myself with rubbish of that sort?” exclaimed Viätkin angrily. “When am I to find time for that? From nine in the morning to six at night I have to be here, there, and everywhere, and hardly manage to get a bite or sup. Besides, thank God! I’ve still my wits about me.”

“What silly talk! An officer ought to be able to handle his sabre.”

“Why? if I may ask. You surely know that in warfare, with the firearms now in use, one never gets within a range of a hundred paces of the enemy. What the devil’s the use of a sabre to me? I’m not a cavalryman. When it comes to the point, I shall seize hold of a rifle and—bang! So the matter’s simple enough. People may say what they please; the bullet is, after all, the safest.”

“Possibly so; but, even in time of peace, there are still many occasions when the

sabre may come in useful—for instance, if one is attacked in street riots, tumults, etc."

"And you think I should condescend to exchange cuts with the tag-rag of the streets? No, thank you, my good friend. In such a case I prefer to give the command, 'Aim, fire'—and all's said and done."

Biek-Agamalov's face darkened.

"You are talking nonsense, Pavel Pavlich. Now answer me this: Suppose, when you are taking a walk, or are at a theatre or restaurant, some coxcomb insults you or a civilian boxes your ears. What will you do then?"

Viätkin shrugged his shoulders and protruded his under lip contemptuously.

"In the first place, that kind of man only attacks those who show that they are afraid of him, and, in the second, I have my—revolver."

"But suppose the revolver were left at home?" remarked Lbov.

"Then, naturally, I should have to go home and fetch it. What stupid questions! You seem to have clean forgotten the incident of a certain cornet who was insulted at a music-hall by two civilians. He drove home for his revolver, returned to the music-hall, and cheerfully shot down the pair who had insulted him—simple enough."

Biek-Agamalov made an indignant gesture. "We know—we have heard all that, but in telling the story you forget that the cornet in question was convicted of deliberate murder. Truly a very pretty business. If I had found myself in a similar situation, I should have——"

He did not finish his sentence, but the little, well-formed hand in which he held the reins was clenched so hard that it trembled. Lbov was seized with one of his usual paroxysms of laughter.

"Ah! you're at it again," Viätkin remarked severely.

“Pardon me, gentlemen, but I really couldn’t—ha, ha, ha! I happened to think of a tragi-comic scene that was enacted in the 17th Regiment. Sub-Ensign Krause on one occasion had a row with some one in an aristocratic club. The steward, to prevent further mischief, seized him so violently by the shoulder-knot that the latter was torn off, whereupon Krause drew his revolver and put a bullet through the steward’s skull. A little lawyer who incautiously mixed himself up in the game shared the same fate. The rest of the party rushed out of the room like so many frightened hens. But Krause quietly proceeded to the camp, and was then challenged by the sentry. ‘Who goes there?’ shouted the sentry. ‘Sub-Ensign Krause, who is coming to die by the colours of his regiment’; whereupon he walked straight up to the colours, laid himself down on the ground, and fired a bullet through his left arm. The court afterwards acquitted him.”

“That was a fine fellow,” exclaimed Biek-Agamalov.

Then began the young officers’ usual favourite conversation on duels, fights, and other sanguinary scenes, whereupon it was stated with great satisfaction that such transgressions of law and municipal order always went unpunished. Then, for instance, a story was told about how a drunken, beardless cornet had drawn his sword at random on a small crowd of Jews who were returning from keeping the Passover; how a sub-lieutenant in the infantry had, at a dancing-hall, stabbed to death an undergraduate who happened to elbow him at the buffet, how an officer at St. Petersburg or Moscow shot down like a dog a civilian who dared to make the impertinent observation that decent people were not in the habit of accosting ladies with whom they are not acquainted.

Romashov, who, up to now, had been a silent listener to these piquant stories, now joined in the conversation; but he did so with every sign of reluctance and embarrassment. He cleared his throat, slowly adjusted his eyeglass, though that was not absolutely necessary then, and finally, in an uncertain voice, spoke as follows—

“Gentlemen, allow me to submit to you this question: In a dispute of that sort it might happen, you know, that the civilian chanced to be a respectable man, even perhaps a person of noble birth. Might it not, in that case, be more correct to demand of him an explanation or satisfaction? We should both belong to the cultured class, so to speak.”

“You’re talking nonsense, Romashov,” interrupted Viätkin. “If you want satisfaction from such scum you’ll most certainly get the following answer, which is little gratifying: ‘Ah, well, my good sir, I do not give satisfaction. That is contrary to my principles. I loathe duels and bloodshed—and besides, you can have recourse, you know, to the Justice of the Peace, in the event of your feeling yourself wronged.’ And then, for the whole of your life, you must carry the delightful recollection of an unavenged box on the ears from a civilian.”

Biek-Agamalov smiled in approbation, and with more than his usual generosity showed his whole row of gleaming white teeth. “Hark you, Viätkin, you ought really to take some interest in this sabre-cutting. With us at our home in the Caucasus we practise it from childhood—on bundles of wattles, on water-spouts, the bodies of sheep.”

“And men’s bodies,” remarked Lbov.

“And on men’s bodies,” repeated Agamalov with unruffled calm. “And such strokes, too! In a twinkling they cleave a fellow from his shoulder to the hip.”

“Biek, can you perform a test of strength like that?”

Biek-Agamalov sighed regretfully.

“No, alas! A sheep, or a calf; I can say I could cleave to the neck by a single stroke, but to cut a full-grown man down to the waist is beyond my power. To my father it would be a trifle.”

“Come, gentlemen, and let us try our strength and sabres on that scarecrow,” said Lbov, in a determined tone and with flashing eyes. “Biek, my dear boy, come with

us."

The officers went up to the clay figure that had been erected a little way off. Viätkin was the first to attack it. After endeavouring to impart to his innocent, prosaic face an expression of wild-beast ferocity, he struck the clay man with all his might and with an unnecessarily big flourish of his sabre. At the same time he uttered the characteristic sound "Khryass!" which a butcher makes when he is cutting up beef. The weapon entered about a quarter of an inch into the clay, and Viätkin had some trouble to extricate his brave sabre.

"Wretchedly done," exclaimed Agamalov, shaking his head. "Now, Romashov, it's your turn."

Romashov drew his sabre from its sheath, and adjusted his eyeglass with a hesitating movement. He was of medium height, lean, and fairly strong in proportion to his build, but through constitutional timidity and lack of interest not much accustomed to handling the weapon. Even as a pupil at the Military Academy he was a bad swordsman, and after a year and a half's service in the regiment he had almost completely forgotten the art.

He raised his sabre high above his head, but stretched out, simultaneously and instinctively, his left arm and hand.

"Mind your hand!" shouted Agamalov.

But it was too late then. The point of the sabre only made a slight scratch on the clay, and Romashov, to his astonishment, who had mis-reckoned on a strong resistance to the steel entering the clay, lost his balance and stumbled forward, whereupon the blade of the sabre caught his outstretched hand and tore off a portion of skin at the lower part of his little finger, so that the blood oozed.

"There! See what you've done!" cried Biek angrily as he dismounted from his charger. "How can any one handle a sabre so badly? You very nearly cut off your hand, you know. Well, that wound is a mere trifle, but you'd better bind it up with

your handkerchief. Ensign, hold my horse. And now, gentlemen, bear this in mind. The force or effect of a stroke is not generated either in the shoulder or the elbow, but here, in the wrist." He made, as quick as lightning, a few rotary movements of his right hand, whereupon the point of his sabre described a scintillating circle above his head. "Now look, I put my left hand behind my back. When the stroke itself is to be delivered it must not be done by a violent and clumsily directed blow, but by a vigorous cut, in which the arm and sabre are jerked slightly backwards. Do you understand? Moreover, it is absolutely necessary that the plane of the sabre exactly coincides with the direction of the stroke. Look, here goes!"

Biek took two steps backwards from the manikin, to which he seemed, as it were, to fasten himself tightly by a sharp, penetrating glance. Suddenly the sabre flashed in the air, and a fearful stroke, delivered with a rapidity that the eye could not follow, struck like lightning the clay figure, the upper part of which rolled, softly but heavily, down to the ground. The cut made by the sabre was as smooth and even as if it had been polished.

"The deuce, that was something like a cut!" cried the enthusiastic Lbov in wild delight. "Biek, my dear fellow, of your charity do that over again."

"Yes, do, Biek," chimed in Viätkin.

But Agamalov, who was evidently afraid of destroying the effect he had produced, smiled as he replaced the sabre in its scabbard. He breathed heavily, and at that moment, by his bloodthirsty, wildly staring eyes, his hawk's nose, and set mouth, he put one in mind of a proud, cruel, malignant bird of prey.

"That was really nothing remarkable," he exclaimed in a tone of assumed contempt. "At home in the Caucasus my old father, although he is over sixty-six, could cut off a horse's head in a trice. You see, my children, everything can be acquired by practice and perseverance. At my home we practise on bundles of fagots tightly twisted together, or we try to cut through a water-spout without the least splash

being noticeable. Well, Lbov, it's your turn now."

At that very moment, however, Bobuilev, the "non-com.," rushed up to Viätkin, with terror depicted on every feature.

"Your Honour! The Commander of the regiment is here."

"Attention!" cried Captain Sliva's sharp voice from the other side of the parade-ground. The officers hastily made their way to their respective detachments.

A large open carriage slowly approached the avenue and stopped at the parade-ground. Out of it stepped the Commander with great trouble and agony amidst a loud moaning and groaning from the side of the poor carriage. The Commander was followed by his Adjutant, Staff-Captain Federovski, a tall, slim officer of smart appearance.

"Good day, 7th Company," was his greeting in a careless, indistinct voice. An ear-splitting chorus of soldiers, dispersed over the whole extent of the ground, replied instantly: "God preserve your Excellency!"

The officers touched their caps.

"Proceed with the drill," ordered the Commander, as he went up to the nearest platoon.

Colonel Shulgovich was evidently not in a good humour. He wandered about the platoons, growling and swearing, all the while repeatedly trying to worry the life out of the unhappy recruits by catch-questions from the "Military Regulations." Time after time he was heard to reel out the most awful strings of insults and threats, and in this he displayed an inventive power and mastery that could hardly be surpassed. The soldiers stood before him, transfixed with terror, stiff, motionless, scarcely daring to breathe, and, as it were, hypnotized by the incessant, steadfast glances, as hard as marble, from those senile, colourless, severe eyes. Colonel Shulgovich, although much troubled with fatness and advanced in years, nevertheless still contrived to carry his huge, imposing figure. His broad, fleshy face, with its bloated

cheeks and deeply receding forehead, was surrounded below by a thick, silvery, pointed beard, whereby the great head came very closely to resemble an awe-inspiring rhomboid. The eyebrows were grey, bushy, and threatening. He always spoke in a subdued tone, but his powerful voice—to which alone he owed his comparatively rapid promotion—was heard all the same as far as the most distant point of the parade-ground, nay! even out on the highroad.

“Who are you?” asked the Colonel, suddenly halting in front of a young soldier named Sharafutdinov, who was on sentry duty near the gymnastic apparatus.

“Recruit in the 6th Company, Sharafutdinov, your Excellency,” the Tartar answered in a strained and hoarse voice.

“Fool! I mean, of course, what post are you supposed to occupy?”

The soldier, who was frightened by his Commander’s angry tone, was silent: he could only produce one or two nervous twitchings of the eyebrows.

“Well?” Shulgovich raised his voice.

“I—am—standing—on guard,” the Tartar at last spluttered out, chancing it. “I cannot—understand, your Excellency,” he went on to say, but he relapsed into silence again, and stood motionless.

The Colonel’s face assumed a dark brick colour, a shade with a touch of blue about it, and his bushy eyebrows began to pucker in an alarming way. Beside himself with fury, he turned round and said in a sharp tone—

“Who is the youngest officer here?”

Romashov stepped forward and touched his cap.

“I am, Colonel.”

“Ha—Sub-lieutenant Romashov, you evidently train your men well. Stand at attention and stretch your legs,” bawled Shulgovich suddenly, his eyes rolling. “Don’t you know how to stand in the presence of your commanding officer? Captain

Sliva, I beg to inform you that your subaltern officer has been lacking in the respect due to his chief. And you, you miserable cur," he now turned towards the unhappy Sharafutdinov, "tell me the name of your Commander."

"I don't know," replied Sharafutdinov quickly, but in a firm tone in which, nevertheless, a melancholy resignation might be detected.

"Oh, I ask you the name of your Colonel. Do you know who I am? I—I—I!" and Shulgovich drummed with the flat of his hand several times on his broad chest.

"I don't know."

The Colonel delivered himself of a string of about twenty words of cynical abuse. "Captain Sliva, I order you at once to exhibit this son of a sea-cook, so that all may see him, with rifle and heavy accoutrements, and let him stand there till he rots. And as for you, Sub-lieutenant, I know well enough that loose women and flirtation interest you more than the service does. In waltzing and reading Paul de Kock you're said to be an authority, but as to performing your duties, instructing your men—that, of course, is beneath your dignity. Just look at this creature" (he gave Sharafutdinov a sound slap on the mouth)—"is this a Russian soldier? No, he's a brute beast, who does not even recognize his own commanding officer. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Romashov stared speechlessly at his chief's red and rage-distorted countenance. He felt his heart threatening to burst with shame and indignation. Suddenly, almost unconsciously, he burst out in a hollow voice—

"Colonel, this fellow is a Tartar and does not understand a word of our language, and besides...."

But he did not finish his sentence. Shulgovich's features had that very instant undergone a ghastly change. His whole countenance was as white as a corpse's, his withered cheeks were transfused with sharp, nervous puckers, and his eyes assumed a terrible expression.

“Wh-at!” roared he in a voice so unnatural and awe-inspiring that a little crowd of Jew boys, who, some distance from the causeway, were sitting on the fence on which they had swarmed, were scattered like sparrows—“you answer back? Silence! A raw young ensign permits himself to—— Lieutenant Federovski, enter in my day-book that I have ordered Sub-lieutenant Romashov four days’ arrest in his room for breach of discipline. And Captain Sliva is to be severely rebuked for neglecting to instil into his junior officers ‘a true military spirit.’”

The Adjutant saluted respectfully without any sign of fear. Captain Sliva stood the whole time bending slightly forward, with his hand to his cap, and quivering with emotion, though without altering a feature of his wooden face.

“I cannot help being surprised at you, Captain Sliva,” again grunted Shulgovich, who had now to some extent regained his self-control. “How is it possible that you, who are one of the best officers in the regiment, and, moreover, old in the service, can let your youngsters run so wild? They want breaking in. It is no use to treat them like young ladies and being afraid of hurting them.”

With these words he turned his back on the Captain, and, followed by the Adjutant, proceeded to the carriage awaiting him. Whilst he was getting into the carriage, and till the latter had turned round behind the corner of the regimental school, a dull, painful silence reigned in the parade-ground.

“Ah! you dear old ducky,” exclaimed Captain Sliva in a dry tone and with deep contempt, when the officers had, some minutes later, separated. “Now, gentlemen, I suppose I, too, ought to say a couple of loving words to you. Learn to stand at attention and hold your jaw even if the sky falls—etc. To-day I’ve had a wigging for you before the whole of my company. Who saddled me with you? Who asked for your services? Not I, at any rate. You are, for me and my company, about as necessary as a fifth leg is to a dog. Go to the deuce, and return to your feeding-bottle.”

He finished his bitter lecture with a weary, contemptuous movement of his hand, and dragged himself slowly away in the direction of his dark, dirty, cheerless bachelor quarters. Romashov cast a long glance at him, and gazing at the tall, thin figure, already bent with age, as well as by the affront just endured, he felt a deep pity for this lonely, embittered man whom nobody loved, who had only two interests in the whole world—correct “dressing” of the 6th Company when marching at a review, and the dear little schnapps bottle which was his trusty and sole companion till bedtime.

And whereas Romashov also had the absurd, silly habit, which is often peculiar to young people, viz. in his introspection to think of himself as a third party, and then weave his noble personality into a sentimental and stilted phrase from novelettes, our soft-hearted lieutenant now expressed his opinion of himself in the following touching manner—

“And over his kindly, expressive eyes fell the shadow of grief.”

II

THE soldiers marched home to their quarters in platoon order. The square was deserted. Romashov stood hesitating for a moment at the causeway. It was not the first time during the year and a half he had been in the service he had experienced that painful feeling of loneliness, of being lost among strangers either hostile or indifferent, or that distressful hesitation as to where one shall spend the evening. To go home or spend the evening at the officers’ mess was equally distasteful to him. At the latter place, at that time of day, there was hardly a soul, at most a couple of ensigns who, whilst they drank ale and smoked to excess and indulged in as many oaths and unseemly words as possible, played pyramids in the wretched little narrow billiard-room; in addition to all this, the horrible smell of food pervading all the rooms.

“I shall go down to the railway-station,” said Romashov at last. “That will be something to do.”

In the poor little town, the population of which mainly consisted of Jews, the only decent restaurant was that at the railway-station. There were certainly two clubs—one for officers, the other for the civilian “big-wigs” of the community. They were both, however, in a sorry plight, and on these grounds the railway restaurant had become the only place where the inhabitants assembled to shake off the dust of everyday life, and to get a drink or a game at cards. Even the ladies of the place accompanied their male protectors there, chiefly, however, to witness the arrival of the trains and scrutinize the passengers, which always offered a little change in the dreary monotony of provincial life.

Romashov liked to go down to the railway-station of an evening at the time when the express arrived, which made its last stop before reaching the Prussian frontier. With a curious feeling of excitement and tension, he awaited the moment when the train flashed round a sharp curve of the line, the locomotive’s fiery, threatening eye grew rapidly in size and intensity, and, at the next second, thundered past him a whole row of palatial carriages. “Like a monstrously huge giant that suddenly checks himself in the middle of a furious leap,” he thought, the train came to an abrupt stop before the platform. From the dazzling, illuminated carriages, that resembled a fairy palace, stepped beautiful and elegant ladies in wonderful hats, gentlemen dressed according to the latest Paris fashion, who, in perfect French or German, greeted one another with compliments or pointed witticisms. None of the passengers took the slightest notice of Romashov, who saw in them a striking little sample of that envied and unattainable world where life is a single, uninterrupted, triumphal feast.

After an interval of eight minutes a bell would ring, the engine would whistle, and the train de luxe would flit away into the darkness. The station would be soon

deserted after this, and the lights lowered in the buffet and on the platform, where Romashov would remain gazing with melancholy eyes, after the lurid gleam of the red lamp of the rear coach, until it disappeared in the gloom like an extinguished spark.

“I shall go to the station for a while,” Romashov repeated to himself once more, but when he cast a glance at his big, clumsy goloshes, bespattered with clay and filth, he experienced a keen sense of shame. All the other officers in the regiment wore the same kind of goloshes. Then he noticed the worn buttonholes of his shabby cloak, its many stains, and the fearfully torn lower border that almost degenerated into a sort of fringe at the knees, and he sighed. One day in the previous week he had, as usual, been promenading the platform, looking with curiosity at the express train that had just arrived, when he noticed a tall, extraordinarily handsome lady standing at the open door of a first-class carriage. She was bare-headed, and Romashov managed to distinguish a little, straight, piquant nose, two charming, pouting lips, and a splendid, gleaming black head of hair which, parted in the middle of her forehead, stole down to her coquettish little ears. Behind her, and looking over her shoulder, stood a gigantic young man in a light suit, with a scornful look, and moustaches after the style affected by Kaiser Wilhelm. In fact, he bore a certain resemblance to Wilhelm. The lady looked at Romashov, it seemed to him with an expression of interest, and he said to himself: “The fair unknown’s eyes rested with pleasure on the young warrior’s tall, well-formed figure.” But when, after walking on a few steps, he turned round to catch the lady’s eyes again, he saw that both she and her companion were looking after him and laughing. In that moment he saw himself from outside, as it were—his awful goloshes, his cloak, pale face, stiff, angular figure—and experienced a feeling of shame and indignation at the thought of the bombastic, romantic phrase he had just applied to himself. Ah! even at this moment, when he was walking along the road in the gloomy spring evening, he flushed at that torturing recollection.

“No, I shall not go to the station,” he whispered to himself with bitter hopelessness. “I’ll take a little stroll and then go straight home.”

It was in the beginning of April. The dusk was deepening into night. The poplars that bordered the road, the small white houses with their red-tiled roofs, the few wanderers one met in the street at this hour—all grew darker, lost colour and perspective. All objects were changed into black shadow, the lines of which, however, still showed distinctly against the dark sky. Far away westwards, outside the town, the sunset still gleamed fiery red. Vast dark-blue clouds melted slowly down into a glowing crater of streaming, flaming gold, and then assumed a blood-red hue with rays of violet and amber. But above the volcano, like a dome of varying green, turquoise and beryl, arose the boundless sky of a luminous spring night.

Romashov looked steadily at this enchanting picture whilst he slowly and laboriously dragged himself and his goloshes along the causeway. As he always did, even from childhood, he even now indulged in fancies of a mysterious, marvellous world that waited for and beckoned to him in the far distance, beyond the sunset. Just there—there behind the clouds and the horizon—is hidden a wonderfully beautiful city lighted up by the beams of a sun invisible from here, and protected against our eyes by heavy, inexorable, threatening clouds. There the human eye is blinded by streets paved with gold; there, to a dazzling height, the dome-capped towers rise above the purple-hued roofs, where the palace windows shimmer in the sun like innumerable gems, where countless flags and banners resplendent with colour sway in the breeze. And in this fairy city throng bands of rejoicing people, whose whole life is nothing but an endless, intoxicating feast, a chord of harmony and bliss vibrating for ever and ever. In paradisaical parks and gardens, amidst fountains and flowers, stroll godlike men and women fair as the day, who have never yet known an unfulfilled desire, who have never yet experienced sorrow and struggle and shame.

Romashov suddenly called to mind the painful scene in the parade-ground, the Commander's coarse invectives and that outrageous insult in the presence of his comrades and subordinates. Ah! what affected him most bitterly of all was that a person had railed at him before the soldiers in the same rough and ruthless way as he himself, alas! had only too often done to his subordinates. This he felt almost as a degradation, nay, even as a debasement of his dignity as a human being.

Then awoke within him, exactly as was the case in his early youth—alas! in many respects he still much resembled a big child—feelings at once revengeful, fantastic, and intoxicating. "Stuff and nonsense!" he shouted out to himself. "All my life is before me." And, as it were, in keeping with his thoughts, he took firmer strides, and breathed more deeply. "To-morrow to spite them all I shall rise with the sun, stick to my books, and force an entrance into the Military Academy. Hard work? I can work hard if I like. I must take myself in hand, that is all. I'll read and cram like fury, early and late, and then, some fine day, to every one's astonishment, I shall pass a brilliant examination. And then, of course, every one will say: 'This was nothing unexpected, we might have foretold that long ago. Such an energetic, talented young man!'"

And our Romashov already saw himself in his mind's eye with a snug Staff appointment and unlimited possibilities in the future. His name stood engraved on the golden tablet of the Military Academy. The professors had predicted a brilliant career for him, tried to retain him as a lecturer at the Academy, etc. etc.—but in vain. All his tastes were for the practical side, for troop service. He had also first to perform his duties as company officer, and as a matter of course—yes, as a matter of course—in his old regiment. He would, therefore, have to make another appearance here—in this disgusting little out-of-the-way hole—as a Staff officer uncommonly learned and all-accomplished, in every respect unsurpassable, well-bred and elegant, inexorably severe to himself, but benevolently condescending towards others, a pattern for all, envied by all, etc. etc. He had seen at the manœuvres in the previous

year a similar prodigy, who stood millions of miles above the rest of mankind, and who, therefore, kept himself far apart from his comrades at the officers' mess. Cards, dice, heavy drinking and noisy buffoonery were not in his line; he had higher views. Besides, he had only honoured with a short visit that miserable place, which for him was only a stage, a step-ladder on the road to honour—and decorations.

And Romashov pursued his fancies. The grand manœuvres have begun, and the battalion is busy. Colonel Shulgovich, who never managed to make out the strategical or tactical situation, gets more and more muddled in his orders, commands and countermands, marches his men aimlessly here and there, and has already got two orderlies at him, bringing severe reprimands from the Commander of the corps. "Look here, Captain," says Shulgovich, turning to his former sub-lieutenant, "help me out of this. We are old and good friends, you know—well, we did have a little difference on one occasion. Now tell me what I ought to do." His face is red with anxiety and vexation; but Romashov sits straight in the saddle, salutes stiffly, and in a respectful but freezing tone replies: "Pardon, Colonel. Your duty is to advance your regiment in accordance with the Commander's order; mine is only to receive your instructions and to carry them out to the best of my ability." In the same moment a third orderly from the Commander approaches at a furious gallop.

Romashov, the brilliant Staff officer, rises higher and higher towards the pinnacles of power and glory. A dangerous strike has taken place at a steel manufactory. Romashov's company is charged with the difficult and hazardous task of restoring peace and order amongst the rioters. Night and gloom, incendiarism, a flaming sea of fire, an innumerable, hooting, bloodthirsty mob, a shower of stones. A stately young officer steps in front of the company, his name is Romashov. "Brothers," cries he, in a strong but melodious voice, "for the third and last time I beseech you to disperse, otherwise—I shall fire." Wild shouts, derisive laughter, whistling. A stone hits Romashov on the shoulder, but his frank, handsome countenance

maintains its unalterable calm. Slowly he turns towards his soldiers, whose eyes scintillate with rage at the insolent outrage that some one had dared to commit on their idolized Captain. A few brief, energetic words of command are heard, “Line and aim—fire!” A crashing report of rifles, immediately followed by a roar of rage and despair from the crowd. A few score dead and wounded lie where they have fallen; the rest flee in disorder or beg for mercy and are taken prisoners. The riot is quelled, and Romashov awaits a gracious token of the Tsar’s gratitude and favour, together with a special reward for the heroism he displayed.

Then comes the longed-for war. Nay, even before the war he is sent by the War Office to Germany as a spy on the enemy’s military power near the frontier. Perfectly familiar with the German language, he enters upon his hazardous career. How delightful is such an adventure to a brave and patriotic man! Absolutely alone, with a German passport in his pocket and a street organ on his back, he wanders from town to town, from village to village, grinds out tunes, collects coppers, plays the part of a simple lout, and meanwhile obtains, in all secrecy, plans and sketches of fortresses, stores, barracks, camps, etc., etc. Foes and perils lie in wait for him every minute. His own Government has left him helpless and unprotected. He is virtually an outlaw. If he succeeds in his purpose, honours and rewards of all kinds await him. Should he be unmasked, he will be condemned straight off to be shot or hanged. He sees himself standing in the dark and gloomy trench, confronted by his executioners. Out of compassion they fasten a white cloth before his eyes; but he tears it away and throws it to the ground with the proud words, “Do you not think an officer can face death?” An old Colonel replies, in a quivering voice: “Listen, my young friend. I have a son of the same age as you. I will spare you. Tell us your name—tell us, at any rate, your nationality, and the death sentence will be commuted to imprisonment.” “I thank you, Colonel; but it is useless. Do your duty.” Then he turns to the soldiers, and says to them in a firm voice in German: “Comrades, there is only one favour I would crave: spare my face, aim at my heart.”

The officer in command, deeply moved, raises his white pocket-handkerchief—a crashing report—and Romashov's story is ended.

This picture made such a lively impression on his imagination that Romashov, who was already very excited and striding along the road, suddenly stopped short, trembling all over. His heart beat violently, and he clenched his hands convulsively. He gained, however, command over himself immediately, and smiling compassionately at himself, he continued on his way in the darkness.

But it was not long before he began to conjure up fresh pictures in his imagination. The cruel war with Prussia and Austria, long expected and prepared for, had come. An enormous battlefield, corpses everywhere, havoc, annihilation, blood, and death. It was the chief battle, on the issue of which the whole war depended. The decisive moment had arrived. The last reserves had been brought up, and one was waiting anxiously for the Russian flanking column to arrive in time to attack the enemy in the rear. At any cost the enemy's frantic attack must be met without flinching. The most important and threatened position on the field was occupied by the Kerenski regiment, which was being decimated by the concentrated fire of the enemy. The soldiers fight like lions without yielding an inch, although the whole line is being mowed down by a murderous fire of shells. Every one feels that he is passing through an historical moment. A few more seconds of heroic endurance and victory will be snatched out of the enemy's hands. But Colonel Shulgovich wavers. He is a brave man—that must be admitted—but the perils of a fight like this are too much for his nerves. He turns pale and trembles. The next moment he signals to the bugler to sound the retreat, and the latter has already put the bugle to his lips, when, that very moment, Colonel Romashov, chief of the Staff, comes dashing from behind the hill on his foaming Arab steed. "Colonel, we dare not retreat. The fate of Russia will be decided here." Shulgovich begins blustering. "Colonel Romashov, it is I who am in command and must answer to God and the Tsar. The regiment must retire—blow the bugle." But Romashov snatches the bugle from the bugler's hand and hurls it to

the ground. “Forward, my children!” he shouts; “the eyes of your Emperor and your fellow-countrymen are fixed on you.” “Hurrah!” With a deafening shout of joy the soldiers, led by Romashov, rush at the foe. Everything disappears in a chasm of fire and smoke. The enemy wavers, and soon his lines are broken; but behind him gleam the Russian bayonets. “The victory is ours! Hurrah, comrades”——

Romashov, who no longer walked but ran, gesticulating wildly, at last stopped and gradually became himself again. It seemed to him as if some one with fingers cold as ice had suddenly passed them over his back, arms, and legs, his hair bristled, and his strong excitement had brought tears to his eyes. He had no notion how he suddenly found himself near his quarters, and, as he recovered from his mad fancies, he gazed with astonishment at the street door he knew so well, at the neglected fruit-garden within which stood the little whitewashed wing where he lodged.

“How does all this nonsense get into my head?” said he, with a sense of shame and a shrug of his shoulders in self-contempt.

III

WHEN Romashov reached his room he threw himself, just as he was, with cap and sabre, on his bed, and for a long time he lay there motionless, staring up at the ceiling. His head burned, his back ached; and he suffered from a vacuum within him as profound as if his mind was incapable of harbouring a feeling, a memory, or a thought. He felt neither irritation nor sadness, but he was sensible of a suffocating weight on his heart, of darkness and indifference.

The shades of a balmy April night fell. He heard his servant quietly occupied with some metal object in the hall.

“Curiously enough,” said he to himself, “I have read somewhere or other that one cannot live a single second without thinking. But here I lie and think about absolutely nothing. Isn’t that so? Perhaps it is just this: I am thinking that I am

thinking about nothing. It even seems as if a tiny wheel in my brain is in motion. And see here a new reflection, an objective introspection—I am also thinking of——”

He lay so long and tortured himself with such forced mental images that returned in an eternal circle that it finally became physically repulsive to him. It was just as if a great loathsome spider, from which he could not extricate himself, was softly groping about under his brain. At last he raised his head from the pillows and called out—

“Hainán.”

At that very moment was heard a tremendous crash of something falling and rolling on the floor. It was probably the funnel belonging to the samovar which had dropped. The door was opened hastily and shut again with a loud bang. The servant burst into the room, making as much noise in opening and shutting the door as if we were running away from some one.

“It is I, your Honour,” shrieked Hainán in a fear-stricken voice.

“Has there been any message from Lieutenant Nikoläiev?”

“No, your Excellency,” replied Hainán in the same shrieking tone.

Between the officer and his servant there existed a certain simple, sincere, affectionately familiar relationship. When the question only required the usual stereotyped, official answer, e.g. “Yes, your Excellency,” “No, your Excellency,” etc., then Hainán shrieked the words in the same wooden, soulless, and unnatural way as soldiers always do in the case of their officers, and which, from their first days in the recruit school, becomes ineradicably ingrained in them as long as they live.

Hainán was by birth a Circassian, and by religion an idolater. This latter circumstance gave great satisfaction to Romashov, because among the young officers of the regiment the silly and boyish custom prevailed of training their

respective servants to be something unique, or of teaching them certain semi-idiotic answers and phrases.

For instance, when his friends paid him a visit, Viätkin used to say to his orderly, a Moldavian, “Busioskul, have we any champagne in the cellar?” And Busioskul would answer with imperturbable gravity, “No, your Excellency. Last night you were pleased to drink up the last dozen.” Another officer, Sub-lieutenant Epifanov, amused himself by putting to his servant learned and difficult questions which he himself could hardly answer. “Listen, my friend, what are your views on the restoration of the monarchy in France at the present day?” The servant answers, “Your Honour, it will, I think, succeed.” Lieutenant Bobetinski had written down a whole catechism for his flunkey, and the latter trained genius replied frankly and unhesitatingly to the most absurd questions, e.g. “Why is this important for the third?” Answer—“For the third this is not important.” “What is Holy Church’s opinion about it?” Answer—“Holy Church has no opinion about it.” The same servant would declaim, with the quaintest, semi-tragical gestures, Pinen’s rôle in “Boris-Gudunov.” It was also usual and much appreciated to make him express himself in French: “Bong shure, musseur. Bon nuite, moussier. Vulley vous du tay, musseur?” etc. etc., in that style. All these follies naturally arose from the dullness of that little garrison town, and the narrowness of a life from which all interests were excluded except those belonging to the service.

Romashov often talked to Hainán about his gods—about whom the Circassian had only dim and meagre ideas; but it amused him greatly to make Hainán tell the story of how he took the oath of allegiance to the Tsar and Russia—a story well worth hearing now and then. At that time the oath of allegiance was, for the Orthodox, administered by a priest of the Greek Church; for Catholics, by the ksends[3]; for Protestants, when a Lutheran pastor was not available, by Staff-Captain Ditz; and for Mohammedans, by Lieutenant Biek-Agamalov. For Hainán and two of his fellow-countrymen a particular and highly original form had been authorized. The

three soldiers were ordered to march in turn up to the Adjutant of the regiment, and from the point of the sabre held towards them they were required to bite off, with deep reverence, a piece of bread that had been dipped in salt. Under no circumstances was the bread to be touched by their hands. The symbolism of this curious ceremony was as follows: When the Circassian had eaten his lord's—the Tsar's—bread and salt in this peculiar way he was ruthlessly condemned to die by the sword if he ever failed in loyalty and obedience. Hainán was evidently very proud of having thus taken his oath of allegiance to the Tsar, and he never got tired of relating the circumstance; but as every time he told his story he adorned it with fresh inventions and absurdities, it became at last a veritable Münchausen affair, which was always received with Homeric laughter by Romashov and his guests.

Hainán now thought that his master would start his usual questions about gods and Adjutants, and stood ready to begin with a cunning smile on his face, when Romashov said—

"That will do; you can go."

"Shall I not lay out your Honour's new uniform?" asked the ever-attentive Hainán.

Romashov was silent and pondered. First he would say "Yes," then "No," and again "Yes." At last, after a long, deep sigh, uttered in the descending scale, he replied in a tone of resignation—

"No, Hainán, never mind about that—get the samovar ready and then run off to the mess for my supper."

"I will stay away to-day," whispered he to himself. "It doesn't do to bore people to death by calling on them like that every day. And, besides, it is plain I am not a man people long for."

His resolution to stay at home that evening seemed fixed enough, and yet an inner voice told him that even to-day, as on most other days during the past three months, he would go to the Nikoläievs'. Every time he bade these friends of his good-bye at

midnight, he had, with shame and indignation at his own weakness and lack of character, sworn to himself on his honour that he would not pay another call there for two or three weeks. Nay, he had even made up his mind to give up altogether these uncalled-for visits. And all the while he was on his way home, whilst he was undressing, ah! even up to the moment he fell asleep, he believed it would be an easy matter for him to keep his resolution. The night went by, the morning dawned, and the day dragged on slowly and unwillingly, evening came, and once more an irresistible force drew him to this handsome and elegant abode, with its warm, well-lighted, comfortable rooms, where peace, harmony, cheerful and confidential conversation, and, above all, the delightful enchantment of feminine beauty awaited him.

Romashov sat on the edge of his bed. It was already dark, but he could, nevertheless, easily discern the various objects in his room. Oh, how he loathed day by day his mean, gloomy dwelling, with its trumpery, tasteless furniture! His lamp, with its ugly shade that resembled a night-cap, on the inconvenient, rickety writing-table, looked haughtily down on the nerve-torturing alarm-clock and the dirty, vulgar inkstand that had the shape of a badly modelled pug-dog. Over his head something intended to represent a wall decoration—a piece of felt on which had been embroidered a terrible tiger and a still more terrible Arab riding on horseback, armed with a spear. In one corner a tumbledown bookstand, in the other the fantastic silhouette of a hideous violoncello case. Over the only window the room could boast a curtain of plaited straw rolled up into a tube. Behind the door a clothes-stand concealed by a sheet that had been white in prehistoric times. Every unmarried subaltern officer had the same articles about him, with the exception of the violoncello which Romashov had borrowed from the band attached to the regiment—in which it was completely unnecessary—with the intention of developing on it his musical talent. But as soon as he had tried in vain to teach himself the C major scale, he tired of the thing altogether, and the ‘cello had now

stood for more than a year, dusty and forgotten, in its dark corner.

More than a year ago Romashov, who had just left the military college, had taken both pride and joy in furnishing his modest lodgings. To have a room of his own, his own things, to choose and buy household furniture according to his own liking, to arrange everything according to his own consummate taste—all that highly flattered the amour propre of that young man of two-and-twenty. It seemed only yesterday that he sat on the school form, or marched in rank and file with his comrades off to the general mess-room to eat, at the word of command, his frugal breakfast. To-day he was his own master. And how many hopes and plans sprang into his brain in the course of those never-to-be-forgotten days when he furnished and “adorned” his new home! What a severe programme he composed for his future! The first two years were to be devoted chiefly to a thorough study of classical literature, French and German, and also music. After that, a serious preparation for entering the Staff College was to follow. It was necessary to study sociology and society life, and to be abreast of modern science and literature. Romashov therefore felt himself bound at least to subscribe to a newspaper and to take in a popular monthly magazine. The bookstand was adorned with Wundt’s Psychology, Lewes’s Physiology, and Smiles’s Self-Help, etc., etc.

But for nine long months have the books lain undisturbed on their shelves, forgotten by Hainán, whose business it is to dust them. Heaps of newspapers, not even stripped of their wrappers, lie cast in a pile beneath the writing-table, and the æsthetic magazine to which we just referred has ceased to reach Romashov on account of repeated “irregularities” with regard to the half-yearly payment. Sub-Lieutenant Romashov drinks a good deal of vodka at mess; he has a tedious and loathsome liaison with a married woman belonging to the regiment, whose consumptive and jealous husband he deceives in strict accordance with all the rules of art; he plays schtoss,[4] and more and more frequently comes into unpleasant collisions both in the service and also in the circles of his friends and acquaintances.

“Pardon me, your Honour,” shouted his servant, entering the room noisily. Then he added in a friendly, simple, good-natured tone: “I forgot to mention that a letter has come from Mrs. Peterson. The orderly who brought it is waiting for an answer.”

Romashov frowned, took the letter, tore open a long, slender, rose-coloured envelope, in a corner of which fluttered a dove with a letter in its beak.

“Light the lamp, Hainán,” said he to his servant.

My dear darling irresistible little Georgi (read Romashov in the sloping, crooked lines he knew so well),—For a whole week you have not been to see me, and yesterday I was so miserable without you that I lay and wept the whole night. Remember that if you fool me or deceive me I shall not survive it. One single drop of poison and I shall be freed from my tortures for ever; but, as for you, conscience shall gnaw you for ever and ever. You must—must come to me to-night at half-past seven. He is not at home, he is somewhere—on tactical duty or whatever it is called. Do come! I kiss you a thousand thousand times.

Yours always, Raisa.

P.S.—

Have you forgotten the river fast rushing, Under the willow-boughs wending its way, Kisses you gave me, dear, burning and crushing, When in your strong arms I tremblingly lay?

P.SS.—You must absolutely attend the soirée next Saturday at the officers’ mess. I will give you the third quadrille. You understand.

A long way down on the fourth page lay written—

I have kissed here.

This delightful epistle wafted the familiar perfume of Persian lilac, and drops of that essence had, here and there, left yellow stains behind them on the letter, in which the characters had run apart in different directions. This stale scent, combined with the

tasteless, absurdly sentimental tone throughout this letter from a little, immoral, red-haired woman, excited in Romashov an intolerable feeling of disgust. With a sort of grim delight he first tore the letter into two parts, laid them carefully together, tore them up again, laid the bits of paper once more together, and tore them again into little bits till his fingers got numb, and then, with clenched teeth and a broad, cynical grin, threw the fragments under his writing-table. At the same time, according to his old habit, he had time to think of himself in the third person—

"And he burst out into a bitter, contemptuous laugh."

A moment later he realized that he would have to go that evening to the Nikoläievs'. "But this is the last time." After he had tried to deceive himself by these words, he felt for once happy and calm.

"Hainán, my clothes."

He made his toilet hastily and impatiently, put on his elegant new tunic, and sprinkled a few drops of eau-de-Cologne on a clean handkerchief; but when he was dressed, and ready to go, he was stopped suddenly by Hainán.

"Your Honour," said the Circassian, in an unusually meek and supplicating tone, as he began to execute a most curious sort of dance before his master. Whilst he was performing a kind of "march on the spot" he lifted his knees right up, one after the other, rocking his shoulders, nodding his head, and making a series of convulsive movements in the air with his arms and fingers. Hainán was in the habit of giving vent to his excited feelings by curious gestures of that sort.

"What do you want now?"

"Your Honour," stammered Hainán, "I want to ask you something; please give me the white gentleman."

"The white gentleman? What white gentleman?"

"The one you ordered me to throw away—the one standing in that corner."

Hainán pointed with his fingers to the stove-corner, where a bust of Pushkin was standing on the floor. This bust, which Romashov had obtained from a wandering pedlar, really did not represent the famous poet, but merely reproduced the forbidding features of an old Jew broker. Badly modelled, so covered with dust and fly dirt as to be unrecognizable, the stone image aroused Romashov's aversion to such an extent that he had at last made up his mind to order Hainán to throw it into the yard.

"What do you want with it?" asked Romashov, laughing. "But take it by all means, take it, I am only too pleased. I don't want it, only I should like to know what you are going to do with it."

Hainán smiled and changed from one foot to the other.

"Well, take him, then; I wish you joy of it. By the way, do you know who it is?"

Hainán smiled in an embarrassed way, and infused still more energy into his caperings.

"No—don't know." Hainán rubbed his lips with his coat sleeve.

"So you don't know. Well, listen. This is Pushkin—Alexander Sergievich Pushkin. Did you understand me? Now repeat—'Alexander Sergievich——'"

"Besiäev," repeated Hainán in a determined tone.

"Besiäev? Well, call him Besiäev if you like. Now I am off. Should any message come from Mr. and Mrs. Peterson, say I'm not at home, and you don't know where I have gone. Do you understand? But if any one wants me in the way of business connected with the regiment, run down at once for me at Lieutenant Nikoläiev's. You may fetch my supper from the mess and eat it yourself. Good-bye, old fellow."

Romashov gave his servant a friendly smack on his shoulder, which was answered by a broad, happy, familiar smile.

IV

WHEN Romashov reached the yard it was quite dark. He stumbled like a blind man into the street, his huge goloshes sank deep into the thick, stiff mud, and every step he took was accompanied by a smacking noise. Now and again one golosh stuck so fast in the mud of the road that it remained there, and he had all the difficulty in the world, whilst balancing himself wildly on his other foot, to recover his treasure.

The little town seemed to him to be absolutely dead. Not a sound was heard, even the dogs were silent. Here and there a gleam of light streamed from the small, low-pitched, white house, against which the window-sills sharply depicted their shapes in the yellowish-brown mire. From the wet and sticky palings along which Romashov slowly worked his way, from the raw, moist bark of the poplars, from the dirty road itself, there arose a strong, refreshing scent of spring, which aroused a certain unconscious sense of joy and comfort. Nay, even with the tormenting gale which swept violently through the streets seemed mingled a youthful, reawakened desire of life, and the gusts of wind chased one another like boisterous and sportive children in a “merry-go-round.”

When Romashov reached the house where the Nikoläievs dwelt, he stopped, despondent and perplexed. The close, cinnamon-coloured curtains were let down, but behind them one could, nevertheless, distinguish the clear, even glow of a lamp. On one side the curtain curved inwards and formed a long, small chink against the window-sill. Romashov pressed his face cautiously against the window, and hardly dared to breathe for fear of betraying his presence.

He could distinguish Alexandra Petrovna’s head and shoulders. She was sitting in a stooping attitude on that green rep divan that he knew so well. From her bowed head and slight movements he concluded that she was occupied with some needlework. Suddenly she straightened herself up, raised her head, and drew a long breath. Her lips moved.

“What is she saying?” thought Romashov. “And look! now she’s smiling. How strange to see through a window a person talking, and not to be able to catch a word of what she says.”

The smile, however, suddenly disappeared from Alexandra Petrovna’s face; her forehead puckered, and her lips moved rapidly and vehemently. Directly afterwards she smiled again, but wickedly and maliciously, and with her head made a slow gesture of disapproval.

“Perhaps they are talking about me,” thought Romashov, not without a certain disagreeable anxiety; but he knew how something pure, chaste, agreeably soothing and benevolent beamed on him from this young woman who, at that moment, made the same impression on him as a charming canvas, the lovely picture of which reminded him of happy, innocent days of long ago. “Shurochka,” whispered Romashov tenderly.

At that moment Alexandra Petrovna lifted her face from her work and cast a rapid, searching, despondent glance at the window. Romashov thought she was looking him straight in the face. It felt as if a cold hand had seized his heart, and in his fright he hid himself behind a projection of the wall. Again he was irresolute and ill at ease, and he was just about to return home, when, by a violent effort of the will, he overcame his pusillanimity and walked through a little back-door into the kitchen.

The Nikoläievs’ servant relieved him of his muddy goloshes, and wiped down his boots with a kitchen rag. When Romashov pulled out his pocket-handkerchief to remove the mist from his eyeglass he heard Alexandra Petrovna’s musical voice from the drawing-room.

“Stepan, have they brought the orders of the day yet?”

“She said that with an object,” thought Romashov to himself. “She knows well enough that I’m in the habit of coming about this time.”

“No, it is I, Alexandra Petrovna,” he answered aloud, but in an uncertain voice,

through the open drawing-room door.

“Oh, it’s you, Romashov. Well, come in, come in. What are you doing at the side entrance? Volodya, Romashov is here.”

Romashov stepped in, made an awkward bow, and began, so as to hide his embarrassment, to wipe his hands with his handkerchief.

“I am afraid I bore you, Alexandra Petrovna.”

He tried to say this in an easy and jocose tone, but the words came out awkwardly, and as it seemed to him, with a forced ring about them.

“What nonsense you talk!” exclaimed Alexandra Petrovna. “Sit down, please, and let us have some tea.”

Looking him straight in the face with her clear, piercing eyes, she squeezed as usual his cold fingers with her little soft, warm hand.

Nikoläiev sat with his back to them at the table that was almost hidden by piles of books, drawings, and maps. Before the year was out he had to make another attempt to get admitted to the Staff College, and for many months he had been preparing with unremitting industry for this stiff examination in which he had already twice failed. Staring hard at the open book before him, he stretched his arm over his shoulder to Romashov without turning round, and said, in a calm, husky voice—

“How do you do, Yuri[5] Alexievich? Is there any news? Shurochka, give him some tea. Excuse me, but I am, as you see, hard at work.”

“What a fool I am!” cried poor Romashov to himself. “What business had I here?” Then he added out loud: “Bad news. There are ugly reports circulating at mess with regard to Lieutenant-Colonel Liech. He is said to have been as tight as a drum. The resentment in the regiment is widespread, and a very searching inquiry is demanded. Epifanov has been arrested.”

“Oh!” remarked Nikoläiev in an absent tone. “But excuse my interruption. You

don’t say so!”

“I, too, have been rewarded with four days. But that is stale news.”

Romashov thought at that moment that his voice sounded peculiar and unnatural, as if he were being throttled. “What a wretched creature I am in their eyes!” thought he, but in the next moment consoled himself by the help of that forced special pleading to which weak and timid persons usually have recourse in similar predicaments. “Such you always are; something goes wrong; you feel confused, embarrassed, and at once you fondly imagine that others notice it, though only you yourself can be clearly conscious of it,” etc., etc.

He sat down on a chair near Shurochka, whose quick crochet needle was in full swing again. She never sat idle, and all the table-covers, lamp-shades, and lace curtains were the product of her busy fingers. Romashov cautiously took up the long crochet threads hanging from the ball, and said—

“What do you call this sort of work?”

“Guipure. This is the tenth time you have asked me that.”

Shurochka glanced quickly at him, and then let her eyes fall on her work; but before long she looked up again and laughed.

“Now then, now then, Yuri Alexievich, don’t sit there pouting. ‘Straighten your back!’ and ‘Head up!’ Isn’t that how you give your commands?”

But Romashov only sighed and looked out of the corner of his eye at Nikoläiev’s brawny neck, the whiteness of which was thrown into strong relief by the grey collar of his old coat.

“By Jove! Vladimir Yefimovich is a lucky dog. Next summer he’s going to St. Petersburg, and will rise to the heights of the Academy.”

“Oh, that remains to be seen,” remarked Shurochka, somewhat tartly, looking in her husband’s direction. “He has twice been plucked at his examination, and with rather

poor credit to himself has had to return to his regiment. This will be his last chance."

Nikoläiev turned round suddenly; his handsome, soldierly, moustached face flushed deeply, and his big dark eyes glittered with rage.

"Don't talk rubbish, Shurochka. When I say I shall pass my examination, I shall pass it, and that's enough about it." He struck the side of his outstretched hand violently on the table. "You are always croaking. I said I should—"

"Yes, 'I said I should,'" his wife repeated after him, whilst she struck her knee with her little brown hand. "But it would be far better if you could answer the following question: 'What are the requisites for a good line of battle?' Perhaps you don't know" (she turned with a roguish glance towards Romashov) "that I am considerably better up in tactics than he. Well, Volodya—Staff-General that is to be—answer the question now."

"Look here, Shurochka, stop it," growled Nikoläiev in a bad temper. But suddenly he turned round again on his chair towards his wife, and in his wide-open, handsome, but rather stupid eyes might be read an amusing helplessness, nay, even a certain terror.

"Wait a bit, my little woman, and I will try to remember. 'Good fighting order'? A good fighting order must be arranged so that one does not expose oneself too much to the enemy's fire; that one can easily issue orders, that—that—wait a minute."

"That waiting will be costly work for you in the future, I think," said Shurochka, interrupting him, in a serious tone. Then, with head down and her body rocking, she began, like a regular schoolgirl, to rattle off the following lesson without stumbling over a single word—

"'The requisites of "good fighting order" are simplicity, mobility, flexibility, and the ability to accommodate itself to the ground. It ought to be easy to be inspected and led. It must, as far as possible, be out of reach of the enemy's fire, easy to pass from one formation to another, and able to be quickly changed from fighting to marching

order.’ Done!”

She opened her eyes, took a deep breath, and, as she turned her lively, smiling countenance to Romashov, said—

“Was that all right?”

“What a memory!” exclaimed Nikoläiev enviously, as he once more plunged into his books.

“We study together like two comrades,” explained Shurochka. “I could pass this examination at any time. The main thing”—she made an energetic motion in the air with her crochet needle—“the main thing is to work systematically or according to a fixed plan. Our system is entirely my own invention, and I say so with pride. Every day we go through a certain amount of mathematics and the science of war—I may remark, by the way, that artillery is not my forte; the formulæ of projectiles are to me specially distasteful—besides a bit out of the Drill and Army Regulations Book. Moreover, every other day we study languages, and on the days we do not study the latter we study history and geography.”

“And Russian too?” asked Romashov politely.

“Russian, do you say? Yes, that does not give us much trouble; we have already mastered Groth’s Orthography, and so far as the essays are concerned, year after year they are after the eternal stereotyped pattern: Para pacem, para bellum; characteristics of Onyägin and his epoch, etc., etc.”

Suddenly she became silent, and snatched by a quick movement the distracting crochet needle from Romashov’s fingers. She evidently wanted to monopolize the whole of his attention to what she now intended to say. After this she began to speak with passionate earnestness of what was at present the goal of all her thoughts and aims.

“Romochka, please, try to understand me. I cannot—cannot stand this any longer. To remain here is to deteriorate. To become a ‘lady of the regiment,’ to attend your

rowdy soirées, to talk scandal and intrigue, to get into tempers every day, and wear out one's nerves over the housekeeping, money and carriage bills, to serve in turn, according to precedency, on ladies' committees and benevolent associations, to play whist, to—no, enough of this. You say that our home is comfortable and charming. But just examine this bourgeois happiness. These eternal embroideries and laces; these dreadful clothes which I have altered and modernized God knows how often; this vulgar, 'loud'-coloured sofa rug composed of rags from every spot on earth—all this has been hateful and intolerable to me. Don't you understand, my dear Romochka, that it is society—real society—that I want, with brilliant drawing-rooms, witty conversation, music, flirtation, homage. As you are well aware, our good Volodya is not one to set the Thames on fire, but he is a brave, honourable, and industrious fellow. If he can only gain admission to the Staff College I swear to procure him a brilliant career. I am a good linguist; I can hold my own in any society whatever; I possess—I don't know how to express it—a certain flexibility of mind or spirit that helps me to hold my own, to adapt myself everywhere. Finally, Romochka, look at me, gaze at me carefully. Am I, as a human being, so uninteresting? Am I, as a woman, so devoid of all charms that I deserve to be doomed to stay and be soured in this hateful place, in this awful hole which has no place on the map?"

She suddenly covered her face with her handkerchief, and burst into tears of self-pity and wounded pride.

Nikoläiev sprang from his chair and hastened, troubled and distracted, to his wife; but Shurochka had already succeeded in regaining her self-control and took her handkerchief away from her face. There were no tears in her eyes now, but the glint of wrath and passion had not yet died out of them.

"It is all right, Volodya. Dear, it is nothing." She pushed him nervously away. Immediately afterwards she turned with a little laugh to Romashov, and whilst she

was again snatching the thread from him, she said to him coquettishly: “Answer me candidly, you clumsy thing, am I pretty or not? Remember, though, it is the height of impoliteness not to pay a woman the compliment she wants.”

“Shurochka, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!” exclaimed Nikoläiev reprovingly, from his seat at the writing-table.

Romashov smiled with a martyr’s air of resignation. Suddenly he replied, in a melancholy and quavering voice—

“You are very beautiful.”

Shurochka looked at him roguishly from her half-closed eyes, and a turbulent curl got loose and fell over her forehead.

“Romochka, how funny you are!” she twittered in a rather thin, girlish voice. The sub-lieutenant blushed and thought according to his wont—

“And his heart was cruelly lacerated.”

Nobody said a word. Shurochka went on diligently crocheting. Vladimir Yefimovich, who was bravely struggling with a German translation, now and then mumbled out some German words. One heard the flame softly sputtering and fizzing in the lamp, which displayed a great yellow silk shade in the form of a tent. Romochka had again managed to possess himself of the crochet-cotton, which, almost without thinking about it, he softly and caressingly drew through the young woman’s fingers, and it afforded him a delightful pleasure to feel how Shurochka unconsciously resisted his mischievous little pulls. It seemed to him as if mysterious, magnetic currents, now and again, rushed backwards and forwards through the delicate white threads.

Whilst he was steadily gazing at her bent head, he whispered to himself, without moving his lips, as if he were carrying on a tender and impassioned conversation—

“How boldly you said to me, ‘Am I pretty?’ Ah, you are most beautiful! Here I sit

looking at you. What happiness! Now listen. I am going to tell you how you look—how lovely you are. But listen carefully. Thy face is as dark as the night, yet pale. It is a face full of passion. Thy lips are red and warm and good to kiss, and thine eyes surrounded by a light yellowish shadow. When thy glance is directed straight before thee, the white of thine eyes acquires a bluish shade, and amidst it all there beams on me a great dark blue mysteriously gleaming pupil. A brunette thou art not; but thou recallest something of the gipsy. But thy hair is silky and soft, and braided at the back in a knot so neat and simple that one finds a difficulty in refraining from stroking it. You little ethereal creature, I could lift you like a little child in my arms; but you are supple and strong, your bosom is as firm as a young girl's, and in all thy being there is something quick, passionate, compelling. A good way down on your left ear sits a charming little birthmark that is like the hardly distinguishable scar after a ring has been removed. What charm——"

"Have you read in the newspapers about the duel between two officers?" asked Shurochka suddenly.

Romashov started as he awoke from his dreams, but he found it hard to remove his gaze from her.

"No, I've not read about it, but I have heard talk of it. What about it?"

"As usual, of course, you read nothing. Truly, Yuri Alexeitch, you are deteriorating. In my opinion the proceedings were ridiculous. I quite understand that duels between officers are as necessary as they are proper."

Shurochka pressed her crochet to her bosom with a gesture of conviction.

"But why all this unnecessary and stupid cruelty? Just listen. A lieutenant had insulted another officer. The insult was gross, and the Court of Honour considered a duel necessary. Now, there would have been nothing to say about it, unless the conditions themselves of the duel had been so fixed that the latter resembled an ordinary execution: fifteen paces distance, and the fight to last till one of the

duellists was hors de combat. This is only on a par with ordinary slaughter, is it not? But hear what followed. On the duelling-ground stood all the officers of the regiment, many of them with ladies; nay, they had even put a photographer behind the bushes! How disgusting! The unfortunate sub-lieutenant or ensign—as Volodya usually says—a man of your youthful age, moreover the party insulted, and not the one who offered the insult—received, after the third shot, a fearful wound in the stomach, and died some hours afterwards in great torture. By his deathbed stood his aged mother and sister, who kept house for him. Now tell me why a duel should be turned into such a disgusting spectacle. Of course the immediate consequence" (Shurochka almost shrieked these words) "was that all those sentimental opponents of duelling—eugh, how I despise these 'liberal' weaklings and poltroons!—at once began making a noise and fuss about 'barbarism,' 'fratricide,' how 'duels are a disgrace to our times,' and more nonsense of that sort."

"Good God! I could never believe that you were so bloodthirsty, Alexandra Petrovna," exclaimed Romashov, interrupting her.

"I am by no means bloodthirsty," replied Shurochka, sharply. "On the contrary, I am very tender-hearted. If a beetle crawls on to my neck I remove it with the greatest caution so as not to inflict any hurt on it—but try and understand me, Romashov. This is my simple process of reasoning: 'Why have we officers?' Answer: 'For the sake of war.' 'What are the most necessary qualities of an officer in time of war?' Answer: 'Courage and a contempt of death.' 'How are these qualities best acquired in time of peace?' Answer: 'By means of duels.' How can that be proved? Duels are not required to be obligatory in the French Army, for a sense of honour is innate in the French officer; he knows what respect is due to himself and to others. Neither is duelling obligatory in the German Army, with its highly developed and inflexible discipline. But with us—us, as long as among our officers are to be found notorious card-sharpers such as, for instance, Artschakovski; or hopeless sots, as our own Nasanski, when, in the officers' mess or on duty, violent scenes are of almost daily

occurrence—then, such being the case, duels are both necessary and salutary. An officer must be a pattern of correctness; he is bound to weigh every word he utters. And, moreover, this delicate squeamishness, the fear of a shot! Your vocation is to risk your life—which is precisely the point."

All at once she brought her long speech to a close, and with redoubled energy resumed her work.

"Shurochka, what is 'rival' in German?" asked Nikoläiev, lifting his head from the book.

"Rival?" Shurochka stuck her crochet-needle in her soft locks. "Read out the whole sentence."

"It runs—wait—directly—directly—ah! it runs: 'Our rival abroad.'"

"Unser ausländischer Nebenbuhler" translated Shurochka straight off.

"Unser," repeated Romashov in a whisper as he gazed dreamily at the flame of the lamp. "When she is moved," thought he, "her words come like a torrent of hail falling on a silver tray. Unser—what a funny word! Unser—unser—unser."

"What are you mumbling to yourself about, Romashov?" asked Alexandra Petrovna severely. "Don't dare to sit and build castles in the air whilst I am present."

He smiled at her with a somewhat embarrassed air.

"I was not building castles in the air, but repeating to myself 'Unser—unser.' Isn't it a funny word?"

"What rubbish you are talking! Unser. Why is it funny?"

"You see" (he made a slight pause as if he really intended to think about what he meant to say), "if one repeats the same word for long, and at the same time concentrates on it all his faculty of thought, the word itself suddenly loses all its meaning and becomes—how can I put it?"

"I know, I know!" she interrupted delightedly. "But it is not easy to do it now. When

I was a child, now—how we used to love doing it!”

“Yes—yes—it belongs to childhood—yes.”

“How well I remember it! I remember the word ‘perhaps’ particularly struck me. I could sit for a long time with eyes shut, rocking my body to and fro, whilst I was repeatedly saying over and over again, ‘Perhaps, perhaps.’ And suddenly I quite forgot what the word itself meant. I tried to remember, but it was no use. I saw only a little round, reddish blotch with two tiny tails. Are you attending?” Romashov looked tenderly at her.

“How wonderful that we should think the same thoughts!” he exclaimed in a dreamy tone. “But let us return to our unser. Does not this word suggest the idea of something long, thin, lanky, and having a sting—a long, twisting insect, poisonous and repulsive?”

“Unser, did you say?” Shurochka lifted up her head, blinked her eyes, and stared obstinately at the darkest corner of the room. She was evidently striving to improve on Romashov’s fanciful ideas.

“No, wait. Unser is something green and sharp. Well, we’ll suppose it is an insect—a grasshopper, for instance—but big, disgusting, and poisonous. But how stupid we are, Romochka!”

“There’s another thing I do sometimes, only it was much easier when I was a child,” resumed Romashov in a mysterious tone. “I used to take a word and pronounce it slowly, extremely slowly. Every letter was drawn out and emphasized interminably. All of a sudden I was seized by a strangely inexpressible feeling: all—everything near me sank into an abyss, and I alone remained, marvelling that I lived, thought, and spoke.”

“I, too, have had a similar sensation,” interrupted Shurochka gaily, “yet not exactly the same. Sometimes I made violent efforts to hold my breath all the time I was thinking. ‘I am not breathing, and I won’t breathe again till, till’—then all at once I

felt as if time was running past me. No, time no longer existed; it was as if—oh, I can't explain!"

Romashov gazed into her enthusiastic eyes, and repeated in a low tone, thrilling with happiness—

"No, you can't explain it. It is strange—inexplicable."

Nikoläiev got up from the table where he had been working. His back ached, and his legs had gone dead from long sitting in the same uncomfortable position. The arteries of his strong, muscular body throbbed when, with arms raised high, he stretched himself to his full length.

"Look here, my learned psychologists, or whatever I should call you, it is supper-time."

A cold collation had been laid in the comfortable little dining-room, where, suspended from the ceiling, a china lamp with frosted glass shed its clear light. Nikoläiev never touched spirits, but a little decanter of schnapps had been put on the table for Romashov. Shurochka, contorting her pretty face by a contemptuous grimace, said, in the careless tone she so often adopted—

"Of course, you can't do without that poison?"

Romashov smiled guiltily, and in his confusion the schnapps went the wrong way, and set him coughing.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" scolded his young hostess. "You can't even drink it without choking over it. I can forgive it in your adored Nasanski, who is a notorious drunkard, but for you, a handsome, promising young man, not to be able to sit down to table without vodka, it is really melancholy. But that is Nasanski's doing too!"

Her husband, who was glancing through the regimental orders that had just come in, suddenly called out—

“Just listen! ‘Lieutenant Nasanski has received a month’s leave from the regiment to attend to his private affairs.’ Tut, tut! What does that mean? He has been tippling again? You, Yuri Alexievich, are said, you know, to visit him. Is it a fact that he has begun to drink heavily?”

Romashov looked embarrassed and lowered his gaze.

“No, I have not observed it, but he certainly does drink a little now and again, you know.”

“Your Nasanski is offensive to me,” remarked Shurochka in a low voice, trembling with suppressed bitterness. “If it were in my power I would have a creature like that shot as if he were a mad dog. Such officers are a disgrace to their regiment.”

Almost directly after supper was over, Nikoläiev, who in eating had displayed no less energy than he had just done at his writing-table, began to gape, and at last said quite plainly—

“Do you know, I think I’ll just take a little nap. Or if one were to go straight off to the Land of Nod, as they used to express it in our good old novels——”

“A good idea, Vladimir Yefimovich,” said Romashov, interrupting him in, as he thought, a careless, dreamy tone, but as he rose from table he thought sadly, “They don’t stand on ceremony with me here. Why on earth do I come?”

It seemed to him that it afforded Nikoläiev a particular pleasure to turn him out of the house; but just as he was purposely saying good-bye to his host first, he was already dreaming of the delightful moment when, in taking leave of Shurochka, he would feel at the same time the strong yet caressing pressure of a beloved one’s hand. When this longed-for moment at length arrived he found himself in such a state of happiness that he did not hear Shurochka say to him—

“Don’t quite forget us. You know you are always welcome. Besides, it is far more healthy for you to spend your evenings with us than to sit drinking with that dreadful Nasanski. Also, don’t forget we stand on no ceremony with you.”

He heard her last words as it were in a dream, but he did not realize their meaning till he reached the street.

“Yes, that is true indeed; they don’t stand on ceremony with me,” whispered he to himself with the painful bitterness in which young and conceited persons of his age are so prone to indulge.

V

ROMASHOV was still standing on the doorstep. The night was rather warm, but very dark. He began to grope his way cautiously with his hand on the palings whilst waiting until his eyes got accustomed to the darkness. Suddenly the kitchendoor of Nikoläiev’s dwelling was thrown open, and a broad stream of misty yellow light escaped. Heavy steps sounded in the muddy street, the next moment Romashov heard Stepan’s, the Nikoläievs’ servant’s, angry voice—

“He comes here every blessed day, and the deuce knows what he comes for.”

Another soldier, whose voice Romashov did not recognize, answered indifferently with a lazy, long-drawn yawn—

“What business can it be of yours, my dear fellow? Good-night, Stepan.”

“Good-night to you, Baúlin; look in when you like.”

Romashov’s hands suddenly clung to the palings. An unendurable feeling of shame made him blush, in spite of the darkness. All his body broke out into a perspiration, and, in his back and the soles of his feet, he felt the sting of a thousand red-hot, pointed nails. “This chapter’s closed; even the soldiers laugh at me,” thought he with indescribable pain. Directly afterwards it flashed on his mind that that very evening, in many expressions used, in the tones of the replies, in glances exchanged between man and wife, he had seen a number of trifles that he had hitherto not noticed, but which he now thought testified only to contempt of him, and ridicule, impatience

and indignation at the persistent visits of that insufferable guest.

“What a disgrace and scandal this is to me!” he whispered without stirring from the spot. “Things have reached such a pitch that it is as much as the Nikoläievs can do to endure my company.”

The lights in their drawing-room were now extinguished. “They are in their bedroom now,” thought Romashov, and at once he began fancying that Nikoläiev and Shurochka were then talking about him whilst making their toilet for the night with the indifference and absence of bashfulness at each other’s presence that is characteristic of married couples. The wife is sitting in her petticoat in front of the mirror, combing her hair. Vladimir Yefimovitch is sitting in his night-shirt at the edge of the bed, and saying in a sleepy but angry tone, whilst flushed with the exertion of taking off his boots: “Hark you, Shurochka, that infernal bore, your dear Romashov, will be the death of me with his insufferable visits. And I really can’t understand how you can tolerate him.” Then to this frank and candid speech Shurochka replies, without turning round, and with her mouth full of hairpins: “Be good enough to remember, sir, he is not my Romochka, but yours.”

Another five minutes elapsed before Romashov, still tortured by these bitter and painful thoughts, made up his mind to continue his journey. Along the whole extent of the palings belonging to the Nikoläievs’ house he walked with stealthy steps, cautiously and gently dragging his feet from the mire, as if he feared he might be discovered and arrested as a common vagrant. To go straight home was not to his liking at all. Nay, he dared not even think of his gloomy, low-pitched, cramped room with its single window and repulsive furniture. “By Jove! why shouldn’t I look up Nasanski, just to annoy her?” thought he all of a sudden, whereupon he experienced the delightful satisfaction of revenge.

“She reproached me for my friendship with Nasanski. Well, I shall just for that very reason pay him a visit.”

He raised eyes to heaven, and said to himself passionately, as he pressed his hands against his heart—

"I swear—I swear that to-day I have visited them for the last time. I will no longer endure this mortification."

And immediately afterwards he added mentally, as was his ingrained habit—

"His expressive black eyes glistened with resolution and contempt."

But Romashov's eyes, unfortunately, were neither "black" nor "expressive," but of a very common colour, slightly varying between yellow and green.

Nasanski tenanted a room in a comrade's—Lieutenant Siégerscht's—house. This Siégerscht was most certainly the oldest lieutenant in the whole Russian Army. Notwithstanding his unimpeachable conduct as an officer and the fact of his having served in the war with Turkey, through some unaccountable disposition of fate, his military career seemed closed, and every hope of further advancement was apparently lost. He was a widower, with four little children and forty-eight roubles a month, on which sum, strangely enough, he managed to get along. It was his practice to hire large flats which he afterwards, in turn, let out to his brother officers. He took in boarders, fattened and sold fowls and turkeys, and no one understood better than he how to purchase wood and other necessaries cheap and at the right time. He bathed his children himself in a common trough, prescribed for them from his little medicine-chest when they were ill, and, with his sewing-machine, made them tiny shirts, under-vests, and drawers. Like many other officers, Siégerscht had, in his bachelor days, interested himself in woman's work, and acquired a readiness with his needle that proved very useful in hard times. Malicious tongues went so far as to assert that he secretly and stealthily sold his handiwork.

Notwithstanding all his economy and closeness, his life was full of troubles. Epidemic diseases ravaged his fowl-house, his numerous rooms stood unlet for long periods; his boarders grumbled at their bad food and refused to pay. The

consequence of this was that, three or four times a year, Siégerscht—tall, thin, and unshaven, with cheerless countenance and a forehead dripping with cold sweat—might be seen on his way to the town to borrow some small sum. And all recognized the low, regimental cap that resembled a pancake, always with its peak askew, as well as the antiquated cloak, modelled on those worn in the time of the Emperor Nicholas, which waved in the breeze like a couple of huge wings.

A light was burning in Siégerscht's flat, and as Romashov approached the window, he saw him sitting by a round table under a hanging-lamp. The bald head, with its gentle, worn features, was bent low over a little piece of red cloth which was probably destined to form an integral part of a Little Russian roubashka.[6] Romashov went up and tapped at the window. Siégerscht started up, laid aside his work, rose from the table, and went up to the window.

"It is I, Adam Ivanich—open the window a moment."

Siégerscht opened a little pane and looked out.

"Well, it's you, Sub-Lieutenant Romashov. What's up?"

"Is Nasanski at home?"

"Of course he's at home—where else should he be? Ah! your friend Nasanski cheats me nicely, I can tell you. For two months I have kept him in food, but, as for his paying for it, as yet I've only had grand promises. When he moved here, I asked him most particularly that, to avoid unpleasantness and misunderstandings, he should——"

"Yes, yes, we know all about that," interrupted Romashov; "but tell me now how he is. Will he see me?"

"Yes, certainly, that he will; he does nothing but walk up and down his room." Siégerscht stopped and listened for a second. "You yourself can hear him tramping about. You see, I said to him, 'To prevent unpleasantness and misunderstandings, it will be best for——'"

“Excuse me, Adam Ivanich; but we’ll talk of that another time. I’m in a bit of a hurry,” said Romashov, interrupting him for the second time, and meanwhile continuing his way round the corner. A light was burning in one of Nasanski’s windows; the other was wide open. Nasanski himself was walking, in his shirt sleeves and without a collar, backwards and forwards with rapid steps. Romashov crept nearer the wall and called him by name.

“Who’s there?” asked Nasanski in a careless tone, leaning out of the window. “Oh, it’s you, Georgie Alexievich. Come in through the window. It’s a long and dark way round through that door. Hold out your hand and I’ll help you.”

Nasanski’s dwelling was if possible more wretched that Romashov’s. Along the wall by the window stood a low, narrow, uncomfortable bed, the bulging, broken bottom of which was covered by a coarse cotton coverlet; on the other wall one saw a plain unpainted table with two common chairs without backs. High up in one corner of the room was a little cupboard fixed to the wall. A brown leather trunk, plastered all over with address labels and railway numbers, lay in state. There was not a single thing in the room except these articles and the lamp.

“Good-evening, my friend,” said Nasanski, with a hearty hand-shake and a warm glance from his beautiful, deep blue eyes. “Please sit down on this bed. As you’ve already heard, I have handed in my sick-report.”

“Yes, I heard it just now from Nikoläiev.”

Again Romashov called to mind Stepan’s insulting remark, the painful memory of which was reflected in his face.

“Oh, you come from the Nikoläievs,” cried Nasanski and with visible interest. “Do you often visit them?”

The unusual tone of the question made Romashov uneasy and suspicious, and he instinctively uttered a falsehood. He answered carelessly—

“No, certainly not often. I just happened to look them up.”

Nasanski, who had been walking up and down the room during the conversation, now stopped before the little cupboard, the door of which he opened. On one of its shelves stood a bottle of vodka, and beside it lay an apple cut up into thin, even slices. Standing with his back to his guest, Nasanski poured out for himself a glass, and quickly drained it. Romashov noticed how Nasanski's back, under its thin linen shirt, quivered convulsively.

"Would you like anything?" asked Nasanski, with a gesture towards the cupboard. "My larder is, as you see, poor enough; but if you are hungry one can always try and procure an omelette. Anyhow, that's more than our father Adam had to offer."

"Thanks, not now. Perhaps later on."

Nasanski stuck his hands in his pockets, and walked about the room. After pacing up and down twice he began talking as though resuming an interrupted conversation.

"Yes, I am always walking up and down and thinking. But I am quite happy. To-morrow, of course, they will say as usual in the regiment, 'He's a drunkard.' And that is true in a sense, but it is not the whole truth. All the same, at this moment, I'm happy; I feel neither pain nor ailments. It is different, alas! in ordinary circumstances. My mind and will-power are paralysed; I shall again become a cowardly and despicably mean creature, vain, shabby, hypocritical—a curse to myself and every one else. I loathe my profession, but, nevertheless, I remain in it. And why? Ah! the devil himself could not explain that. Because I had it knocked into me in my childhood, and have lived since in a set where it is held that the most important thing in life is to serve the State, to be free from anxiety as to one's clothes and daily bread. And philosophy, people say, is mere rubbish, good enough for one who has nothing else to do or who has come into a goodly heritage from his dear mamma.

"Thus I, too, occupy myself with things in which I don't take the slightest interest, or issue orders that seem to me both harsh and unmeaning. My daily life is as

monotonous and cheerless as an old deal board, as rough and hard as a soldier's regulation cap. I dare scarcely think of, far less talk of, love, beauty, my place in the scheme of creation, of freedom and happiness, of poetry and God. They would only laugh ha! ha! ha! at me, and say: 'Oh, damn it! That, you know, is philosophy. It is not only ridiculous but even dangerous for an officer to show he holds any high views,' and at best the officer escapes with being dubbed a harmless, hopeless ass."

"And yet it is this that alone gives life any value," sighed Romashov.

"And now the happy hour is drawing nigh about which they tattle so heartlessly and with so much contempt," Nasanski went on to say without listening to Romashov's words. He walked incessantly backwards and forwards, and interpolated his speech, every now and then, with striking gestures, which were not, however, addressed to Romashov, but were always directed to the two corners of the room which he visited in turn. "Now comes my turn of freedom, Romashov—freedom for soul, thought, and will. Then I shall certainly live a peculiar, but nevertheless rich, inner life. All that I have seen, heard, and read will then gain a deeper meaning, will appear in a clear and more distinct light, and receive a deep, infinite significance. My memory will then be like a museum of rare curiosities. I shall be a very Rothschild. I take the first object within my reach, gaze at it long, closely, and with rapture. Persons, events, characters, books, women, love—nay, first and last, women and love—all this is interwoven in my imagination. Now and then I think of the heroes and geniuses of history, of the countless martyrs of religion and science. I don't believe in God, Romashov, but sometimes I think of the saints and martyrs and call to mind the Holy Scriptures and canticles."

Romashov got up quietly from his seat at the edge of the bed and walked away to the open window, and then he sat down with his back resting against the sill. From that spot, from the lighted room, the night seemed to him still darker and more fraught with mystery. Tepid breezes whispered just beneath the window, amongst

the dark foliage of the shrubs. And in this mild air, charged with the sharp, aromatic perfume of spring, under those gleaming stars, in this dead silence of the universe, one might fancy he felt the hot breath of reviving, generating, voluptuous Nature.

Nasanski continued all along his eternal wandering, and indulged in building castles in the air, without looking at Romashov, as if he were talking to the walls.

“In these moments my thoughts—seething, motley, original—chase one another. My senses acquire an unnatural acuteness; my imagination becomes an overwhelming flood. Persons and things, living or dead, which are evoked by me stand before me in high relief and also in an extraordinarily intense light, as if I saw them in a camera obscura. I know, I know now, that all that is merely a super-excitation of the senses, an emanation of the soul flaming up like lightning, but in the next instant flickering out, being produced by the physiological influence of alcohol on the nervous system. In the beginning I thought such psychic phenomena implied an elevation of my inner, spiritual Ego, and that even I might have moments of inspiration. But no; there was nothing permanent or of any value in this, nothing creative or fructifying. Altogether it was only a morbid, physiological process, a river wave that at every ebb that occurs sucks away with it and destroys the beach. Yes, this, alas! is a fact. But it is also equally indisputable that these wild imaginings procured me moments of ineffable happiness. And besides, let the devil keep for his share your much-vaunted high morality, your hypocrisy, and your insufferable rules of health. I don’t want to become one of your pillar-saints nor do I wish to live a hundred years so as to figure as a physiological miracle in the advertisement columns of the newspapers. I am happy, and that suffices.”

Nasanski again went up to the little cupboard, poured out and swallowed a “nip,” after which he shut the cupboard door with much ceremony and an expression on his face as if he had fulfilled a religious duty. Romashov walked listlessly up from the window to the cupboard, the life-giving contents of which he sampled with a

gloomy and blasé air. This done, he returned to his seat on the window-bench.

“What were you thinking about just before I came, Vasili Nilich?” asked Romashov, as he made himself as comfortable as possible.

Nasanski, however, did not hear his question. “How sweet it is to dream of women!” he exclaimed with a grand and eloquent gesture. “But away with all unclean thoughts! And why? Ah! because no one has any right, even in imagination, to make a human being a culprit in what is low, sinful, and impure. How often I think of chaste, tender, loving women, of their bright tears and gracious smiles; of young, devoted, self-sacrificing mothers, of all those who have faced death for love; of proud, bewitching maidens with souls as pure as snow, knowing all, yet afraid of nothing. But such women do not exist—yet I am wrong, Romashov; such women do exist although neither you nor I have seen them. This may possibly be vouchsafed you; but to me—never!”

He was now standing right in front of Romashov and staring him straight in the face, but by the far-off expression in his eyes, by the enigmatical smile that played on his lips, any one could observe that he did not even see to whom he was talking. Never had Nasanski’s countenance—even in his better and sober moments—seemed to Romashov so attractive and interesting as at this instant. His golden hair fell in luxuriant curls around his pure and lofty brow; his blond, closely clipped beard was curled in light waves, and his strong, handsome head on his bare, classically shaped neck reminded one of the sages and heroes of Greece, whose busts Romashov had seen in engravings and at museums. Nasanski’s bright, clever blue eyes glistened with moisture, and his well-formed features were rendered still more engaging by the fresh colour of his complexion, although a keen eye could not, I daresay, avoid noticing a certain flabbiness—the infallible mark of every person addicted to drink.

“Love—what an abyss of mystery is contained in the word, and what bliss lies hidden in its tortures!” Nasanski went on to say in an enraptured voice. In his violent

excitement he caught hold of his hair with both hands, and took two hasty strides towards the other end of the room, but suddenly stopped, and turned round sharply to Romashov with a merry laugh. The latter observed him with great interest, but likewise not without a certain uneasiness.

“Just this moment I remember an amusing story” (Nasanski now dropped into his usual good-tempered tone), “but, ugh! how my wits go wool-gathering—now here, now there. Once upon a time I sat waiting for the train at Ryasan, and wait I did—I suppose half a day, for it was right in the middle of the spring floods, and the train had met with real obstacles. Well, you must know, I built myself a little nest in the waiting-room. Behind the counter stood a girl of eighteen—not pretty, being pockmarked, but brisk and pleasant. She had black eyes and a charming smile. In fact, she was a very nice girl. We were three, all told, at the station: she, I, and a little telegraphist with white eyebrows and eyelashes. Ah! excuse me, there was another person there—the girl’s father, a fat, red-faced, grey-haired brute, who put me in mind of a rough old mastiff. But this attractive figure kept itself, as a rule, behind the scenes. Only rarely and for a few minutes did he put in an appearance behind the counter, to yawn, scratch himself under his waistcoat, and immediately afterwards disappear for a longish time. He spent his life in bed, and his eyes were glued together by eternally sleeping. The little telegraphist paid frequent and regular visits to the waiting-room, laid his elbows on the counter, but was, for the most part, as mute as the grave. She, too, was silent and looked dreamily out of the window at the floods. All of a sudden our youngster began humming—

“‘Love—love. What is love? Something celestial That drives us wild.’

“After this, again silence. A pause of five minutes, she begins, in her turn—

“‘Love—love. What is love?’ etc.

“Both the sentimental words as well as the melody were taken from some musty old operetta that had perhaps been performed in the town, and had become a pleasant

recollection to both the young people. Then again the same wistful song and significant silence. At last she steals softly a couple of paces to the window, all the while keeping one hand on the counter. Our Celadon quietly lays hold of the delicate fingers, one by one, and with visible trepidation gazes at them in profound devotion. And again the motif of that hackneyed operetta is heard from his lips. It was spring with all its yearning. Then all this cloying ‘love’ only awoke in me nausea and disgust, but, since then, I have often thought with deep emotion of the vast amount of happiness this innocent love-making could bestow, and how it was most certainly the only ray of light in the dreary lives of these two human beings—lives, very likely, even more empty and barren than my own. But, I beg your pardon, Romashov; why should I bore you with my silly, long-winded stories?”

Nasanski again betook himself to the little cupboard, but he did not fetch out the schnapps bottle, but stood motionless with his back turned to Romashov. He scratched his forehead, pressed his right hand lightly to his temple, and maintained this position for a considerable while, evidently a prey to conflicting thoughts.

“You were speaking of women, love, abysses, mystery, and joy,” remarked Romashov, by way of reminder.

“Yes, love,” cried Nasanski in a jubilant voice. He now took out the bottle, poured some of its contents out, and drained the glass quickly, as he turned round with a fierce glance, and wiped his mouth with his shirt sleeve. “Love! who do you suppose understands the infinite meaning of this holy word? And yet—from it men have derived subjects for filthy, rubbishy operettas; for lewd pictures and statues, shameless stories and disgusting ‘rhymes.’ That is what we officers do. Yesterday I had a visit from Ditz. He sat where you are sitting now. He toyed with his gold pince-nez and talked about women. Romashov, my friend, I tell you that if an animal, a dog, for instance, possessed the faculty of understanding human speech, and had happened to hear what Ditz said yesterday, it would have fled from the

room ashamed. Ditz, as you know, Romashov, is a ‘good fellow,’ and even the others are ‘good,’ for really bad people do not exist; but for fear of forfeiting his reputation as a cynic, ‘man about town,’ and ‘lady-killer,’ he dares not express himself about women otherwise than he does. Amongst our young men there is a universal confusion of ideas that often finds expression in bragging contempt, and the cause of this is that the great majority seek in the possession of women only coarse, sensual, brutish enjoyment, and that is the reason why love becomes to them only something contemptible, wanton—well, I don’t know, damn it! how to express exactly what I mean—and, when the animal instincts are satisfied, coldness, disgust, and enmity are the natural result. The man of culture has said good-night to love, just as he has done to robbery and murder, and seems to regard it only as a sort of snare set by Nature for the destruction of humanity.”

“That is the truth about it,” agreed Romashov quietly and sadly.

“No, that is not true!” shouted Nasanski in a voice of thunder. “Yes, I say it once more—it is a lie. In this, as in everything else, Nature has revealed her wisdom and ingenuity. The fact is merely that whereas Lieutenant Ditz finds in love only brutal enjoyment, disgust, and surfeit, Dante finds in it beauty, felicity, and harmony. True love is the heritage of the elect, and to understand this let us take another simile. All mankind has an ear for music, but, in the case of millions, this is developed about as much as in stock-fish or Staff-Captain Vasilichenko. Only one individual in all these millions is a Beethoven. And the same is the case in everything—in art, science, poetry. And so far as love is concerned, I tell you that even this has its peaks which only one out of millions is able to climb.”

He walked to the window, and leaned his forehead against the sill where Romashov sat gazing out on the warm, dark, spring night. At last he said in a voice low, but vibrating with strong inward excitement—

“Oh, if we could see and grasp Love’s innermost being, its supernatural beauty and

charm—we gross, blind earth-worms! How many know and feel what happiness, what delightful tortures exist in an undying, hopeless love? I remember, when I was a youth, how all my yearning took form and shape in this single dream: to fall in love with an ideally beautiful and noble woman far beyond my reach, and standing so high above me that every thought of possessing her I might harbour was mad and criminal; to consecrate to her all my life, all my thoughts, without her even suspecting it, and to carry my delightful, torturing secret with me to the grave; to be her slave, her lackey, her protector, or to employ a thousand arts just to see her once a year, to come close to her, and—oh, maddening rapture!—to touch the hem of her garment or kiss the ground on which she had walked——"

"And to wind up in a mad-house," exclaimed Romashov in a gloomy tone.

"Oh, my dear fellow, what does that matter?" cried Nasanski passionately. "Perhaps—who knows?—one might then attain to that state of bliss one reads of in stories. Which is best—to lose your wits through a love which can never be realized, or, like Ditz, to go stark mad from shameful, incurable diseases or slow paralysis? Just think what felicity—to stand all night in front of her window on the other side of the street. Look, there's a shadow visible behind the drawn curtain—can it be she? What's she doing? What's she thinking of? The light is lowered—sleep, my beloved, sleep in peace, for Love is keeping vigil. Days, months, years pass away; the moment at last arrives when Chance, perhaps, bestows on you her glove, handkerchief, the concert programme she has thrown away. She is not acquainted with you, does not even know that you exist. Her glance passes over you without seeing you; but there you stand with the same unchangeable, idolatrous adoration, ready to sacrifice yourself for her—nay, even for her slightest whim, for her husband, lover, her pet dog, to sacrifice life, honour, and all that you hold dear. Romashov, a bliss such as this can never fall to the lot of our Don Juans and lady-killers."

“Ah, how true this is! how splendidly you speak!” cried Romashov, carried away by Nasanski’s passionate words and gestures. Long before this he had got up from the window, and now he was walking, like his eccentric host, up and down the long, narrow room, pacing the floor with long, quick strides. “Listen, Nasanski. I will tell you something—about myself. Once upon a time I fell in love with a woman—oh, not here; no, in Moscow. I was then a mere stripling. Ah, well, she had no inkling of it, and it was enough for me to be allowed to sit near her when she sewed, and to draw quietly and imperceptibly, the threads towards me. That was all, and she noticed nothing; but it was enough to turn my head with joy.”

“Ah, yes, how well I understand this!” replied Nasanski with a friendly smile, nodding his head all the time. “A delicate white thread charged with electrical currents. What a store of poetry is enshrined in that! My dear fellow, life is so beautiful!”

Nasanski, absorbed in profound reverie, grew silent, and his blue eyes were bright with tears. Romashov also felt touched, and there was something nervous, hysterical, and spontaneous about this melancholy of his, but these expressions of pity were not only for Nasanski, but himself.

“Vasili Nilich, I admire you,” cried he as he grasped and warmly pressed both Nasanski’s hands. “But how can so gifted, far-sighted, and wide-awake a man as you rush, with his eyes open, to his own destruction? But I am the last person on earth who ought to read you a lesson on morals. Only one more question: supposing in the course of your life you happened to meet a woman worthy of you, and capable of appreciating you, would you then——? I’ve thought of this so often.”

Nasanski stopped and stared for a long time through the open window.

“A woman——” he uttered the word slowly and dreamily. “I’ll tell you a story,” he continued suddenly and in an energetic tone. “Once in my life I met an exceptional—ah! wonderful—woman, a young girl, but as Heine somewhere says:

‘She was worthy of being loved, and he loved her; but he was not worthy, and she did not love him.’ Her love waned because I drank, or perhaps it was I drank because she did not love me. She—by the way, it was not here that this happened. It was a long time ago, and you possibly know that I first served in the infantry for three years, after that for four years with the reserves, and for a second time, three years ago, I came here. Well, to continue, between her and me there was no romance whatever. We met and had five or six chats together—that was all. But have you ever thought what an irresistible, bewitching might there is in the past, in our recollections? The memory of these few insignificant episodes of my life constitutes the whole of my wealth. I love her even to this very day. Wait, Romashov, you deserve to hear it—I will read out to you the first and only letter I ever received from her.” He crouched down before the old trunk, opened it, and began rummaging impatiently among a mass of old papers, during which he kept on talking. “I know she never loved any one but herself. There was a depth of pride, imperiousness, even cruelty about her, yet, at the same time, she was so good, so genuinely womanly, so infinitely pleasant and lovable. She had two natures—the one egoistical and calculating, the other all heart and passionate tenderness. See here, I have it. Read it now, Romashov. The beginning will not interest you much” (Nasanski turned over a few lines of the letter), “but read from here; read it all.”

Romashov felt as if some one had struck him a stunning blow on the head, and the whole room seemed to dance before his eyes, for the letter was written in a large but nervous and compressed hand, that could only belong to Alexandra Petrovna—quaint, irregular, but by no means unsympathetic. Romashov, who had often received cards from her with invitations to small dinners and card parties, recognized this hand at once.

“It is a bitter and hard task for me to write this,” read Romashov under Nasanski’s hand; “but only you yourself are to blame for our acquaintance coming to this tragic end. Lying I abominate more than anything else in life. It always springs from

cowardice and weakness, and this is the reason why I shall also tell you the whole truth. I loved you up to now; yes, I love you even now, and I know it will prove very hard for me to master this feeling. But I also know that, in the end, I shall gain the victory. What do you suppose our lot would be if I acted otherwise? I confess I lack the energy and self-denial requisite for becoming the housekeeper, nurse-girl, or sister of mercy to a weakling with no will of his own. I loathe above everything self-sacrifice and pity for others, and I shall let neither you nor any one else excite these feelings in me. I will not have a husband who would only be a dog at my feet, incessantly craving alms or proofs of affection. And you would never be anything else, in spite of your extraordinary talents and noble qualities. Tell me now, with your hand upon your heart, if you are capable of it. Alas! my dear Vasili Nilich, if you could. All my heart, all my life yearns for you. I love you. What is the obstacle, then? No one but yourself. For a person one loves, one can, you know, sacrifice the whole world, and now I ask of you only this one thing; but can you? No, you cannot, and now I bid you good-bye for ever. In thought I kiss you on your forehead as one kisses a corpse, and you are dead to me—for ever. I advise you to destroy this letter, not that I blush for or fear its contents, but because I think it will be a source to you of tormenting recollections. I repeat once more——”

“The rest is of little interest to you,” said Nasanski abruptly, as he took the letter from Romashov’s hand. “This, as I have just told you, was her only letter to me.”

“What happened afterwards?” stammered Romashov awkwardly.

“Afterwards? We never saw one another afterwards. She went her way and is reported to have married an engineer. That, however, is another matter.”

“And you never visit Alexandra Petrovna?”

Romashov uttered these words in a whisper, but both officers started at the sound of them, and gazed at each other a long time without speaking. During these few seconds all the barriers raised by human guile and hypocrisy fell away, and the two

men read each other's soul as an open book. Hundreds of things that had hitherto been for them a profound secret stood before them that moment in dazzling light, and the whole of the conversation that evening suddenly took a peculiar, deep, nay, almost tragic, significance.

"What? you too?" exclaimed Nasanski at last, with an expression bordering on fear in his eyes, but he quickly regained his composure and exclaimed with a laugh, "Ugh! what a misunderstanding! We were discussing something quite different. That letter which you have just read was written hundreds of years ago, and the woman in question lived in Transcaucasia. But where was it we left off?"

"It is late, Vasili Nilich, and time to say good-night," replied Romashov, rising.

Nasanski did not try to keep him. They separated neither in a cold or unfriendly way, but they were, as it seemed, ashamed of each other. Romashov was now more convinced than ever that the letter was from Shurochka. During the whole of his way home he thought of nothing except this letter, but he could not make out what feelings it aroused in him. They were a mingling of jealousy of Nasanski—jealousy on account of what had been—but also a certain exultant pity for Nasanski, and in himself there awoke new hopes, dim and indefinite, but delicious and alluring. It was as if this letter had put into his hand a mysterious, invisible clue that was leading him into the future.

The breeze had subsided. The tepid night's intense darkness and silence reminded one of soft, warm velvet. One felt, as it were, life's mystic creative force in the never-slumbering air, in the dumb stillness of the invisible trees, in the smell of the earth. Romashov walked without seeing which way he went, and it seemed to him as if he felt the hot breath of something strong and powerful, but, at the same time, sweet and caressing. His thoughts went back with dull, harrowing pain to bygone happy springs that would never more return—to the blissful, innocent days of his childhood.

When he reached home he found on the table another letter from Raisa Alexandrovna Peterson. In her usual bad taste she complained, in turgid, extravagant terms, of his “deceitful conduct” towards her. She “now understood everything,” and the “injured woman” within her invoked on him all the perils of hatred and revenge.

Now I know what I have to do (the letter ran). If I survive the sorrow and pain of your abominable conduct, you may be quite certain I shall cruelly avenge this insult. You seem to think that nobody knows where you are in the habit of spending your evenings. You are watched! and even walls have ears. Every step you take is known to me. But all the same, you will never get anything there with all your soft, pretty speeches, unless N. flings you downstairs like a puppy. So far as I am concerned, you will be wise not to lull yourself into fancied security. I am not one of those women who let themselves be insulted with impunity.

A Caucasian woman am I Who knows how to handle a knife.

—Once yours, now nobody’s,

Raisa.

PS.—I command you to meet me at the soirée on Saturday and explain your conduct. The third quadrille will be kept for you; but mind, there is no special importance now in that.

R. P.

To Romashov this ill-spelled, ungrammatical letter was a breath of the stupidity, meanness, and spiteful tittle-tattle of a provincial town. He felt for ever soiled from head to foot by this disgusting liaison, scarcely of six months’ standing, with a woman he had never loved. He threw himself on his bed with an indescribable feeling of depression. He even felt as if he were torn to tatters by the events of the day, and he involuntarily called to mind Nasanski’s words that very night: “his thoughts were as grey as a soldier’s cloak.”

He soon fell into a deep, heavy sleep. As he had always done of late, when he had

had bitter moments, he saw himself, even now in his dreams, as a little child. There were no impure impulses in him, no sense of something lacking, no weariness of life; his body was light and healthy, and his soul was luminous and full of joy and hope; and in this world of radiance and happiness he saw dear old Moscow's streets in the dazzling brightness that is presented to the eyes in dreamland. But far away by the horizon, at the very verge of this sky that was saturated with light, there arose quickly and threateningly a dark, ill-boding wall of cloud, behind which was hidden a horrible provincial hole of a place with cruel and unbearable slavery, drills, recruit schools, drinking, false friends, and utterly corrupt women. His life was nothing but joy and gladness, but the dark cloud was waiting patiently for the moment when it was to fold him in its deadly embrace. And it so happened that little Romashov, amidst his childish babble and innocent dreams, bewailed in silence the fate of his "double."

He awoke in the middle of the night, and noticed that his pillow was wet with tears. Then he wept afresh, and the warm tears again ran down his cheeks in rapid streams.

VI

WITH the exception of a few ambitious men bent on making a career for themselves, all the officers regarded the service as an intolerable slavery to which they must needs submit. The younger of them behaved like veritable schoolboys; they came late to the drills, and wriggled away from them as soon as possible, provided that could be done without risk of serious consequences to themselves afterwards. The captains, who, as a rule, were burdened with large families, were immersed in household cares, scandals, money troubles, and were worried the whole year through with loans, promissory notes, and other methods of raising the wind. Many ventured—often at the instigation of their wives—secretly to divert to their own purposes the moneys belonging to the regiment and the soldiers' pay—nay,

they even went so far as “officially” to withhold their men’s private letters when the latter were found to contain money. Some lived by gambling—vint, schtoss, lansquenet—and certain rather ugly stories were told in connection with this—stories which high authorities had a good deal of trouble to suppress. In addition to all this, heavy drinking, both at mess and in their own homes, was widespread amongst the officers.

With regard to the officers’ sense of duty, that, too, was, as a rule, altogether lacking. The non-commissioned officers did all the work; the pay-sergeants set in motion and regulated the inner mechanism of the company, and were held responsible for the despatch of it; hence very soon, and quite imperceptibly, the commander became a mere marionette in the coarse, experienced hands of his subordinates. The senior officers, moreover, regarded the exercises of the troops with the same aversion as did their junior comrades, and if at any time they displayed their zeal by punishing an ensign, they only did it to gain prestige or—which was more seldom the case—to satisfy their lust of power or desire for revenge.

Captains of brigades and battalions had, as a rule, absolutely nothing to do in the winter. During the summer it was their duty to inspect the exercises of the battalion, to assist at those of the regiment and division, and to undergo the hardships of the field-manœuvres. During their long freedom from duty they used to sit continually in their mess-room, eagerly studying the Russki Invalid,[7] and savagely criticizing all new appointments; but cards were, however, their alpha and omega, and they most readily permitted their juniors to be their hosts, though they but very rarely exercised a cautious hospitality in their own homes, and then only with the object of getting their numerous daughters married.

But when the time for the great review approached, it was quite another tune. All, from the highest to the lowest, were seized by a sort of madness. There was no talk

of peace and quiet then; every one tried, by additional hours of drill and an almost maniacal activity, to make up for previous negligence. The soldiers were treated with the most heartless cruelty, and overtaxed to the last degree of sheer exhaustion. Every one was tyrant over some wretch; the company commanders, with endless curses, threatened their “incompetent” subalterns, and the latter, in turn, poured the vials of their wrath over the “non-coms.,” and the “non-coms.,” hoarse with shouting orders, oaths, and the most frightful insults, struck and misused the soldiers in the most ferocious manner. The whole camp and parade-ground were changed into a hell, and Sundays, with their indispensable rest and peace, loomed like a heavenly paradise in the eyes of the poor tortured recruits.

This spring the regiment was preparing for the great May parade. It was at this time common knowledge that the review was to take place before the commander of the corps—a strict old veteran, known throughout military literature by his works on the Carlist War and the Franco-German Campaign of 1870, in which he took part as a volunteer. Besides, he was known throughout the kingdom for his eccentric general orders and manifestoes that were invariably couched in a lapidary style à la Savóroff. The reckless, sharp, and coarse sarcasm he always infused into his criticism was feared by the officers more than even the severest disciplinary punishment.

It was not to be wondered at that for a fortnight the whole regiment worked with feverish energy, and Sunday was no less longed for by the utterly worn-out officers than by the men, who were well-nigh tortured to death.

But to Romashov, who sat idle under arrest, Sunday brought neither joy nor repose. As he had tried in vain to sleep during the night, he got up early, dressed slowly and unwillingly, drank his tea with undisguised repugnance, and refreshed himself at last by hurling a few insults at Hainán, who did not heed them in the least, but continued to stalk about the room as happy, active, and clumsy as a puppy.

Romashov sauntered up and down his narrow room in his unbuttoned, carelessly donned undress uniform. Now he bumped his knee against the foot of the bed, now his elbow against the rickety bookcase. It was the first time now for half a year—thanks to a somewhat unpleasant accident—that he found himself alone in his own abode. He had always been occupied with drill, sentry duty, card-playing, and libations to Bacchus, dancing attendance on the Peterson woman, and evening calls on the Nikoläievs. Sometimes, if he happened to be free and had nothing particular in view, Romashov might, if worried by moping and laziness, and as if he feared his own company, rush aimlessly off to the club, or some acquaintance, or simply to the street, in hopes of finding some bachelor comrade—a meeting which infallibly ended with a drinking-bout in the mess-room. Now he contemplated with dread the long, unendurable day of loneliness and boredom before him, and a crowd of stupid, extraordinary fancies and projects buzzed in his brain.

The bells in the town were ringing for High Mass. Through the inner window, which had not been removed since the winter began, forced their way into the room these trembling tones that were produced, as it were, one from the other, and in the melancholy clang of which, on this sentimental spring morning, there lay a peculiar power of charm. Immediately outside Romashov's window lay a garden in which many cherry-trees grew in rich abundance, all white with blooms, and all soft and round as a flock of snow-white sheep whose wool was fine. Between them, here and there, arose slim but gigantic poplars that stretched their boughs beseechingly towards heaven, and ancient, venerable chestnut-trees with their dome-like crests. The trees were still bare, with black, naked boughs, but on these, though the eye could hardly discern them, the first yellowish verdure, fresh as the dew, began to be visible. In the pure, moisture-laden air of the newly-awakened spring day, the trees rocked softly here and there before the cool, sportive breezes that murmured from time to time among the flowers, and bowed them to the ground with a roguish kiss.

From the windows one could discern, on the left, through a gateway, a part of the

dirty street, which on one side was fenced off. People passed alongside of the fence from time to time, walking slowly as they picked out a dry place for their next step. “Lucky people,” thought Romashov, as he enviously followed them with his eyes, “they need not hurry. They have the whole of the long day before them—ah! a whole, free, glorious day.”

And suddenly there came over him a longing for freedom so intense and passionate that tears rushed to his eyes, and he had great difficulty in restraining himself from running out of the house. Now, however, it was not the mess-room that attracted him, but only the yard, the street, fresh air. It was as if he had never understood before what freedom was, and he was astonished at the amount of happiness that is comprised in the simple fact that one may go where one pleases, turn into this or that street, stop in the middle of the square, peep into a half-opened church door, etc., etc., all at one’s own sweet will and without having to fear the consequences. The right to do, and the possibility of doing, all this would be enough to fill a man’s heart with an exultant sense of joy and bliss.

He remembered in connection with this how, in his earliest youth, long before he entered the Cadet School, his mother used to punish him by tying him tightly to the foot of the bed with fine thread, after which she left him by himself; and little Romashov sat for whole hours submissively still. But never for an instant did it occur to him to flee from the house, although, under ordinary circumstances, he never stood on ceremony—for instance, to slide down the water-pipe from other storys to the street; to dangle, without permission, after a military band or a funeral procession as far as the outskirts of Moscow; or to steal from his mother lumps of sugar, jam, and cigarettes for older playfellows, etc. But this brittle thread exercised a remarkable hypnotizing influence on his mind as a child. He was even afraid of breaking it by some sudden, incautious movement. In that case he was influenced by no fear whatsoever of punishment, neither by a sense of duty, nor by regret, but by pure hypnosis, a superstitious dread of the unfathomable power and superiority of

grown-up or older persons, which reminds one of the savage who, paralysed by fright, dares not take a step beyond the magic circle that the conjurer has drawn.

“And here I am sitting now like a schoolboy, like a little helpless, mischievous brat tied by the leg,” thought Romashov as he slouched backwards and forwards in his room. “The door is open, I can go when I please, can do what I please, can talk and laugh—but I am kept back by a thread. I sit here; I and nobody else. Some one has ordered me to sit here, and I shall sit here; but who has authorized him to order this? Certainly not I.

“I”—Romashov stood in the middle of the room with his legs straddling and his head hanging down, thinking deeply. “I, I, I!” he shouted in a loud voice, in which there lay a certain note of astonishment, as if he now was first beginning to comprehend the meaning of this short word. “Who is standing here and gaping at that black crack in the floor?—Is it really I? How curious—I”—he paused slowly and with emphasis on the monosyllable, just as if it were only by such means that he could grasp its significance.

He smiled unnaturally; but, in the next instant, he frowned, and turned pale with emotion and strain of thought. Such small crises had not infrequently happened to him during the last five or six years, as is nearly always the case with young people during that period of life when the mind is in course of development. A simple truth, a saying, a common phrase, with the meaning of which he has long ago been familiar, suddenly, by some mysterious impulse from within, stands in a new light, and so receives a particular philosophical meaning. Romashov could still remember the first time this happened to him. It was at school during a catechism lesson, when the priest tried to explain the parable of the labourers who carried away stones. One of them began with the light stones, and afterwards took the heavier ones, but when at last he came to the very heaviest of all his strength was exhausted. The other worked according to a diametrically different plan, and luckily fulfilled his duty. To

Romashov was opened the whole abyss of practical wisdom that lay hidden in this simple picture that he had known and understood ever since he could read a book. Likewise with the old saying: “Seven times shalt thou measure, once shalt thou cut.” In a happy moment he suddenly perceived the full, deep import of this maxim; wisdom, understanding, wise economy, calculation. A tremendous experience of life lay concealed in these few words. Such was the case now. All his mental individuality stood suddenly before him with the distinctness of a lightning flash.

“My Ego,” thought Romashov, “is only that which is within me, the very kernel of my being; all the rest is the non-Ego—that is, only secondary things. This room, street, trees, sky, the commander of my regiment, Lieutenant Andrusevich, the service, the standard, the soldiers—all this is non-Ego. No, no, this is non-Ego—my hands and feet.” Romashov lifted up his hands to the level of his face, and looked at them with wonder and curiosity, as if he saw them now for the first time in his life. “No, all this is non-Ego. But look—I pinch my arm—that is the Ego. I see my arm, I lift it up—this is the Ego. And what I am thinking now is also Ego. If I now want to go my way, that is the Ego. And even if I stop, that is the Ego.

“Oh, how wonderful, how mysterious is this. And so simple too. Is it true that all individuals possess a similar Ego? Perhaps it is only I who have it? Or perhaps nobody has it. Down there hundreds of soldiers stand drawn up in front of me. I give the order: ‘Eyes to the right,’ to hundreds of human beings who has each his own Ego, and who see in me something foreign, distant, i.e. non-Ego—then turn their heads at once to the right. But I do not distinguish one from the other; they are to me merely a mass. And to Colonel Schulgovich both I and Viätkin and Lbov, and all the captains and lieutenants, are likewise perhaps merely a ‘mass,’ viz., he does not distinguish one of us from the other, or, in other words, we are entirely outside his ken as individuals to him.”

The door was opened, and Hainán stole into the room. He began at once his usual

dance, threw up his legs into the air, rocked his shoulders, and shouted—

“Your Honour, I got no cigarettes. They said that Lieutenant Skriabin gave orders that you were not to have any more on credit.”

“Oh, damn! You can go, Hainán. What am I to do without cigarettes? However, it is of no consequence. You can go, Hainán.”

“What was it I was thinking of?” Romashov asked himself, when he was once more alone. He had lost the threads, and, unaccustomed as he was to think, he could not pick them up again at once. “What was I thinking of just now? It was something important and interesting. Well, let us turn back and take the questions in order. Also, I am under arrest; out in the street I see people at large; my mother tied me up with a thread—me, me. Yes, so it was. The soldier perhaps has an Ego, perhaps even Colonel Shulgovich. Ha, he! now I remember; go on. Here I am sitting in my room. I am arrested, but my door is open. I want to go out, but I dare not. Why do I not dare? Have I committed any crime—theft—murder? No. All I did was merely omitting to keep my heels together when I was talking to another man. Possibly I was wrong. Yet, why? Is it anything important? Is it the chief thing in life? In about twenty or thirty years—a second in eternity—my life, my Ego, will go out like a lamp does when one turns the wick down. They will light life—the lamp—afresh, over and over again; but my Ego is gone for ever. Likewise this room, this sky, the regiment, the whole army, all stars, this dirty globe, my hands and feet—all, all—shall be annihilated for ever. Yes, yes; that is so. Well, all right—but wait a bit. I must not be in too much of a hurry. I shall not be in existence. Ah, wait. I found myself in infinite darkness. Somebody came and lighted my life’s lamp, but almost immediately he blew it out again, and once more I was in darkness, in the eternity of eternities. What did I do? What did I utter during this short moment of my existence? I held my thumb on the seam of my trousers and my heels together. I shrieked as loud as I could: ‘Shoulder arms!’ and immediately afterwards I

thundered ‘Use your butt ends, you donkeys!’ I trembled before a hundred tyrants, now miserable ghosts in eternity like my own remarkable, lofty Ego. But why did I tremble before those ghosts and why could they compel me to do such a lot of unnecessary, idiotic, unpleasant things? How could they venture to annoy and insult my Ego—these miserable spectres?”

Romashov sat down by the table, put his elbows on it, and leaned his head on his hands. It was hard work for him to keep in check these wild thoughts which raced through his mind.

“H’m!—my friend Romashov, what a lot you have forgotten—your fatherland, the ashes of your sire, the altar of honour, the warrior’s oath and discipline. Who shall preserve the land of your sires when the foe rushes over its boundaries? Ah! when I am dead there will be no more fatherland, no enemy, no honour. They will disappear at the same time as my consciousness. But if all this be buried and brought to naught—country, enemies, honour, and all the other big words—what has all this to do with my Ego? I am more important than all these phrases about duty, honour, love, etc. Assume that I am a soldier and my Ego suddenly says, ‘I won’t fight,’ and not only my own Ego, but millions of other Egos that constitute the whole of the army, the whole of Russia, the entire world; all these say, ‘We won’t!’ Then it will be all over so far as war is concerned, and never again will any one have to hear such absurdities as ‘Open order,’ ‘Shoulder arms,’ and all the rest of that nonsense.

“Well, well, well. It must be so some day,” shouted an exultant voice in Romashov. “All that talk about ‘warlike deeds,’ ‘discipline,’ ‘honour of the uniform,’ ‘respect for superiors,’ and, first and last, the whole science of war exists only because humanity will not, or cannot, or dare not, say, ‘I won’t.’”

“What do you suppose all this cunningly reared edifice that is called the profession of arms really is? Nothing, humbug, a house hanging in midair, which will tumble down directly mankind pronounces three short words: ‘I will not.’ My Ego will

never say, ‘I will not eat,’ ‘I will not breathe,’ ‘I will not see,’ But if any one proposes to my Ego that it shall die, it infallibly replies: ‘I will not.’ What, then, is war with all its hecatombs of dead and the science of war, which teaches us the best methods of murdering? Why, a universal madness, an illusion. But wait. Perhaps I am mistaken. No, I cannot be mistaken, for this ‘I will not’ is so simple, so natural, that everybody must, in the end, say it. Let us, however, examine the matter more closely. Let us suppose that this thought is pronounced this very moment by all Russians, Germans, Englishmen, and Japanese. Ah, well, what would be the consequence? Why, that war would cease for ever, and the officers and soldiers would go, every man, to his home. And what would happen after that? I know: Shulgovich would answer; Shulgovich would immediately get querulous and say: ‘Now we are done for; they can attack us now whenever they please, take away our hearths and homes, trample down our fields, and carry off our wives and sisters.’ And what about rioters, socialists, revolutionaries? But when the whole of mankind without exception has shouted: ‘We will no longer tolerate bloodshed,’ who will then dare to assail us? No one! All enemies would be reconciled, submit to each other, forgive everything, and justly divide among themselves the abundance of the earth. Gracious God, when shall this dream be fulfilled?”

Whilst Romashov was indulging in these fancies, he failed to notice that Hainán had quietly stolen in behind his back and suddenly stretched his arm over his shoulder. Romashov started in terror, and roared out angrily—

“What the devil do you want?”

Hainán laid before him on the table a cinnamon-coloured packet. “This is for you,” he replied in a friendly, familiar tone, and Romashov felt behind him his servant’s jovial smile. “They are cigarettes; smoke now.”

Romashov looked at the packet. On it was printed, “The Trumpeter, First-class Cigarettes. Price 3 kopecks for 20.”

“What does this mean?” he asked in astonishment. “Where did this come from?”

“I saw that you had no cigarettes, so I bought these with my own money. Please smoke them. It is nothing. Just a little present.”

After this, to conceal his confusion, Hainán ran headlong to the door, which he slammed after him with a deafening bang. Romashov lighted a cigarette, and the room was soon filled with a perfume that strongly reminded one of melted sealing-wax and burnt feathers.

“Oh, you dear!” thought Romashov, deeply moved. “I get cross with you and scold you and make you pull off my muddy boots every evening, and yet you go and buy me cigarettes with your few last coppers. ‘Please smoke them.’ What made you do it?”

Again he got up and walked up and down the room with his hands behind him.

“Our company consists of at least a hundred men, and each of them is a creature with thoughts, feelings, experience of life, personal sympathies and antipathies. Do I know anything about them? No, nothing, except their faces. I see them before me as they stand in line every day, drawn up from right to left: Sóltyss, Riaboschápka, Yégoroff, Yaschtschischin, etc., etc.—mere sorry, grey figures. What have I done to bring my soul nearer to their souls, my Ego to theirs? Nothing.”

He involuntarily called to mind a rough night at the end of autumn, when (as was his custom) he was sitting drinking in the mess-room with a few comrades. Suddenly the pay-sergeant Goumeniuk, of the 9th Company, rushed into the room, and breathlessly called to his commander—

“Your Excellency, the recruits are here.”

Yes, there they stood in the rain, in the barrack-yard, driven together like a herd of frightened animals without any will of their own, which with cowed, suspicious glances gazed at their tormentors. “Each individual,” thought Romashov, as he slowly and carefully inspected their appearance, “has his own characteristic

expression of countenance. This one, for instance, is most certainly a smith; that is, doubtless, a jolly chap who plays his accordion with some talent; that one with the shrewd features can both read and write, and looks as if he were a polevói."[8] And one felt that these poor recruits who, a few days ago, had been violently seized whilst their wives and children were crying and lamenting, had tried, with tears in their voices, to join in the coarse songs of their wild, drunken brothers in misfortune. But a year later they stood like soldiers in long rigid rows—grey, sluggish, apathetic figures, all cast, as it were, in the same mould. But they never left their homes of their own free will. Their Ego resented it. And yet they went. Why all this inconsistency? How can one not help thinking of that old and well-known story about the cock who fought desperately with his wings and resisted to the uttermost when his beak was pressed against a table, but who stood motionless, hypnotized, when some one drew a thick line with a piece of chalk across the table from the tip of his beak.

Romashov threw himself on the bed.

"What is there left for you to do under the circumstances?" he asked himself in bitter mockery. "Do you think of resigning? But, in that case, where do you think of going? What does the sum of knowledge amount to that you have learnt at the infants' school, the Cadet School, at the Military Academy, at mess? Have you tried the struggle and seriousness of life? No, you have been looked after and your wants supplied, as if you were a little child, and you think perhaps, like a certain schoolgirl, that rolls grow on trees. Go out into the world and try. At the very first step you would slip and fall; people would trample you in the dust, and you would drown your misery in drink. And besides, have you ever heard of an officer leaving the service of his own free will? No, never. Just because he is unfit for anything he will not give up his meagre bread-and-butter. And if any one is forced into doing this, you will soon see him wearing a greasy old regimental cap, and accepting alms from people in the street. I am a Russian officer of gentle birth, comprenez-vous?

Alas, where shall I go—what will become of me?”

“Prisoner, prisoner!” cried a clear female voice beneath the window.

Romashov jumped up from his bed and rushed to the window. Opposite him stood Shurochka. She was protecting her eyes from the sun with the palm of her hand, and pressing her rosy face against the window pane, exclaiming in a mocking tone:—

“Oh, give a poor beggar a copper!”

Romashov fumbled at the window-catch in wild eagerness to open it, but he remembered in the same moment that the inner window had not been removed. With joyous resolution he seized the window-frame with both hands, and dragged it to him with a tremendous tug. A loud noise was heard, and the whole window fell into the room, besprinkling Romashov with bits of lime and pieces of dried putty. The outer window flew up, and a stream of fresh air, charged with joy and the perfume of flowers, forced its way into the room.

“Ha, at last! Now I’ll go out, cost what it may,” shouted Romashov in a jubilant voice.

“Romashov, you mad creature! what are you doing?”

He caught her outstretched hand through the window; it was closely covered by a cinnamon-coloured glove, and he began boldly to kiss it, first upwards and downwards, and after that from the finger-tips to the wrist. Last of all, he kissed the hole in the glove just below the buttons. He was astonished at his boldness; never before had he ventured to do this. Shurochka submitted as though unconscious to this passionate burst of affection, and smilingly accepted his kisses whilst gazing at him in shy wonderment.

“Alexandra Petrovna, you are an angel. How shall I ever be able to thank you?”

“Gracious, Romochka! what has come to you? And why are you so happy?” she asked laughingly as she eyed Romashov with persistent curiosity. “But wait, my

poor prisoner, I have brought you from home a splendid kalátsch and the most delicious apple puffs."

"Stepan, bring the basket here."

He looked at her with devotion in his eyes, and without letting go her hand, which she allowed to remain unresistingly in his, he said hurriedly—

"Oh, if you knew all I have been thinking about this morning—if you only knew! But of this, later on."

"Yes, later on. Look, here comes my lord and master. Let go my hand. How strange you look to-day! I even think you have grown handsome."

Nikoläiev now came up to the window. He frowned, and greeted Romashov in a rather cool and reserved way.

"Come, Shurochka," he said to his wife, "what in the world are you thinking about? You must both be mad. Only think, if the Commander were to see us. Good-bye, Romashov; come and see us."

"Yes, come and see us, Yuri Alexievich," repeated Shurochka. She left the window, but returned almost at once and whispered rapidly to Romashov. "Don't forget us. You are the only man here whom I can associate with—as a friend—do you hear? And another thing. Once for all I forbid you to look at me with such sheep's eyes, remember that. Besides, you have no right to imagine anything. You are not a coxcomb yet, you know."

VII

AT 3.30 p.m. Lieutenant Federovski, the Adjutant of the regiment, drove up to Romashov's house. He was a tall, stately, and (as the ladies of the regiment used to say) presentable young man, with freezingly cold eyes and an enormous moustache that almost grazed his shoulder. Towards the younger officers he was always

excessively polite, but, at the same time, officially correct in his conduct. He was not familiar with any one, and had a very high opinion of himself and his position. Nearly all the captains flattered and paid court to him.

As he entered the door, he rapidly scanned with his blinking eyes the whole of the scanty furniture in Romashov's room. The latter, who lay resting on his bed, jumped off, and, blushing, began to button up his undress tunic.

"I am here by orders of the commander, who wishes to speak to you," said Federovski in a dry tone. "Be good enough to dress and accompany me as soon as possible."

"I shall be ready at once. Shall I put on undress or parade uniform?"

"Don't, please, stand on ceremony. A frock-coat, if you like, that would be quite sufficient. Meanwhile, with your permission, I will take a seat."

"Oh, I beg your pardon—will you have some tea?" said Romashov fussily.

"No, thanks. My time is short, and I must ask you to be as quick as possible about changing your clothes."

And without taking off his cloak or gloves, he sat down whilst Romashov changed his clothes in nervous haste and with painful glances at his not particularly clean shirt. Federovski sat the whole time with his hands resting on the hilt of his sabre, as motionless as a stone image.

"I suppose you do not happen to know why I am sent for?"

The Adjutant shrugged his shoulders.

"A singular question! How should I know? You ought to know the reason better than I. But if I may give you a bit of friendly advice, put the sabre-belt under—not over—the shoulder strap. The Colonel is, as you are aware, particular about such matters. And now, if you please, we will start."

Before the steps stood a common calèche, attached to which were a couple of high,

lean army horses. Romashov was polite enough to encroach as little as possible on the narrow seat, so as not to cause his attendant any discomfort, but the latter did not, so it seemed, take the slightest notice of that. On the way they met Viätkin; the latter exchanged a chilly and correct salute with the Adjutant, but honoured Romashov, who for a second turned round, with a comic but enigmatical gesture that might probably mean: “Ah, poor fellow, you are on your way to Pontius Pilate.” They met other officers, some of whom regarded Romashov with a sort of solemn interest, others with unfeigned astonishment, and some bestowed on him only a derisive smile. Romashov tried to avoid their glances and felt himself shrinking beneath them.

The Colonel did not receive him at once. He had some one in his private room. Romashov had to wait in a half-dark hall that smelt of apples, naphtha, newly-polished furniture and, besides that, of something which not at all unpleasantly reminded him of the odour which seems particularly inseparable from clothes and furniture in well-to-do German families that are pedantically careful about their goods and chattels.

As he walked slowly up and down the hall, he glanced at himself several times in a mirror in a light ashwood frame which was fixed to the wall; and each time he looked his face struck him as being unhealthily pale, ugly, and queer. His uniform, too, was shabby, and his epaulettes soiled.

Out in the hall might be heard the incessant rumbling of the Colonel’s deep bass voice. The words themselves could not be distinguished, but the ferocious tone told the tale clearly enough that Colonel Shulgovich was scolding some one with implacable and sustained rage. This went on for about five minutes; after which Schulgovich suddenly became silent, a trembling, supplicating voice succeeded his, and, after a moment’s pause, Romashov clearly heard the following frightful tirade uttered with a terrible accent of pride, indignation, and contempt:

“What nonsense is it that you dare to talk about your wife and your children? What the devil have I to do with them? Before you brought your children into the world you ought to have considered how you could manage to feed them. What? So now you are trying to throw the blame on your Colonel, are you? But it has nothing to do with him. You know too well, Captain, that if I do not deliver you into the hands of justice I shall fail in my duty as your commander. Be good enough not to interrupt me. Here there is no question of an offence against discipline, but a glaring crime, and your place henceforward will certainly not be in the regiment, but you yourself best know where.” Again he heard that miserable, beseeching voice, so pitiful that it did not sound human.

“Good Lord! what is it all about?” thought Romashov, who, as if he were glued to the looking-glass, gazed at his pale face without seeing it, and felt his heart throbbing painfully. “Good Lord! how horrible!”

The plaintive, beseeching voice again replied, and spoke at some length. When it ceased, the Colonel’s deep bass began thundering, but now evidently a trifle more calmly and gently than before, as if his rage had spent itself, and his desire to witness the humiliation of another were satisfied.

Shulgovich said abruptly: “Engrave it for ever on your red nose. All right! But this is the last time. Remember now! The last time! Do you hear? If it ever comes to my ears that you have been drunk, the—silence!—I know what you intend to say, but I won’t hear any more of your promises. In a week’s time I shall inspect your company. You understand? And as to the troops’ pay, that matter must be settled to-morrow. You hear? To-morrow. And now I shall not detain you longer, Captain. I have the honour——”

The last words were interrupted by a scraping on the floor, and a few tottering steps towards the door; but, suddenly, the Colonel’s voice was again heard, though this time its wrathful and violent tone did not sound quite natural.

“Wait a moment! Come here, you devil’s pepper-box! Where are you off to? To the Jews, of course—to get a bill signed. Ah, you fool—you blockhead! Here you are! One, two, three, four—three hundred. I can’t do more. Take them and be off with you. Pay me back when you can. What a mess you have made of things, Captain! Now be off with you! Go to the devil—your servant, sir!”

The door sprang open, and into the hall staggered little Captain Sviatovidov, red and perspiring, with harassed, nay, ravaged, features. His right hand grasped convulsively his new, rustling bundle of banknotes. He made a sort of pirouette directly he recognized Romashov, tried, but failed miserably in the attempt, to assume a sportive, free-and-easy look, and clutched tight hold of Romashov’s fingers with his hot, moist, trembling hand. His wandering, furtive glances rested at last on Romashov as if he would ask the question: “Have you heard anything or have you not?”

“He’s a tiger, a bloodhound!” he whispered, pointing to the door of the Colonel’s room; “but what the deuce does it matter?” Sviatovidov twice crossed himself quickly. “The Lord be praised! the Lord be praised!”

“Bon-da-ren-ko!” roared Shulgovich from his room, and his powerful voice that moment filled every nook and corner of the house. “Bondarenko, who is out there still? Bring him in.”

“Hold your own, my young lion,” whispered Sviatovidov with a false smile. “Au revoir, Lieutenant. Hope you’ll have a good time.”

Bondarenko glided through the door. He was a typical Colonel’s servant, with an impudently condescending look, hair pomaded and parted in the middle, dandified, with white gloves. He addressed Romashov in a respectful tone, but eyed him, at the same time, in a very bold way.

“His Excellency begs your Honour to step in.”

He opened the door and stepped aside. Romashov walked in.

Colonel Shulgovich sat at a table in a corner of the room, to the left of the door. He was wearing his fatigue tunic, under which appeared his gleaming white shirt. His red, sinewy hands rested on the arm of his easy chair. His unnaturally big, old face, with short tufts of hair on the top of his head, and the white pointed beard, gave an impression of a certain hardness and coldness. The bright colourless eyes gleamed almost aggressively at the visitor, whose salutation was returned with a brief nod. Romashov at that moment noticed a crescent-shaped ring in the Colonel's ear, and thought to himself: "Strange that I never saw that ring before."

"This is very serious," began Shulgovich, in a gruff bass that seemed to proceed from the depths of his diaphragm, after which he made a long pause. "Shame on you!" he continued in a raised voice. "Because you've served a year all but one week you begin to put on airs. Besides this, I have many other reasons to be annoyed with you. For instance: I come to the parade-ground and make a justifiable remark about you. At once you are ready to answer your commanding officer in a silly, insolent manner. Can that be called military tact and discipline? No. Such a thing is incredible, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself." The latter words were roared by Shulgovich with such deafening violence that his victim felt a tremor under his knee-cap.

Romashov looked gloomily away, and no power in the world, thought he, should induce him to look at the Colonel straight in his basilisk face.

"Where's my Ego now?" he asked himself ironically. "Here the only thing to do is to suffer, keep silent, and stand at attention."

"It does not matter now how I obtained my information about you. It is quite sufficient I know all your sins. You drink. You, a mere boy—a callow creature that has but lately left school—swig schnapps like a cobbler's apprentice. Hold your tongue, don't try to defend yourself, I know everything—and much more than you think. Well, God forbid!—if you are bent on going down the broad path you are

welcome to do it, so far as I'm concerned. Still, I'll give you a warning: drink has made more than one of your sort acquainted with the inside of a prison. Lay these words of mine to heart. My long-suffering is great, but even an angel's patience can be exhausted. The officers of a regiment are mutually related as members of one family; but don't forget that an unworthy member who tarnishes the honour of the family is ruthlessly cast out."

"Here I stand paralysed with fright, and my tongue is numbed," thought Romashov, as he stared, as though hypnotized, at the little silver ring in the Colonel's ear. "At this moment I ought to tell him straight out that I do not in the least degree value the honour of belonging to this worthy family, and that I shall be delighted to leave it to enter the reserves; but have I the courage to say so?" His lips moved, he found a difficulty in swallowing, but he stood still, as he had throughout the interview.

"But let us," continued Shulgovich in the same harsh tone, "examine more closely your conduct in the past. In the previous year—practically as soon as you entered the service, you requested leave on account of your mother's illness, nay, you even produced a sort of letter about it. Well, in such cases an officer cannot, you know, openly express his doubts as to the truth of a comrade's word. But I take this opportunity of telling you in private that I had my own opinion then about that story. You understand?"

Romashov had for a long time felt a tremor in his right knee. This tremor was at first very slight, in fact scarcely noticeable, but it very soon assumed alarming proportions, and finally extended over the whole of his body. This feeling grew very painful at the thought that Shulgovich might possibly regard his nervousness as proceeding from fear; but when his mother's name was mentioned, a consuming heat coursed through Romashov's veins, and his intense nervous tremor ceased immediately. For the first time during all this painful scene he raised his eyes to his torturer and looked him defiantly straight in the face. And in this look glittered a

hatred, menace, and imperious lust of vengeance from the insulted man, so intense and void of all fear that the illimitable distance between the omnipotent commander and the insignificant sub-lieutenant, who had no rights at all, was absolutely annihilated. A mist arose before Romashov's eyes, the various objects in the room lost their shape, and the Colonel's gruff voice sounded to him as if from a deep abyss. Then there suddenly came a moment of darkness and ominous silence, devoid of thoughts, will, or external perception, nay, even without consciousness. He experienced only a horrible certainty that, in another moment, something terrible and maniacal, something irretrievably disastrous, would happen. A strange, unfamiliar voice whispered in his ear: "Next moment I will kill him," and Romashov was slowly but irresistibly forced to fix his eyes on the Colonel's bald head.

Afterwards, as if in a dream, he became aware, although he could not understand the reason, of a curious change in his enemy's eyes, which, in rapid succession, reflected wonder, dread, helplessness, and pity. The wave of destruction that had just whelmed through Romashov's soul, by the violence of natural force, subsided, sank, and disappeared in space. He tottered, and now everything appeared to him commonplace and uninteresting. Shulgovich, in nervous haste, placed a chair before him, and said, with unexpected but somewhat rough kindness—

"The Devil take you! what a touchy fellow you are! Sit down and be damned to you! But you are all alike. You look at me as if I were a wild beast. 'The old fossil goes for us without rhyme or reason.' And all the time God knows I love you as if you were my own children. Do you think I have nothing to put up with, either? Ah, gentlemen, how little you know me! It is true I scold you occasionally, but, damn it all! an old fellow has a right to be angry sometimes. Oh, you youngsters! Well, let us make peace. Give me your hand and come to dinner."

Romashov bowed without uttering a syllable, and pressed the coarse, cold, hairy hand. His recollection of the past insult to some extent faded, but his heart was none

the lighter for this. He remembered his proud, inflated fancies of that very morning, and he now felt like a little pale, pitiful schoolboy, like a shy, abandoned, scarcely tolerated brat, and he thought of all this with shame and mortification. Also, whilst accompanying Shulgovich to the dining-room, he could not help addressing himself, as his habit was, in the third person—

"And a shadow rested on his brow."

Shulgovich was childless. In the dining-room, his wife—a fat, coarse, self-important, and silent woman—awaited him. She had not a vestige of neck, but displayed a whole row of chins. Notwithstanding her pince-nez and her scornful mien, there was a certain air of vulgarity about her countenance, which gave the impression of its being formed, at the last minute, hurriedly and negligently, out of dough, with raisins or currants instead of eyes. Behind her waddled, dragging her feet, the Colonel's old mother—a little deaf, but still an active, domineering, venomous old hag. While she closely and rudely examined Romashov over her spectacles, she clawed hold of his fingers and coolly pressed to his lips her black, shrivelled, bony hand, that reminded one most of an anatomical specimen. This done, she turned to the Colonel and asked him, just as if they had been absolutely alone in the dining-room—

"Who is this? I don't remember seeing him here before?"

Shulgovich formed his hands into a sort of speaking-tube, and bawled into the old woman's ear:

"Sub-lieutenant Romashov, mamma. A capital officer, a smart fellow, and an ornament to his regiment—comes from the Cadet School. By the way, Sub-lieutenant," he exclaimed abruptly, "we are certainly from the same province. Aren't you from Pevsa?"[9]

"Yes, Colonel, I was born in Pevsa."

"To be sure, to be sure; now I remember. You are from the Narovtschátski district?"

“Quite right, Colonel.”

“Ah, yes—how could I have forgotten it! Mamma,” he again trumpeted into his mother’s ear, “mamma, Sub-lieutenant Romashov is from our province; he’s from Narovtschátski.”

“Ah, ah,” and the old woman raised her eyebrows as a sign that she understood. “Well, then, you’re, of course, a son of Sergei Petrovich Shishkin?”

“No, dear mother,” roared the Colonel, “you are wrong. His name is Romashov, not Shishkin.”

“Yes, didn’t I say so? I never knew Sergei Petrovich except by hearsay; but I often met Peter Petrovich. He was a charming young man. We were near neighbours, and I congratulate you, my young friend, on your relationship.”

“Well, as you will have it, you old deaf-as-a-post,” exclaimed the Colonel, interrupting her with good-humoured cynicism.” But now, let’s sit down; please take a seat, Sub-lieutenant. Lieutenant Federovski,” he shrieked towards the door, “stop your work and come and have a schnapps.” The Adjutant, who, according to the custom in many regiments, dined every day with his chief, hurriedly entered the dining-room. He clicked his spurs softly and discreetly, walked straight up to the little majolica table with the sakuska,[10] calmly helped himself to a schnapps, and ate with extreme calmness and enjoyment. Romashov noticed all that with an absurd, envious feeling of admiration.

“You’ll take one, won’t you?” said Shulgovich to Romashov. “You’re no teetotaller, you know.”

“No, thank you very much,” replied Romashov hoarsely; and, with a slight cough, “I do not usually——”

“Bravo, my young friend. Stick to that in future.”

They sat down to table. The dinner was good and abundant. Any one could observe

that, in this childless family, both host and hostess had an innocent little weakness for good living. Dinner consisted of chicken soup with vegetables, roast bream with kascha,[11] a splendid fat duck and asparagus. On the table stood three remarkable decanters containing red wine, white wine, and madeira, resplendent with embossed silver stoppers bearing elegant foreign marks. The Colonel, whose violent explosion of wrath but a short time previously had evidently given him an excellent appetite, ate with an elegance and taste that struck the spectator with pleasure and surprise. He joked all the time with a certain rough humour. When the asparagus was put on the table, he crammed a corner of his dazzlingly white serviette well down under his chin, and exclaimed in a lively way—

“If I were the Tsar, I would eat asparagus every day of my life.”

Only once, at the fish course, he fell into his usual domineering tone, and shouted almost harshly to Romashov—

“Sub-lieutenant, be good enough to put your knife down. Fish and cutlets are eaten only with a fork. An officer must know how to eat properly; he may, at any time, you know, be invited to the palace. Don’t forget that.”

Romashov was uncomfortable and constrained the whole time. He did not know what to do with his hands, which, for the most part, he kept under the table plaiting the fringe of the tablecloth. He had long got out of the habit of observing what was regarded as “good form” in an elegant and wealthy house. And, during the whole time he was at table, one sole thought tortured him: “How disagreeable this is, and what weakness and cowardice on my part not to have the courage to refuse this humiliating invitation to dinner. Now I shall not stand this any longer. I’ll get up and bow to the company, and go my way. They may think what they please about it. They can hardly eat me up for that—nor rob me of my soul, my thoughts, my consciousness. Shall I go?” And again he was obliged to acknowledge to himself, with a heart overflowing with pain and indignation, that he lacked the moral courage

necessary to assert his individuality and self-respect.

Twilight was falling when at last coffee was served. The red, slanting beams of the setting sun filtered in through the window blinds, and sportively cast little copper-coloured spots or rays on the dark furniture, on the white tablecloth, and the clothes and countenances of those present. Conversation gradually languished. All sat silent, as though hypnotized by the mystic mood of the dying day.

“When I was an ensign,” said Shulgovich, breaking the silence, “we had for the chief of our brigade a General named Fofanov. He was just one of those gentle and simple old fogies who had risen from the ranks during a time of war, and, as I believe, belonged at the start to what we call Kantonists.[12] I remember how at reviews he always went straight up to the big drum—he was insanely enamoured of that instrument—and said to the drummer, ‘Come, come, my friend, play me something really melancholy.’ This same General had also the habit of going to bed directly the clock struck eleven. When the clock was just on the stroke of the hour, he invariably said to his guests, ‘Well, well, gentlemen, eat, drink, and enjoy yourselves, but I’m going to throw myself into the arms of Neptune.’ Somebody once remarked, ‘Your Excellency, you mean the arms of Morpheus?’ ‘Oh, that’s the same thing. They both belong to the same mineralogy.’ Well, that’s just what I am going to do, gentlemen.”

Shulgovich got up and placed his serviette on the arm of his chair. “I, too, am going to throw myself into the arms of Neptune. I release you, gentlemen.”

Both officers got up and stretched themselves. “A bitter, ironical smile played on his thin lips,” thought Romashov about himself—only thought, however, for at that moment his countenance was pale, wretched, and by no means prepossessing to look at.

Once more Romashov was on his way home, and once more he felt himself lonely, abandoned, and helpless in this gloomy and hostile place. Once more the sun flamed

in the west, amidst heavy, dark blue thunder-clouds, and once more before Romashov's eyes, in the distance, behind houses and fields, at the verge of the horizon, there loomed a fantastic fairy city beckoning to him with promises of marvellous beauty and happiness.

The darkness fell suddenly between the rows of houses. A few little Jewish children ran, squealing, along the path. Here and there in doorways, in the embrasures of windows, and in the dusk of gardens there were sounds of women's laughter, provocative and unintermittent, and with a quiver of warm animalistic gladness which is heard only when spring is near. With the deep yet calm melancholy that now lay heavy on Romashov's heart there were mingled strange, dim memories of a bliss miraged but never enjoyed in youth's still lovelier spring, and there arose in his heart a delicious presentiment of a strong, invincible love that at last gained its object.

When Romashov reached his abode he found Hainán in his dark and dirty cupboard in front of Pushkin's bust. The great bard was smeared all over with grease, and before him burning candles cast bright blurs on the statue's nose, its thick lips and muscular neck. Hainán sat, in the Turkish style, cross-legged on the three boards that constituted his bed, rocked his body to and fro, and mumbled out in a sing-song tone something weird, melancholy, and monotonous.

"Hainán," shouted Romashov.

The servant started, jumped up, and stood at attention. Fear and embarrassment were displayed on his countenance.

"Allah?" asked Romashov in the most friendly way.

The Circassian's shaven boyish mouth expanded in a broad grin which showed his beautiful white teeth in the candle-light.

"Allah, your Honour."

"It is all the same, Hainán. Allah is in you. Allah is in me. There is one Allah for us

all."

"My excellent Hainán," thought Romashov to himself as he went into his room. "And I dare not shake hands with him. Dare not! Damn it all! from to-day I will dress and undress myself. It's a disgrace that some one else should do it for me."

That evening he did not go to the mess-room, but stayed at home and brought out of a drawer a thick, ruled book, nearly entirely filled with elegant, irregular handwriting. He wrote far into the night. It was the third in order of Romashov's novels, and its title ran: A Fatal Beginning.

But our lieutenant blushed furiously at his literary efforts, and he would not have been induced for anything in the world to acknowledge his authorship.

VIII

BARRACKS had just begun to be built for the garrison troops on what was called the "Cattle Square," outside the town, on the other side of the railway. Meanwhile the companies were quartered here and there in the town. The officers' mess-room was situated in a rather small house. The drawing-room and ballroom had their windows over the street. The other rooms, the windows of which overlooked a dark, dirty backyard, were set apart for kitchen, dining-room, billiard-room, guest-chamber, and ladies'-room. A long narrow corridor with doors to all the rooms in the house ran the whole length of the building. In the rooms that were seldom used, and not often cleaned or aired, a musty, sour smell greeted the visitor as he entered.

Romashov reached the mess at 9 p.m. Five or six unmarried officers had already assembled for the appointed soirée, but the ladies had not yet arrived. For some time past there had been a keen rivalry amongst the latter to display their acquaintance with the demands of fashion, according to which it was incumbent on a lady with pretensions to elegance scrupulously to avoid being among the first to reach the

ballroom. The musicians were already in their places in a sort of gallery that was connected with the room by means of a large window composed of many panes of glass. Three-branched candelabra on the pillars between the windows shed their radiance, and lamps were suspended from the roof. The bright illumination on the scanty furniture, consisting only of Viennese chairs, the bare walls, and the common white muslin window-curtains, gave the somewhat spacious room a very empty and deserted air.

In the billiard-room the two Adjutants of the battalion, Biek-Agamalov and Olisár—the only count in the regiment—were engaged in a game of “Carolina.” The stakes were only ale. Olisár—tall, gaunt, sleek, and pomaded—an “old, young man” with wrinkled face and bald crown, scattered freely billiard-room jests and slang. Biek-Agamalov lost both his game and his temper in consequence. In the seat by the window sat Staff-Captain Lieschtschenko—a melancholy individual of forty-five, an altogether miserable figure, the mere sight of which could bore people to death—watching the game. His whole appearance gave the impression of hopeless melancholy. Everything about him was limp: his long, fleshy, wrinkled red nose; his dim, dark-brown thread-like moustache that reached down below his chin. His eyebrows, which grew a good way down to the bridge of his nose, made his eyes look as if he were just about to weep, and his thin, lean body with his sunken chest and sloping shoulders looked like a clothes-horse in its worn and shiny uniform. Lieschtschenko neither smoked, drank, nor played; but he found a strange pleasure in looking at the cards from behind the players’ backs, and in following the movements of the balls in the billiard-room. He likewise delighted in listening, huddled up in a dining-room window, to the row and vulgarities of the wildest drinking-bouts. He could thus sit, for hours at a time, motionless as a stone statue, and without uttering a single word. All the officers were so accustomed to this that they almost regarded the silent Lieschtschenko as one of the inevitable fixtures of a normal gambling or drinking bout.

After saluting the three officers, Romashov sat down by Lieschtschenko, who courteously made room for him, as with a deep sigh he fixed his sorrowful and friendly, dog-like eyes on him.

“How is Maria Viktorovna?” asked Romashov in the careless and intentionally loud voice which is generally employed in conversation with deaf or rather stupid people, and which all the regiment (including the ensigns) used when they happened to address Lieschtschenko.

“Quite well, thanks,” replied Lieschtschenko with a still deeper sigh. “You understand—her nerves; but, you know, at this time of year——”

“But why did she not come with you? But perhaps Maria Viktorovna is not coming to the soirée to-night?”

“What do you mean? of course she’s coming; but you see, my dear fellow, there was no room for me in the cab. She and Raisa Peterson took a trap between them, and as you’ll understand, my dear fellow, they said to me, ‘Don’t come here with your dirty, rough boots, they simply ruin our clothes.’”

“Croisez in the middle—a nice ‘kiss.’ Pick up the ball, Biek,” cried Olisár.

“I am not a lackey. Do you think I’ll pick up your balls?” replied Biek-Agamalov in a furious tone.

Lieschtschenko caught in his mouth the tips of his long moustaches, and thereupon began sucking and chewing them with an extremely thoughtful and troubled air.

“Yuri Alexievich, my dear fellow, I have a favour to ask you,” he blurted out at last in a shy and deprecating tone. “You lead the dance to-night, eh?”

“Yes, damn it all! They have so arranged it among themselves. I did try to get off it, kow-towed to the Adjutant—ah, pretty nearly reported myself ill. ‘In that case,’ said he, ‘you must be good enough to hand in a medical certificate.’”

“This is what I want you to do for me,” Lieschtschenko went on in the same humble

voice. “For God’s sake see that she does not have to sit out many dances.”

“Maria Viktorovna?”

“Yes, please——”

“Double with the yellow in the corner,” said Biek-Agamalov, indicating the stroke he intended to make. Being short, he often found billiards very troublesome. To reach the ball now he was obliged to lie lengthways on the table. He became quite red in the face through the effort, and two veins in his forehead swelled to such an extent that they converged at the top of his nose like the letter V.[13]

“What a conjurer!” said Olisár in a jeering, ironical tone. “I could not do that.”

Agamalov’s cue touched the ball with a dry, scraping sound. The ball did not move from its place.

“Miss!” cried Olisár jubilantly, as he danced a cancan round the billiard table. “Do you snore when you sleep, my pretty creature?”

Agamalov banged the thick end of his cue on the floor.

“If you ever again speak when I am making a stroke,” he roared, his black eyes glittering, “I’ll throw up the game.”

“Don’t, whatever you do, get excited. It’s so bad for your health. Now it’s my turn.”

Just at that moment in rushed one of the soldiers stationed in the hall for the service of the ladies, and came to attention in front of Romashov.

“Your Honour, the ladies would like you to come into the ballroom.”

Three ladies who had just arrived were already pacing up and down the ballroom. They were none of them exactly young; the eldest of them, the wife of the Club President—Anna Ivanovna Migunov—turned to Romashov and exclaimed in a prim, affected tone, drawling out the words and tossing her head:

“Sub-lieutenant Romashov, please order the band to play something whilst we are waiting.”

“With pleasure, ladies,” replied Romashov with a polite bow. He then went up to the orchestra and called to the conductor, “Zisserman, play us something pretty.”

The first thundering notes of the overture to “Long live the Tsar” rolled through the open windows of the music gallery across the ballroom, and the flames of the candelabra vibrated to the rhythm of the drum beats.

The ladies gradually assembled. A year ago, Romashov had felt an indescribable pleasure in those very minutes before the ball when, in accordance with his duties as director of the ball, he received the ladies as they arrived in the hall. Oh, what mystic witchery those enchantresses possessed when, fired by the strains of the orchestra, by the glare of many lights, and by the thought of the approaching ball, they suffered themselves, in delicious confusion, to be divested of their boas, fur cloaks, wraps, etc. Women’s silvery laughter, high-pitched chatter, mysterious whispers, the freezing perfume from furs covered with hoar-frost, essences, powder, kid gloves, etc. All this commingled constituted the mystic, intoxicating atmosphere that is only found where beautiful women in evening dress crowd one another immediately before entering a ballroom. What a charm in their lovely eyes, beaming with the certainty of victory, that cast a last, swift, scrutinizing glance in the mirror at their hair! What music in the frou-frou of trains and silken skirts! What bliss in the touch of delicate little hands, shawls, and fans!

All this enchantment, Romashov felt, had now ceased for ever. He now understood, and not without a certain sense of shame, that much of this enchantment had owed its origin to the perusal of bad French novels, in which occurred the inevitable description of how “Gustave and Armand cross the vestibule when invited to a ball at the Russian Embassy.” He also knew that the ladies of his regiment wore for years the same evening dress, which, on certain festive occasions, was pathetically remodelled, and that the white gloves very often smelt of benzine. The generally prevailing passion for different sorts of aigrettes, scarves, sham diamonds, feathers,

and ribbons of loud and gaudy colours, struck him as being highly ridiculous and pretentious. The same lack of taste and shabby-genteel love of display were shown even in their homes. They “made up” shamelessly, and some faces by this means had acquired a bluish tint; but the most unpleasant part of the affair, in Romashov’s opinion, was what he and others in the regiment, on the day after the ball, discovered as having happened behind the scenes—gossip, flirtations, and big and little scandals. And he also knew how much poverty, envy, love of intrigue, petty provincial pride, and low morality were hidden behind all this splendid misery.

Now Captain Taliman and his wife entered the room. They were both tall and compact. She was a delicate, fragile blonde; he, dark, with the face of a veritable brigand, and affected with a chronic hoarseness and cough. Romashov knew beforehand that Taliman would very soon whisper his usual phrase, and, sure enough, the latter directly afterwards exclaimed, as his gipsy eyes wandered spy-like over the ballroom—

“Have you started cards yet, Lieutenant?”

“No, not yet, they are all together in the dining-room.”

“Ah, really, do you know, Sonochka, I think I’ll go into the dining-room for a minute just to glance at the Russki Invalid. And you, my dear Romashov, kindly look after my wife here for a bit—they are starting the quadrille there.”

After this the Lykatschev family—a whole caravan of pretty, laughing, lisping young ladies, always chattering—made its appearance. At the head walked the mother, a lively little woman, who, despite her forty years, danced every dance, and brought children into the world “between the second and third quadrille,” as Artschakovski, the wit of the regiment, liked to put it.

The young ladies instantly threw themselves on Romashov, laughing and chattering in the attempt to talk one another down.

“Lieutenant Romashov, why do you never come to thee uth?”

“You wicked man!”

“Naughty, naughty, naughty!”

“Wicked man!”

“I will give you the firtht quadwille.”

“Mesdames, mesdames,” said Romashov in self-defence, bowing and scraping in all directions, and forced against his will to do the polite.

At that very moment he happened to look in the direction of the street door. He recognized, silhouetted against the glass, Raisa Alexandrovna’s thin face and thick, prominent lips, which, however, were almost hidden by a white kerchief tied over her hat.

Romashov, like a schoolboy caught in the act, slipped into the reception-room as quick as lightning, but however much he might try to convince himself that he escaped Raisa’s notice, he felt a certain anxiety. In his quondam mistress’s small eyes lay a new expression, hard, menacing, and revengeful, that foreboded a bad time for him.

He walked into the dining-room, where a crowd of officers were assembled. Nearly all the chairs round the long oilcloth-covered table were engaged. The blue tobacco smoke curled slowly along the roof and walls. A rancid smell of fried butter emanated from the kitchen. Two or three groups of officers had already made inroads on the cold collation and schnapps. A few were reading the newspapers. A loud, multitudinous murmur of voices blended with the click of billiard balls, the rattle of knives, and the slamming of the kitchen door. A cold, unpleasant draught from the vestibule caught one’s feet and legs.

Romashov looked for Lieutenant Bobetinski and went to him.

Bobetinski was standing, with his hands in his trousers pockets, quite near the long table. He was rocking backwards and forwards, first on his toes, then on his heels,

and his eyes were blinking from the smoke. Romashov gently touched his arm.

“I beg your pardon!” said Bobetinski as he turned round and drew one hand out of his pocket; but he continued peering with his eyes, squinting at Romashov, and screwing his moustache with a superior air and his elbows akimbo. “Ha! it is you? This is very delightful!”

He always assumed an affected, mincing air, and spoke in short, broken sentences, thinking, by so doing, that he imitated the aristocratic Guardsmen and the jeunesse dorée of St. Petersburg. He had a very high opinion of himself, regarded himself as unsurpassed as a dancer and connoisseur of women and horses, and loved to play the part of a blasé man of the world, although he was hardly twenty-four. He always shrugged his shoulders coquettishly high, jabbered horrible French, pattered along the streets with limp, crooked knees and trailing gait, and invariably accompanied his conversation with careless, weary gestures.

“My good Peter Taddeevich,” implored Romashov in a piteous voice, “do, please, conduct the ball to-night instead of me.”

“Mais, mon ami”—Bobetinski shrugged his shoulders, raised his eyebrows, and assumed a stupid expression. “But, my friend,” he translated into Russian, “why so? Pourquoi donc? Really, how shall I say it? You—you astonish me.”

“Well, my dear fellow, please——”

“Stop! No familiarities, if you please. My dear fellow, indeed!”

“But I beg you, Peter Taddeevich. You see, my head aches, and I have a pain in my throat; it is absolutely impossible for me to——”

In this way Romashov long and fruitlessly assailed his brother officer. Finally, as a last expedient, he began to deluge him with gross flattery.

“Peter Taddeevich, there is no one in the whole regiment so capable as yourself of conducting a ball with good taste and genius, and, moreover, a lady has specially

desired——”

“A lady!” Bobetinski assumed a blank, melancholy expression. “A lady, did you say? Ah, my friend, at my age——” he smiled with a studied expression of hopeless resignation. “Besides, what is woman? Ha, ha! an enigma. However, I’ll do what you want me to do.” And in the same doleful tone he added suddenly, “Mon cher ami, do you happen to have—what do you call it—three roubles?”

“Ah, no, alas!” sighed Romashov.

“Well, one rouble, then?”

“But——”

“Désagréable. The old, old story. At any rate, I suppose we can take a glass of vodka together?”

“Alas, alas! Peter Taddeevich, I have no further credit.”

“Oh! O pauvre enfant! But it does not matter, come along!” Bobetinski waved his hand with an air of magnanimity. “I will treat you.”

Meanwhile, in the dining-room the conversation had become more and more high-pitched and interesting for some of those present. The talk was about certain officers’ duels that had lately taken place, and opinions were evidently much divided.

The speaker at that moment was Artschakovski, a rather obscure individual who was suspected, not without reason, of cheating at cards. There was a story current about him, which was whispered about, to the effect that, before he entered the regiment, when he still belonged to the reserves, he had been head of a posting-station, and was arrested and condemned for killing a post-boy by a blow of his fist.

“Duels may often be necessary among the fools and dandies of the Guards,” exclaimed Artschakovski roughly, “but it is not the same thing with us. Let us assume for an instance that I and Vasili Vasilich Lipski get blind drunk at mess, and

that I, who am a bachelor, whilst drunk, box his ears. What will be the result? Well, either he refuses to exchange a couple of bullets with me, and is consequently turned out of the regiment, or he accepts the challenge and gets a bullet in his stomach; but in either case his children will die of starvation. No, all that sort of thing is sheer nonsense."

"Wait a bit," interrupted the old toper, Lieutenant-Colonel Liech, as he held his glass with one hand and with the other made several languid motions in the air; "do you understand what the honour of the uniform is? It is the sort of thing, my dear fellow, which—— But speaking of duels, I remember an event that happened in 1862 in the Temriukski Regiment."

"For God's sake," exclaimed Artschakovski, interrupting him in turn, "spare us your old stories or tell us something that took place after the reign of King Orre."

"What cheek! you are only a little boy compared with me. Well, as I was saying——"

"Only blood can wipe out the stain of an insult," stammered Bobetinski, who plumed himself on being a cock, and now took part in the conversation in a bragging tone.

"Well, gentlemen, there was at that time a certain ensign—Solúcha," said Liech, making one more attempt.

Captain Osadchi, commander of the 1st Company, approached from the buffet.

"I hear that you are talking about duels—most interesting," he began in a gruff, rolling bass that reminded one of a lion's roar, and immediately drowned every murmur in the room. "I have the honour, Lieutenant-Colonel. Good-evening, gentlemen."

"Ah! what do I see—the Colossus of Rhodes? Come and sit down," replied Liech affably. "Come and have a glass with me, you prince of giants."

"All right," answered Osadchi in an octave lower.

This officer always had a curiously unnerving effect on Romashov, and at the same time aroused in him a mingled feeling of fear and curiosity. Osadchi was no less famous than Shulgovich, not only in the regiment but also in the whole division, for his deafening voice when giving the word of command, his gigantic build, and tremendous physical strength. He was also renowned for his remarkable knowledge of the service and its requirements. Now and then it even happened that Osadchi was, in the interests of the service, removed from his own regiment to another, and he usually succeeded, in the course of half a year, in turning the most backward, good-for-nothing troops into exemplary war-machines. His magic power seemed much more incomprehensible to his brother officers inasmuch as he never—or at least in very rare instances—had recourse to blows or insults. Romashov always thought he could perceive, behind those handsome, gloomy, set features, the extreme paleness of which was thrown into stronger relief by the bluish-black hair, something strained, masterly, alluring, and cruel—a gigantic, bloodthirsty wild beast. Often whilst observing Osadchi unseen from a distance, Romashov would try to imagine what the man would be like if he were in a rage, and, at the very thought of it, his limbs froze with fear. And now, without a thought of protesting, he saw how Osadchi, with the careless calm that enormous physical strength always lends, coolly sat down on the seat intended for himself.

Osadchi drained his glass, nibbled a crisp radish, and said in a tone of indifference—

"Well, what is the verdict?"

"That story, my dear friend," Liech put in, "I will tell you at once. It was at the time when I was serving in the Temriukski Regiment, a Lieutenant von Zoon—the soldiers called him 'Pod-Zvoon'—who, on a certain occasion, happened to be at mess——"

Here, however, Liech was interrupted by Lipski, a red-faced, thick-set staff captain

who, in spite of his good forty years, did not think it beneath him to be the Jack-pudding in ordinary and butt of the men, and by virtue thereof had assumed the insolent, jocular tone of a spoilt favourite.

“Allow me, Captain, to put the matter in a nutshell. Lieutenant Artschakovski says that duels are nothing but madness and folly. For such heresy he ought to be sent with a bursary to a seminary for priests—but enough of that. But to get on with the story, Lieutenant Bobetinski took up the debate and demanded blood. Then came Lieutenant-Colonel Liech with his hoary chestnuts, which, on that occasion, by a wonderful dispensation of Providence, we managed to escape. After that, Sub-lieutenant Michin tried, in the midst of the general noise, to expound his views, which were more and more undistinguishable both from the speaker’s insufficient strength of lungs and his well-known bashfulness.”

Sub-lieutenant Michin—an undersized youth with sunken chest, dark, pock-marked, freckled face and two timid, almost frightened eyes—blushed till the tears came into his eyes.

“Gentlemen, I only—gentlemen, I may be mistaken,” he said, “but, in my opinion—I mean in other words, as I look at the matter, every particular case ought necessarily to be considered by itself.” He now began to bow and stammer worse and worse, at the same time grabbing nervously with the tips of his fingers at his invisible moustaches. “A duel may occasionally be useful, even necessary, nobody can deny, and I suppose there is no one among us who will not approach the lists—when honour demands it. That is, as I have said, indisputable; but, gentlemen, sometimes the highest honour might also be found in—in holding out the hand of reconciliation. Well, of course, I cannot now say on what occasions this——”

“Ugh! you wretched Ivanovich,” exclaimed Artschakovski, interrupting him in a rude and contemptuous tone, “don’t stand here mumbling. Go home to your dear mamma and the feeding-bottle.”

“Gentlemen, won’t you allow me to finish what I was going to say?”

But Osadchi with his powerful bass voice put a stop to the dispute. In a second there was silence in the room.

“Every duel, gentlemen, must, above all, end in death for at least one of the parties, otherwise it is absurd. Directly coddling or humanity, so-called, comes in, the whole thing is turned into a farce. ‘Fifteen paces distance and only one shot.’ How damnably pitiful! Such a deplorable event only happens in such tomfooleries as are called French duels, which one reads about, now and then, in our papers. They meet, each fires a bullet out of a toy pistol, and the thing is over. Then come the cursed newspaper hacks with their report on the duel, which invariably winds up thus: ‘The duel went off satisfactorily. Both adversaries exchanged shots without inflicting any injury on either party, and both displayed the greatest courage during the whole time. At the breakfast, after the champagne, both the former mortal enemies fell into each other’s arms, etc.’ A duel like that, gentlemen, is nothing but a scandal, and does nothing to raise the tone of our society.”

Several of the company tried to speak at once. Liech, in particular, made a last despairing attack on those present to finish his story:

“Well, well, my friends, it was like this—but listen, you puppies.”

Nobody, however, did listen to his adjurations, and his supplicating glances wandered in vain over the gathering, seeking for a deliverer and ally. All turned disrespectfully away, eagerly engrossed in that interesting subject, and Liech shook his head sorrowfully. At last he caught sight of Romashov. The young officer had the same miserable experience as his comrades with regard to the old Lieutenant-Colonel’s talents as a story-teller, but his heart grew soft, and he determined to sacrifice himself. Liech dragged his prey away with him to the table.

“This—well—come and listen to me, Ensign. Ah, sit here and drink a glass with me. All the others are mere asses and loons.” Liech, with considerable difficulty, raised

his languid arm and made a contemptuous gesture towards the group of officers. “Buzz, buzz, buzz! What understanding or experience is there amongst such things? But wait a bit, you shall hear.”

Glass in one hand, the other waving in the air as if he were the conductor of a big orchestra, Liech began one of his interminable stories with which he was larded—like sausages with liver—and which he never brought to a conclusion because of an endless number of divagations from the subject, parentheses, embroideries, and analogues. The anecdote in question was about an American duel, Heaven only knows how many years ago, between two officers who, playing for their lives, guessed odd and even on the last figure of a date on a rouble-note. But one of them—it was never quite cleared up as to whether it was a certain Pod-Zvoon or his friend Solúcha—was blackguard enough to paste together two rouble-notes of different dates of issue, whereby the front had always an even date, but the back an odd one—“or perhaps it was the other way about,” pondered Liech long and conscientiously. “You see, my dear fellow, they of course then began to dispute. One of them said——”

Alas, however, Liech did not even this time get to the end of his story. Madame Raisa Alexandrovna Peterson had glided into the buffet. Standing at the door, but not entering, which was, moreover, not permitted to ladies, she shouted with the roguishness and audacity of a privileged young lady:

“Gentlemen, what do I see? The ladies have arrived long ago, and here you are sitting and having a good old time. We want to dance.”

Two or three young officers arose to go into the ballroom. The rest coolly remained sitting where they were, chatting, drinking, and smoking, without taking the slightest notice of the coquettish lady. Only Liech, the chivalrous old professional flirt, strutted up with bandy, uncertain legs to Raisa, with hands crossed over his chest—and pouring the contents of his glass over his uniform, cried with a drunken

emotion:

“Most divine among women, how can any one forget his duties to a queen of beauty? Your hand, my charmer; just one kiss——”

“Yuri Alexievich,” Raisa babbled, “it’s your turn to-day to arrange the dancing. You are a nice one to do that.”

“Mille pardons, madame. C’est ma faute. This is my fault,” cried Bobetinski, as he flew off to her. On the way he improvised a sort of ballet with scrapes, bounds, genuflections, and a lot of wonderful attitudes and gestures. “Your hand. Votre main, madame. Gentlemen, to the ballroom, to the ballroom!”

He offered his arm to Raisa Alexandrovna, and walked out of the room as proud as a peacock. Directly afterwards he was heard shouting in his well-known, affected tone:

“Messieurs, take partners for a waltz. Band! a waltz!”

“Excuse me, Colonel, I am obliged to go now. Duty calls me,” said Romashov.

“Ah, my dear fellow,” replied Liech, as his head drooped with a dejected look—“are you, too, such a coxcomb as the others? But wait just a moment, Ensign; have you heard the story of Moltke—about the great Field-Marshal Moltke, the strategist?”

“Colonel, on my honour, I must really go—I——”

“Well, well, don’t get excited. I won’t be long. You see, it was like this: the great Man of Silence used to take his meals in the officers’ mess, and every day he laid in front of him on the table a purse full of gold with the intention of bestowing it on the first officer from whose lips he heard a single intelligent word. Well, at last, you know, the old man died after having borne with this world for ninety years, but—you see—the purse had always been in safe keeping. Now run along, my boy. Go and hop about like a sparrow.”

IX

IN the ballroom, the walls of which seemed to vibrate in the same rhythm as the deafening music, two couples were dancing. Bobetinski, whose elbows flapped like a pair of wings, pirouetted with short, quick steps around his partner, Madame Taliman, who was dancing with the stately composure of a stone monument. The gigantic Artschakovski of the fair locks made the youngest of the Lykatschev girls, a little thing with rosy cheeks, rotate round him, whereas he, leaning forward, and closely observing his partner's hair and shoulders, moved his legs as if he were dancing with a child. Fifteen ladies lined the walls quite deserted, and trying to look as if they did not mind it. As, which was always the case at these soirées, the gentlemen numbered less than a quarter of the ladies, the prospect of a lively and enjoyable evening was not particularly promising.

Raisa Alexandrovna, who had just opened the ball, and was, therefore, the object of the other ladies' envy, was now dancing with the slender, ceremonious Olisár. He held one of her hands as if it had been fixed to his left side. She supported her chin in a languishing way against her other hand, which rested on his right shoulder. She kept her head far thrown back in an affected and unnatural attitude. When the dance was over she sat purposely near Romashov, who was leaning against the doorpost of the ladies' dressing-room. She fanned herself violently, and looking up to Olisár, who was leaning over her, lisped in a soft dolcissimo:

"Tell me, Count, tell me, please, why do I always feel so hot? Do tell me."

Olisár made a slight bow, clicked his spurs, stroked his moustache several times.

"Dear lady, that is a question which I don't think even Martin Sadek could answer."

When Olisár cast a scrutinizing glance at the fair Raisa's décolleté bosom, pitiable and bare as the desert itself, she began at once to breathe quickly and deeply.

"Ah, I have always an abnormally high temperature," Raisa Alexandrovna went on

to say with a significant expression, insinuating by her smile that her words had a double meaning. “I suffer, too, from an unusually fiery temperament.”

Olisár gave vent to a short, soft chuckle.

Romashov stood looking sideways at Raisa, thinking with disgust, “Oh, how loathsome she is.” And at the thought that he had once enjoyed her favours, he experienced the sensation as if he had not changed his linen for months.

“Well, well, Count, don’t laugh. Perhaps you do not know that my mother was a Greek?”

“And how horribly she speaks, too,” thought Romashov. “Curious that I never noticed this before. It sounds as if she had a chronic cold or a polypus in her nose—‘by buther was a Greek.’”

Now Raisa turned to Romashov and threw him a challenging glance.

Romashov mentally said, “His face became impassive like a mask.”

“How do you do, Yuri Alexievich? Why don’t you come and speak to me?” Romashov went up to her. With a venomous glance from her small, sharp eyes she pressed his hand. The pupils of her eyes stood motionless.

“At your desire I have kept the third quadrille for you. I hope you have not forgotten that.”

Romashov bowed.

“You are very polite! At least you might say Enchanté, madame!” (“Edchadté, badabe” was what Romashov heard.) “Isn’t he a blockhead, Count?”

“Of course, I remember,” mumbled Romashov insincerely. “I thank you for the great honour.”

Bobetinski did nothing to liven up the evening. He conducted the ball with an apathetic, condescending look, just as if he was performing, from a strict sense of duty, something very distasteful and uninteresting to himself, but of infinite

importance to the rest of mankind. When, however, the third quadrille was about to begin, he got, as it were, a little new life, and, as he hurried across the room with the long gliding steps of a skater, he shouted in a loud voice:

“Quadrille monstre! Cavaliers, engagez vos dames!”

Romashov and Raisa Alexandrovna took up a position close to the window of the music gallery, with Michin and Madame Lieschtschenko for their vis-à-vis. The latter hardly reached up to her partner’s shoulders. The number of dancers had now very noticeably increased, and the couples stood up for the third quadrille. Every dance had therefore to be repeated twice.

“There must be an explanation; this must be put a stop to,” thought Romashov, almost deafened by the noise of the big drums and the braying brass instruments in his immediate proximity. “I have had enough! ‘And in his countenance you could read fixed resolution.’”

The “dancing-masters” and those who arranged the regimental balls had preserved by tradition certain fairly innocent frolics and jokes for such soirées, which were greatly appreciated by the younger dancers. For instance, at the third quadrille it was customary, as it were accidentally, by changing the dances, to cause confusion among the dancers, who with uproar and laughter did their part in increasing the general disorder. Bobetinski’s device that evening consisted in the gentlemen pretending to forget their partners and dancing the figure by themselves. Suddenly a “galop all round” was ordered, the result of which was a chaos of ladies and gentlemen rushing about in fruitless search for their respective partners.

“Mesdames, avancez—pardon, reculez. Gentlemen, alone. Pardon—balancez avec vos dames!”

Raisa Alexandrovna kept talking to Romashov in the most virulent tone and panting with fury, but smiling all the while as if her conversation was wholly confined to pleasant and joyous subjects.

“I will not allow any one to treat me in such a manner, do you hear? I am not a good-for-nothing girl you can do as you like with. Besides, decent people don’t behave as you are behaving.”

“Raisa Alexandrovna, for goodness’ sake try to curb your temper,” begged Romashov in a low, imploring tone.

“Angry with you? No, sir, that would be to pay you too high a compliment. I despise you, do you hear? Despise you; but woe to him who dares to play with my feelings! You left my letter unanswered. How dare you?”

“But your letter did not reach me, I assure you.”

“Ha! don’t try to humbug me. I know your lies, and I also know where you spend your time. Don’t make any mistake about that.

“Do you think I don’t know this woman, this Lilliput queen, and her intrigues? Rather, you may be sure of that,” Raisa went on to say. “She fondly imagines she’s a somebody; yes, she does! Her father was a thieving notary.”

“I must beg you, in my presence, to express yourself in a more decent manner in regard to my friends,” interrupted Romashov sharply.

Then and there a painful scene occurred. Raisa stormed and broke out in a torrent of aspersions on Shurochka. The fury within her had now the mastery; her artificial smiles were banished, and she even tried to drown the music by her snuffly voice. Romashov, conscious of his impotence to try to put in a word in defence of the grossly insulted Shurochka, was distracted with shame and wrath. In addition to this were the intolerable din of the band and the disagreeable attention of the bystanders, which his partner’s unbridled fury was beginning to attract.

“Yes, her father was a common thief; she has nothing to stick her nose in the air about and she ought, to be sure, to be very careful not to give herself airs!” shrieked Raisa. “And for a thing like that to dare to look down on us! We know something else about her, too!”

“I implore you!” whispered Romashov.

“Don’t make any mistake about it; both you and she shall feel my claws. In the first place, I shall open her husband’s eyes—the eyes of that fool Nikoläiev, who has, for the third time, been ‘ploughed’ in his exam. But what else can one expect from a fool like that, who does not know what is going on under his nose? And it is certainly no longer any secret who the lover is.”

“Mazurka générale! Promenade!” howled Bobetinski, who at that moment was strutting through the room with the pomp of an archangel.

The floor rocked under the heavy tramping of the dancers, and the muslin curtains and coloured lamps moved in unison with the notes of the mazurka.

“Why cannot we part as friends?” Romashov asked in a shy tone. He felt within himself that this woman not only caused him indescribable disgust, but also aroused in his heart a cowardice he could not subdue, and which filled him with self-contempt. “You no longer love me; let us part good friends.”

“Ha! ha! You’re frightened; you’re trying to cut my claws. No, my fine fellow. I am not one of those who are thrown aside with impunity. It is I, mind you, who throw aside one who causes me disgust and loathing—not the other way about. And as for your baseness——”

“That’s enough; let’s end all this talk,” said Romashov, interrupting her in a hollow voice and with clenched teeth.

“Five minutes’ entr’acte. Cavaliers, occupez vos dames!” shouted Bobetinski.

“I’ll end it when I think fit. You have deceived me shamefully. For you I have sacrificed all that a virtuous woman can bestow. It is your fault that I dare not look my husband in the face—my husband, the best and noblest man on earth. It’s you who made me forget my duties as wife and mother. Oh, why, why did I not remain true to him!”

Romashov could not, however, now refrain from a smile. Raisa Alexandrovna's innumerable amours with all the young, new-fledged officers in the regiment were an open secret, and both by word of mouth and in her letters to Romashov she was in the habit of referring to her "beloved husband" in the following terms: "my fool," or "that despicable creature," or "this booby who is always in the way," etc., etc.

"Ah, you have even the impudence to laugh," she hissed; "but look out now, sir, it is my turn."

With these words she took her partner's arm and tripped along, with swaying hips and smiling a vinegary smile on all sides. When the dance was over her face resumed its former expression of hatred. Again she began to buzz savagely—"like an angry wasp," thought Romashov.

"I shall never forgive you this, do you hear? Never. I know the reason why you have thrown me over so shamelessly and in such a blackguardly fashion; but don't fondly imagine that a new love-intrigue will be successful. No; never, as long as I live, shall that be the case. Instead of acknowledging in a straightforward and honourable way that you no longer love me, you have preferred to cloak your treachery and treat me like a vulgar harlot, reasoning, I suppose, like this: 'If it does not come off with the other, I always have her, you know.' Ha! ha! ha!"

"All right, you may perhaps allow me to speak decently," began Romashov, with restrained wrath. His face grew paler and paler, and he bit his lips nervously. "You have asked for it, and now I tell you straight. I do not love you."

"Oh, what an insult!"

"I have never loved you; nor did you love me. We have both played an unworthy and false game, a miserable, vulgar farce with a nauseous plot and disgusting rôles. Raisa Alexandrovna, I have studied you, and I know you, very likely, better than you do yourself. You lack every requisite of love, tenderness, nay, even common affection. The cause of it is your absolutely superficial character, your narrow, petty

outlook on life. And, besides" (Romashov happened to remember at this point Nasanski's words), "only elect, refined natures can know what a great or real love is."

"Such elect, refined natures, for instance, as your own."

Once more the band thundered forth. Romashov looked almost with hatred at the trombone's wide, shining mouth, that, with the most cynical indifference, flung out its hoarse, howling notes over the whole of the room. And its fellow-culprit—the poor soldier who, with the full force of his lungs, gave life to the instrument—was with his bulging eyes and blue, swollen cheeks, no less an object of his dislike and disgust.

"Don't let us quarrel about it. It is likely enough that I am not worthy of a great and real love, but we are not discussing that now. The fact is that you, with your narrow, provincial views and silly vanity, must needs always be surrounded by men dancing attendance on you, so that you may be able to boast about it to your lady friends in what you are pleased to call 'Society.' And possibly you think I have not understood the purpose of your ostentatiously familiar manner with me at the regimental soirées, your tender glances, etc., the intimately dictatorial tone you always assume when we are seen together. Yes, precisely the chief object was that people should notice the free-and-easy way in which you treated me. Except for this all your game would not have had the slightest meaning, for no real love or affection on my part has ever formed part of your—programme."

"Even if such had been the case I might well have chosen a better and more worthy object than you," replied Raisa, in a haughty and scornful tone.

"Such an answer from you is too ridiculous to insult me; for, listen, I repeat once more, your absurd vanity demands that some slave should always be dancing attendance on you. But the years come and go, and the number of your slaves diminishes. Finally, in order not to be entirely without admirers, you are forced to

sacrifice your plighted troth, your duties as wife and mother."

"No; but that's quite sufficient. You shall most certainly hear from me," whispered Raisa, in a significant tone and with glittering eyes.

At that moment, Captain Peterson came across the room with many absurd skips and shuffles in order to avoid colliding with the dancers. He was a thin, consumptive man with a yellow complexion, bald head, and black eyes, in the warm and moist glance of which lurked treachery and malice. It was said of him that, curiously enough, he was to such an extent infatuated with his wife that he played the part of intimate friend, in an unctuous and sickening way, with all her lovers. It was likewise common knowledge that he had tried by means of acrimonious perfidy and the most vulgar intrigues to be revenged on every single person who had, with joy and relief, turned his back on the fair Raisa's withered charms.

He smiled from a distance at his wife and Romashov with his bluish, pursed lips.

"Are you dancing, Romashov? Well, how are you, my dear Georgi? Where have you been all this time? My wife and I were so used to your company that we have been quite dull without you."

"Been awfully busy," mumbled Romashov.

"Ah, yes, we all know about those military duties," replied Captain Peterson, with a little insinuating whistle that was directly changed into an amicable smile. His black eyes with their yellow pupils wandered, however, from Raisa to Romashov inquisitively.

"I have an idea that you two have been quarrelling. Why do you both look so cross? What has happened?"

Romashov stood silent whilst he gazed, worried and embarrassed, at Raisa's skinny, dark, sinewy neck. Raisa answered promptly, with the easy insolence she invariably displayed when lying:

“Yuri Alexievich is playing the philosopher. He declares that dancing is both stupid and ridiculous, and that he has seen his best days.”

“And yet he dances?” replied the Captain, with a quick, snake-like glance at Romashov. “Dance away, my children, and don’t let me disturb you.”

He had scarcely got out of earshot before Raisa Alexandrovna, in a hypocritical, pathetic tone, burst out with, “And I have deceived this saint, this noblest of husbands. And for whom?—Oh, if he knew all, if he only knew!”

“Mazurka générale,” shrieked Bobetinski. “Gentlemen, resume your partners.”

The violently perspiring bodies of the dancers and the dust arising from the parquet floor made the air of the ballroom close, and the lights in the lamps and candelabra took a dull yellow tint. The dancing was now in full swing, but as the space was insufficient, each couple, who every moment squeezed and pushed against one another, was obliged to tramp on the very same spot. This figure—the last in the quadrille—consisted in a gentleman, who was without a partner, pursuing a couple who were dancing. If he managed to come face to face with a lady he clapped her on the hand, which meant that the lady was now his booty. The lady’s usual partner tried, of course, to prevent this, but by this arose a disorder and uproar which often resulted in some very brutal incidents.

“Actress,” whispered Romashov hoarsely, as he bent nearer to Raisa. “You’re as pitiable as you are ridiculous.”

“And you are drunk,” the worthy lady almost shrieked, giving Romashov at the same time a glance resembling that with which the heroine on the stage measures the villain of the piece from head to foot.

“It only remains for me to find out,” pursued Romashov mercilessly, “the exact reason why I was chosen by you. But this, however, is a question which I can answer myself. You gave yourself to me in order to get a hold on me. Oh, if this had been done out of love or from sentiment merely! But you were actuated by a base

vanity. Are you not frightened at the mere thought of the depths into which we have both sunk, without even a spark of love that might redeem the crime? You must understand that this is even more wretched than when a woman sells herself for money. Then dire necessity is frequently the tempter. But in this case—the memory of this senseless, unpardonable crime will always be to me a source of shame and loathing."

With cold perspiration on his forehead and distraction in his weary eyes, he gazed on the couples dancing. Past him—hardly lifting her feet and without looking at her partner—sailed the majestic Madame Taliman, with motionless shoulders and an ironical, menacing countenance, as if she meant to protect herself against the slightest liberty or insult. Epifanov skipped round her like a little frisky goat. Then glided little Miss Lykatschev, flushed of face, with gleaming eyes, and bare, white, virginal bosom. Then came Olisár with his slender, elegant legs, straight and stiff as a sparrow's. Romashov felt a burning headache and a strong, almost uncontrollable desire to weep; but beside him still stood Raisa, pale with suppressed rage. With an exaggerated theatrical gesture she fired at him the following sarcasm—

"Did any one ever hear such a thing before? A Russian Infantry lieutenant playing the part of the chaste Joseph? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, quite so, my lady. Precisely that part," replied Romashov, glaring with wrath. "I know too well that it is humiliating and ridiculous. Nevertheless, I am not ashamed to express my sorrow that I should have so degraded myself. With our eyes open we have both flung ourselves into a cesspool, and I know that I shall never again deserve a pure and noble woman's love. Who is to blame for this? Well, you. Bear this well in mind—you, you, you—for you were the older and more experienced of us two, especially in affairs of that sort."

Raisa Alexandrovna got up hurriedly from her chair. "That will do," she replied in a dramatic tone. "You have got what you wanted. I hate you. I hope henceforward you

will cease to visit a home where you were received as a friend and relation, where you were entertained and fed, and where, too, you were found out to be the scoundrel you are. Oh, that I had the courage to reveal everything to my husband—that incomparable creature, that saint whom I venerate. Were he only convinced of what has happened he would, I think, know how to avenge the wounded honour of a helpless, insulted woman. He would kill you."

Romashov looked through his eyeglass at her big, faded mouth, her features distorted by hate and rage. The infernal music from the open windows of the gallery continued with unimpaired strength; the intolerable bassoon howled worse than ever, and, thought Romashov, the bass drum had now come into immediate contact with his brain.

Raisa shut her fan with a snap that echoed through the ballroom. "Oh, you—lowest of all blackguards on earth," whispered she, with a theatrical gesture, and then disappeared into the ladies' retiring-room.

All was now over and done with, but Romashov did not experience the relief he expected. This long-nourished hope to feel his soul freed from a heavy, unclean burthen was not fulfilled. His strict, avenging conscience told him that he had acted in a cowardly, low, and boorish way when he cast all the blame on a weak, narrow, wretched woman who, most certainly at that moment, in the ladies'-room, was, through him, shedding bitter, hysterical tears of sorrow, shame, and impotent rage.

"I am sinking more and more deeply," thought he, in disgust at himself. What had his life been? what had it consisted of? An odious and wanton liaison, gambling, drinking, soul-killing, monotonous regimental routine, with never a single inspiriting word, never a ray of light in this black, hopeless darkness. Salutary, useful work, music, art, science, where were they?

He returned to the dining-room. There he met Osadchi and his friend Viätkin, who with much trouble was making his way in the direction of the street door. Liech,

now quite drunk, was helplessly wobbling in different directions, whilst in a fuddled voice he kept asserting that he was—an archbishop. Osadchi intoned in reply with the most serious countenance and a low, rolling bass, whilst carefully following the ecclesiastical ritual—

"Your high, refulgent Excellency, the hour of burial has struck. Give us your blessing, etc."

As the soirée approached its end, the gathering in the dining-room grew more noisy and lively. The room was already so full of tobacco smoke that those sitting at opposite sides of the table could not recognize each other. Cards were being played in one corner; by the window a small but select set had assembled to edify one another by racy stories—the spice most appreciated at officers' dinners and suppers.

"No, no, no, gentlemen," shrieked Artschakovski, "allow me to put in a word. You see it was this way: a soldier was quartered at the house of a khokhol[14] who had a pretty wife. Ho, ho, thought the soldier, that is something for me."

Then, however, he was interrupted by Vasili Vasilievich, who had been waiting long and impatiently—

"Shut up with your old stories, Artschakovski. You shall hear this. Once upon a time in Odessa there——"

But even he was not allowed to speak very long. The generality of the stories were rather poor and devoid of wit, but, to make up for that, they were interspersed with coarse and repulsive cynicisms. Viätkin, who had now returned from the street, where he had been paying his respects to Liech's "interment" and holy "departure," invited Romashov to sit down at the table.

"Sit you here, my dear Georginka.[15] We will watch them. To-day I am as rich as a Jew. I won yesterday, and to-day I shall take the bank again."

Romashov only longed to lighten his heart, for a friend to whom he might tell his sorrow and his disgust at life. After draining his glass he looked at Viätkin with

beseeching eyes, and began to talk in a voice quivering with deep, inward emotion.

“Pavel Pavlich, we all seem to have completely forgotten the existence of another life. Where it is I cannot say; I only know that it exists. Even in that men must struggle, suffer, and love, but that life is rich—rich in great thoughts and noble deeds. For here, my friend, what do you suppose our life is, and how will such a miserable existence as ours end some day?”

“Well, yes, old fellow—but it’s life,” replied Viätkin in a sleepy way. “Life after all is—only natural philosophy and energy. And what is energy?”

“Oh, what a wretched existence,” Romashov went on to say with increasing emotion, and without listening to Viätkin. “To-day we booze at mess till we are drunk; to-morrow we meet at drill—’one, two, left, right’—in the evening we again assemble round the bottle. Just the same, year in, year out. That’s what makes up our life. How disgusting!”

Viätkin peered at him with sleepy eyes, hiccoughed, and then suddenly started singing in a weak falsetto:—

“In the dark, stilly forest There once dwelt a maiden, She sat at her distaff By day and by night.

“Take care of your health, my angel, and to the deuce with the rest.

“Romashevich! Romaskovski! let’s go to the board of green cloth. I’ll lend you a——”

“No one understands me, and I have not a single friend here,” sighed Romashov mournfully. The next moment he remembered Shurochka—the splendid, high-minded Shurochka, and he felt in his heart a delicious and melancholy sensation, coupled with hopelessness and quiet resignation.

He stayed in the mess-room till daybreak, watched them playing schtoss, and now and then took a hand at the game, yet without feeling the slightest pleasure or

interest in it. Once he noticed how Artschakovski, who was playing at a little private table with two ensigns, made rather a stupid, but none the less successful, attempt to cheat. Romashov thought for a moment of taking up the matter and exposing the fraud, but checked himself suddenly, saying to himself: “Oh, what’s the use! I should not improve matters by interfering.”

Viätkin, who had lost, in less than five minutes, his boasted “millions,” sat sleeping on a chair, with his eyes wide open and his face as white as a sheet. Beside Romashov sat the eternal Lieschtschenko with his mournful eyes fixed on the game. Day began to dawn. The guttering candle-ends’ half-extinguished, yellowish flames flickered dully in their sticks, and illumined by their weak and uncertain light the pale, emaciated features of the gamblers. But Romashov kept staring at the cards, the heaps of silver and notes, and the green cloth scrawled all over with chalk; and in his heavy, weary head the same cruel, torturing thoughts of a worthless, unprofitable life ran incessantly.

X

IT was a splendid, though somewhat chilly, spring morning. The hedges were in bloom. Romashov, who was still, as a rule, a slave to his youthful, heavy sleep, had, as usual, overslept himself, and was late for the morning drill. With an unpleasant feeling of shyness and nervousness, he approached the parade-ground, and his spirits were not cheered by the thought of Captain Sliva’s notorious habit of making a humiliating and painful situation still worse by his abuse and rudeness.

This officer was a survival of the barbaric times when an iron discipline, idiotic pedantry—parade march in three time—and inhuman martial laws were virtually epidemic. Even in the 4th Regiment, which, from being quartered in a God-forsaken hole, seldom came into contact with civilization, and, moreover, did not bear the reputation for much culture, Captain Sliva was looked upon as a rough and boorish

person, and the most incredible anecdotes were current about him. Everything outside the company, service, and drill-book, and which he was accustomed to call “rot” or “rubbish,” had no existence so far as he was concerned. After having borne for nearly all his life the heavy burden of military service, he had arrived at such a state of savagery that he never opened a book, and, as far as newspapers were concerned, he only looked at the official and military notices in the Invalid. He despised with all his innate cynicism the meetings and amusements of society, and there were no oaths, no insulting terms too gross and crude for him to incorporate in his “Soldier’s Lexicon.” One story about him was that one lovely summer evening, when sitting at his open window, occupied, as usual, with his registers and accounts, a nightingale began to warble. Captain Sliva got up instantly, and shouted in a towering rage to his servant Sachartschuk, “Get a stone and drive away that damned bird; it’s disturbing me.”

This apparently sleepy and easy-going man was unmercifully severe to the soldiers, whom he not only abandoned to the ferocity of the “non-coms.,” but whom he himself personally whipped till they fell bleeding to the ground; but in all that concerned their food, clothing, and pay, he displayed the greatest consideration and honesty, and in this he was only surpassed by the commander of the 5th Company.

To the junior officers Captain Sliva was always harsh and stiff, and a certain native, crabbed humour imparted an additional sharpness to his biting sarcasms. If, for instance, a subaltern officer happened, during the march, to step out with the wrong foot, he instantly bellowed—

“Damnation! What the devil are you doing? All the company except Lieutenant N. is marching with the wrong foot!”

He was particularly rude and merciless on occasions when some young officer overslept himself or, for some other cause, came too late to drill, which not unfrequently was the case with Romashov.

Captain Sliva had a habit then of celebrating the victim's advent by forming the whole company into line, and, in a sharp voice, commanding "Attention!" After this he took up a position opposite the front rank, and in death-like silence waited, watch in hand and motionless, while the unpunctual officer, crushed with shame, sought his place in the line. Now and then Sliva increased the poor sinner's torture by putting to him the sarcastic question: "Will your Honour allow the company to go on with the drill?" For Romashov he had, moreover, certain dainty phrases specially stored up, e.g. "I hope you slept well," or "Your Honour has, I suppose, as usual, had pleasant dreams?" etc., etc. When all these preludes were finished, he began to shower abuse and reproaches on his victim.

"Oh, I don't care," thought Romashov to himself in deep disgust as he approached his company. "It is no worse to be here than in other places. All my life is ruined."

Sliva, Viätkin, Lbov, and the ensign were standing in the middle of the parade-ground, and all turned at once to Romashov as he arrived. Even the soldiers turned their heads towards him, and with veritable torture Romashov pictured to himself what a sorry figure he cut at that moment.

"Well, the shame I am now feeling is possibly unnecessary or excessive," he reasoned to himself, trying, as is habitual with timid or bashful persons, to console himself. "Possibly that which seems so shameful and guilty to me is regarded by others as the veriest trifle. Suppose, for instance, that it was Lbov, not I, who came too late, and that I am now in the line and see him coming up. Well, what more—what is there to make a fuss about? Lbov comes—that's all it amounts to. How stupid to grieve and get uncomfortable at such a petty incident, which within a month, perhaps even in a week, will be forgotten by all here present. Besides, what is there in this life which is not forgotten?" Romashov remarked as he finished his argument with himself, and felt in some degree calm and consoled.

To every one's astonishment this time Sliva spared Romashov from personal insults,

nay, he even seemed not to have noticed him in the least. When Romashov went up to him and saluted, with his heels together and his hand at his cap, he only said, pointing his red, withered fingers, which strongly resembled five little cold sausages:

“I must beg you, Sub-lieutenant, to remember that it is your duty to be with your company five minutes before the senior subaltern officers, and ten minutes before the chief of your company.”

“I am very sorry, Captain,” replied Romashov in a composed tone.

“That’s all very well, Sub-lieutenant, but you are always asleep and you seem to have quite forgotten the old adage: ‘He who is seldom awake must go about shabby.’ And I must now ask you, gentlemen, to retire to your respective companies.”

The whole company was split up into small groups, each of which was instructed in gymnastics. The soldiers stood drawn up in open file at a distance of a pace apart, and with their uniforms unbuttoned in order to enable them to perform their gymnastic exercises. Bobyliev, the smart subaltern officer stationed in Romashov’s platoon, cast a respectful glance at his commander, who was approaching, his lower jaw stuck out and his eyes squinting, and giving orders in a resonant voice—

“Hips steady. Rise on your toes. Bend your knees.”

And directly after that, very softly and in a sing-song voice—

“Begin.”

“One,” sang out the soldiers in unison, and they simultaneously performed in slow time the order to bend the knees till the whole division found itself on its haunches.

Bobyliev, who likewise performed the same movement, scrutinized the soldiers with severe, critical, and aggressive eyes. Immediately beside him cried the little spasmodic corporal, Syeroshtán, in his sharp, squeaky voice that reminded one of a

cockerel squabbling for food—

“Stretch your arms to the right—and left—salute. Begin, one, two, one, two,” and directly afterwards ten smart young fellows were heard yelling at the top of their voices the regulation—

“Haú, haú, haú.”

“Halt,” shouted Syeroshtán, red of face from rage and over-exertion. “La-apschin, you great ass, you toss about, give yourself airs, and twist your arm like some old woman from Riasan—choú, choú. Do the movements properly, or by all that’s unholy I’ll——”

After this the subalterns led their respective divisions at quick march to the gymnastic apparatus, which had been set up in different parts of the parade-ground. Sub-lieutenant Lbov—young, strong, and agile, and also an expert gymnast—threw down his sabre and cap, and ran before the others to one of the bars. Grasping the bar with both his hands, after three violent efforts he made a somersault in the air, threw himself forward and finally landed himself on all fours two yards and a half from the bar.

“Sub-lieutenant Lbov, at your everlasting circus tricks again,” shrieked Captain Sliva in a tone meant to be severe. In his heart the old warrior cherished a sneaking affection for Lbov, who was a thoroughly efficient soldier, and, by his brave bearing, invaluable at parades. “Be good enough to observe the regulation, and keep the other thing till Carnival comes round.”

“Right, Captain!” yelled Lbov in reply; “but I shan’t obey,” he whispered to Romashov with a wink.

The 4th platoon exercised on the inclined ladder. The soldiers walked in turn to the ladder, gripped hold of the steps, and climbed up them with arms bent. Shapovalenko stood below and made remarks—

“Keep your feet still. Up with your soles.”

The turn now came to a little soldier in the left wing, whose name was Khliabnikov, who served as a butt to the entire company. Whenever Romashov caught sight of him, he wondered how this emaciated, sorry figure, in height almost a dwarf, whose dirty little beardless face was but a little larger than a man's fist, could have been admitted into the army. And when he met Khliabnikov's soulless eyes, which looked as if they had expressed nothing but a dull submissive fear ever since he was born, he felt in his heart a heavy, oppressive feeling of disgust and prick of conscience.

Khliabnikov hung motionless on the ladder like a dead, shapeless mass.

"Take a grip and raise yourself on your arms, you miserable dog!" shrieked the sergeant. "Up with you, I say."

Khliabnikov made a violent effort to show his obedience, but in vain. He remained in the same position, and his legs swung from side to side. For the space of a second he turned downwards and sideways his ashen grey face, in which the dirty little turned-up nose obstinately turned upwards. Suddenly he let go of the ladder and fell like a sack to the ground.

"Ho, ho, you refuse to obey orders, to make the movement you were ordered to do," roared the sergeant; "but a scoundrel like you shall not destroy discipline. Now you shall——"

"Shapovalenko, don't touch him!" shouted Romashov, beside himself with anger and shame. "I forbid you to strike him now and always." Romashov rushed up and pulled the sergeant's arm.

Shapovalenko instantaneously became stiff and erect, and raised his hand to his cap. In his eyes, which at once resumed their ordinary lifeless expression, and on his lips there gleamed a faint mocking smile.

"I will obey, your Honour, but permit me to report that that fellow is utterly impossible."

Khliabnikov took his place once more in the ranks. He looked lazily out of the

corner of his eyes at the young officer, and stroked his nose with the back of his hand. Romashov turned his back on him and went off, meditating painfully over this fruitless pity, to inspect the 3rd platoon.

After the gymnastics the soldiers had ten minutes' rest. The officers forgathered at the bars, almost in the middle of the exercise-ground. Their conversation turned on the great May parade, which was approaching.

"Well, it now remains for us to guess where the shoe pinches," began Sliva, as he swung his arms, and opened wide his watery blue eyes, "for I'll tell you one thing, every General has his special little hobby. I remember we once had a Lieutenant-General Lvovich for the commander of our corps. He came to us direct from the Engineers. The natural consequence was we never did anything except dig and root up earth. Drill, marching, and keeping time—all such were thrown on the dust-heap. From morning to night we built cottages and quarters—in summer, of earth; in winter, of snow. The whole regiment looked like a collection of clodhoppers, dirty beyond recognition. Captain Aleinikov, the commander of the 10th Company—God rest his soul!—became a Knight of St. Anne, because he had somehow constructed a little redoubt in two hours."

"That was clever of him," observed Lbov.

"Wait, I have more to remind you of. You remember, Pavel Pavlich, General Aragonski and his everlasting gunnery instructions?"

"And the story of Pontius Pilate," laughed Viätkin.

"What was that?" asked Romashov.

Captain Sliva made a contemptuous gesture with his hand.

"At that time we did nothing but read Aragonski's 'Instructions in Shooting.' One day it so happened that one of the men had to pass an examination in the Creed. When the soldier got to the clause 'suffered under Pontius Pilatus,' there was a full stop. But the fellow did not lose his head, but went boldly on with a lot of

appropriate excerpts from Aragonski's 'Instructions in Shooting,' and came out with flying colours. Ah, you may well believe, those were grand times for idiocy. Things went so far that the first finger was not allowed to retain its good old name, but was called the 'trigger finger,' etc., etc."

"Do you remember, Athanasi Kirillich, what cramming and theorizing—'range,' elevation, etc.—went on from morning to night? If you gave the soldier a rifle and said to him: 'Look down the barrel. What do you see there?' you got for an answer: 'I see a tense line which is the gun's axis,' etc. And what practice in shooting there was in those days, you remember, Athanasi Kirillich!"

"Do I remember! The shooting in our division was the talk of the whole country, ah, even the foreign newspapers had stories about it. At the shooting competitions regiments borrowed 'crack' shots from each other. Down at the butts stood young officers hidden behind a screen, who helped the scoring by their revolvers. On another occasion it so happened that a certain company made more hits in the target than could be accounted for by the shots fired, whereupon the ensign who was marking got severely 'called over the coals.'"

"Do you recollect the Schreiberovsky gymnastics in Slesarev's time?"

"Rather! It was like a ballet. Ah, may the devil take all those old Generals with their hobbies and eccentricities. And yet, gentlemen, all that sort of thing—all the old-time absurdities, were as nothing compared with what is done in our days. It might be well said that discipline has received its quietus. The soldier, if you please, is now to be treated 'humanely.' He is our 'fellow-creature,' our 'brother'; his 'mind is to be developed,' he is to be taught 'to think,' etc., etc. What absolute madness! No, he shall have a thrashing, the scoundrel. And oh, my saintly Suvorov, tell me if a single individual nowadays knows how a soldier ought to be treated, and what one should teach him. Nothing but new-fangled arts and rubbish. That invention in regard to cavalry charges, for instance."

“Yes, one might have something more amusing,” Viätkin chimed in.

“There you stand,” continued Sliva, “in the middle of the field, like a decoy-bird, and the Cossacks rush at you in full pelt. Naturally, like a sensible man, you make room for them in good time. Directly after comes: ‘You have bad nerves, Captain; one should not behave in that way in the army. Be good enough to recollect that,’ etc., etc., in the same style.”

“The General in command of the K—— Regiment,” interrupted Viätkin, “once had a brilliant idea. He had a company marched to the edge of an awful cesspool, and then ordered the Captain to order the men to lie down. The latter hesitated for an instant, but obeyed the command. The soldiers were chapfallen, gazing at one another in a questioning way. All thought they had heard incorrectly; but they got their information right enough. The General thundered away at the poor Captain in the presence of all. ‘What training do you give your company? Miserable lot of weaklings. Pretty heroes to take into the field. No, you are cravens, every one of you, and you, Captain, not the least among them. March to arrest.’”

“That ‘takes the cake,’” laughed Lbov.

“And what’s the use of it? First one insults the officers in the presence of the men, and then complaints are made of lack of discipline. But to give a scamp his deserts is a thing one dare not do. He is, if you please, a ‘human being,’ a ‘personage’; but in the good old times there were no ‘personages’ in the army. Then the cattle got what they needed, and then there was the Italian Campaign, Sebastopol, and several other trifles. Well, all the same thing, so far as I am concerned. I’ll do my duty even if it costs me my commission, and as far as my arm reaches every scoundrel shall get his deserts.”

“There’s no honour in striking a soldier,” exclaimed Romashov, in a muffled voice. Up to this he had been merely a silent listener. “One can’t hit a man who is not allowed to raise a hand in self-defence. It is as cowardly as it is cruel.”

Captain Sliva bestowed on Romashov an annihilating look, pressed his underlip against his little grey, bristling moustache, and at length exclaimed, with an expression of the deepest contempt—

“Wha-at’s that?”

Romashov stood as white as a corpse, his pulse beat violently, and a cold shudder ran through his body.

“I said that such a method of treatment was cruel and cowardly, and I—retain my opinion,” answered Romashov nervously, but without flinching.

“You don’t say so!” twittered Sliva. “Listen to my young cockerel. Should you, against all likelihood, be another year with the regiment, you shall be provided with a muzzle. That you may rely on. Thank God, I know how to deal with such germs of evil. Don’t worry yourself about that.”

Romashov fearlessly directed at him a glance of hatred, straight in his eyes, and said, almost in a whisper—

“If ever I see you maltreat a soldier I will report it at once to the commander of the regiment.”

“What, do you dare?” shrieked Sliva in a threatening voice, but checked himself instantly. “Enough of this,” he went on to say dryly; “you ensigns are a little too young to teach veterans who have smelt powder, and who have, for more than a quarter of a century, served their Tsar without incurring punishment. Officers, return to your respective posts.”

Captain Sliva turned his back sharply on the officers and went away.

“Why do you poke your nose into all that?” asked Viätkin as he took Romashov by the arm and left the place. “As you know, that old plum[16] isn’t one of the sweetest; besides, you don’t know him yet as well as I do. Be careful what you are about; he is not to be played with, and some fine day he’ll put you in the lock-up in

earnest."

"Listen, Pavel Pavlich," cried Romashov, with tears of rage in his voice. "Do you think views such as Captain Sliva's are worthy of an officer? And is it not revolting that such old bags of bones should be suffered to insult their subordinates with impunity? Who can put up with it in the long run?"

"Well, yes—to a certain extent you are right," replied Viätkin, in a tone of indifference. The rest of what he thought of saying died away in a gape, and Romashov continued, in increasing excitement—

"Tell me, what is the use of all this shouting and yelling at the men? I never could imagine when I became an officer that such barbarism was tolerated in our time in a Russian regiment. Ah! never shall I forget my first impressions and experiences here. One incident remains very clearly graven in my memory. It was the third day after my arrival here. I was sitting at mess in company with that red-haired libertine, Artschakovski. I addressed him in conversation as 'lieutenant,' because he called me 'sub-lieutenant.' Suddenly he began showering insults and abuse on me. Although we sat at the same table and drank ale together, he shouted at me: 'In the first place, I am not lieutenant to you, but Mr. Lieutenant, and, secondly, be good enough to stand up when you are speaking to your superior.' And there I stood in the room, like a schoolboy under punishment, until Lieutenant-Colonel Liech came and sat between us. No, no, pray don't say anything, Pavel Pavlich. I am just sick of all that goes on here."

XI

THE 22nd of April was for Romashov not only an uncomfortable and tiresome day, but a very remarkable one. At 10 a.m., before Romashov had got out of bed, Nikoläiev's servant, Stepan, arrived with a letter from Alexandra Petrovna.

My dear Romotchka (she wrote), I should not be in the least surprised if you have

forgotten that to-day is my name-day, of which I also take the liberty to remind you. And in spite of all your transgressions, I should like to see you at my house to-day. But don't come at the conventional hour of congratulation, but at 5 p.m. We are going to a little picnic at Dubetschnaia.—Yours,

A. N.

The letter trembled in Romashov's hands as he read it. For a whole week he had not once seen Shurochka's saucy, smiling, bewitching face; had not felt the delicious enchantment he always experienced in her presence. "To-day," a joyful voice sang exultant in his heart.

"To-day," shouted Romashov, in a ringing voice, as he jumped out of bed. "Hainán, my bathwater, quick."

Hainán rushed in.

"Your Honour, the servant is waiting for an answer."

"Oh—yes, of course." Romashov dropped, with eyes wide open, on a chair. "The deuce, he is waiting for a 'tip,' and I haven't a single copeck." Romashov stared at his trusty servant with a look of absolute helplessness.

Hainán returned his look with a broad grin of delight.

"No more have I either, your Excellency. You have nothing, and I have nothing—what's to be done? Nichevó!"

At that moment Romashov called to mind that dark spring night when he stood in the dirty road, leaning against the wet, sticky fence, and heard Stepan's scornful remark: "That man hangs about here every day." Now he remembered the intolerable feeling of shame he experienced at that moment, and what would he not give if only he could conjure up a single silver coin, a twenty-copeck piece, wherewith to stop the mouth of Shurochka's messenger.

He pressed his hands convulsively against his temples and almost cried from

annoyance.

“Hainán,” he whispered, looking shyly askance at the door, “Hainán, go and tell him he shall have his ‘tip’ to-night—for certain, do you hear? For certain.”

Romashov was just then as hard up as it was possible to be. His credit was gone everywhere—at mess, with the buffet proprietor, at the regimental treasury, etc. He certainly still drew his dinner and supper rations, but without sakuska. He had not even tea and sugar in his room; only a tremendous tin can containing coffee grounds—a dark, awesome mixture which, when diluted with water, was heroically swallowed every morning by Romashov and his trusty servant.

With grimaces of the deepest disgust, Romashov sat and absorbed this bitter, nauseous morning beverage. His brain was working at high pressure as to how he should find some escape from the present desperate situation. First, where and how was he to obtain a name-day present for Shurochka? It would be an impossibility for him to show up at her house without one. And, besides, what should he give her? Sweets or gloves? But he did not know what size she wore—sweets, then? But in the town the sweets were notoriously nasty, therefore something else—scent—a fan? No, scent would, he thought, be preferable. She liked “Ess Bouquet,” so “Ess Bouquet” it should be. Moreover, the expense of the evening’s picnic. A trap there and back, “tip” to Stepan, incidental expenses. “Ah, my good Romashov, you won’t do it for less than ten roubles.”

After this he reviewed his resources. His month’s pay—every copeck of that was spent and receipted. Advance of pay perhaps. Alas, he had tried that way quite thirty times, but always with an unhappy result. The paymaster to the regiment, Staff-Captain Doroshenko, was known far and wide as the most disobliging “swine,” especially to sub-lieutenants. He had taken part in the Turkish War, and was there, alas! wounded in the most mortifying and humiliating spot—in his heel. This had not happened during retreat, but on an occasion when he was turning to his

troops to order an attack. None the less he was, on account of his ill-omened wound, the object of everlasting flings and sarcasms, with the result that Doroshenko, who went to the campaign a merry ensign, was now changed into a jealous, irritable hypochondriac. No, Doroshenko would not advance a single copeck, least of all to a sub-lieutenant who, with uncommon eagerness, had long since drawn all the pay that was due to him.

“But one need not hang oneself, I suppose, for that,” Romashov consoled himself by thinking, after he had finished the foregoing meditation. “One must try and borrow. Let us now take the victims in turn. Well, the 1st Company, Osadchi?”

Before Romashov’s mind’s eye appeared Osadchi’s peculiar but well-formed features and his heavy, brutal expression. “No, anybody else in the world except him. Second Company, Taliman? Ah, that poor devil, who is borrowing all the year round, even from the ensigns. He won’t do. Take another name—Khutinski?”

But just at that moment a mad boyish idea crossed Romashov’s mind. “Suppose I go and borrow money from the Colonel himself. What then would be likely to happen? First he would be numbed with horror at such a piece of impudence; next he would begin trembling with rage, then he would fire, as if from a mortar, the words: ‘Wha-at! Si-lence!’”

Romashov burst out laughing. “How in the world can a day that began so happily as this ever end sadly and sorrowfully? Yes, I don’t know yet how the problem is to be solved, but an inward voice has told me that all will go well. Captain Duvernois? No, Duvernois is a skinflint, and, besides, he can’t bear me. I know that.”

In this way he went through all the officers of his company, from the first to the sixteenth, without getting a step nearer his goal. He was just about to despair altogether when suddenly a new name sprang up in his head—Lieutenant-Colonel Rafalski.

“Rafalski! What an ass I am! Hainán, my coat, gloves, cap. Make haste!”

Lieutenant-Colonel Rafalski, commander of the 4th Battalion, was an incorrigible old bachelor, and, in addition, a most eccentric character, who was called by his comrades “Colonel Brehm.” He associated with no one, was seen among the circle of his brother officers only on occasions of ceremony, i.e. at Easter and on New Year’s Day, and he neglected his duties to such a degree that at drill he was the constant object of furious invectives on the part of the higher authorities. All his time, all his attention, and all his unconsumed funds of love and tenderness, which he really possessed, were devoted to his idolized protégés, his wild creatures—brutes, birds, and fishes, of which he owned almost an entire menagerie. The ladies of the regiment, who in the depths of their hearts were highly incensed with Rafalski for his unconcealed contempt of women, used to say of him: “Such a dreadful man, and what dreadful animals he keeps! Such dirtiness in his house, and, pardon the expression, what a nasty smell he carries with him wherever he goes.”

All his savings went to the menagerie. This most eccentric individual had succeeded in reducing his temporal needs to a minimum. He wore a cap and uniform that dated from prehistoric times, he slept and dwelt God knows how, he shared the soldiers’ fare, and he ate in the 15th Company’s kitchen, towards the staff of which he displayed a certain liberality. To his comrades—particularly the younger of them—he seldom refused a small loan if he was in funds, but to remain in debt to “Colonel Brehm” was not regarded as comme il faut, and he who did so was inevitably exposed to his comrades’ ridicule and contempt.

Frivolous and impudent individuals as, e.g. Lbov, were occasionally not averse from extracting a few silver roubles from Rafalski, and they always introduced the business by a request to be allowed to see the menagerie. This was generally an infallible way to the old hermit’s heart and cash-box. “Good morning, Ivan Antonovich, have you got any fresh animals? Oh, how interesting! Come and show us them,” etc., in the same style. After this the loan was a simple matter.

Romashov had many times visited Rafalski, but never up to then with an ulterior motive. He too was particularly fond of animals, and when he was a cadet at Moscow, nay, even when he was a lad, he much preferred a circus to a theatre, and the zoological gardens or some menagerie to either. In his dreams as a child there always hovered a St. Bernard. Now his secret dream was to be appointed Adjutant to a battalion—so that he might become the possessor of a horse. But neither of his dreams was fulfilled.

The poverty of his parents proved an insuperable obstacle to the realization of the former, and, as far as his adjutancy was concerned, his prospects were exceedingly small, as Romashov lacked the most important qualifications for it, viz. a fine figure and carriage.

Romashov went into the street. A warm spring breeze caressed his cheeks, and the ground that had just dried after the rain gave to his steps, through its elasticity, a pleasant feeling of buoyancy and power. Hagberry and lilac pointed and nodded at him with their rich-scented bunches of blossom over the street fences. A suddenly awakened joy of life expanded his chest, and he felt as if he was about to fly. After he had looked round the street and convinced himself that he was alone, he took Shurochka's letter out of his pocket, read it through once more, and then pressed her signature passionately to his lips.

"Oh, lovely sky! Beautiful trees!" he whispered with moist eyes.

"Colonel Brehm" lived at the far end of a great enclosure hedged round by a green lattice-like hedge. Over the gate might be read: "Ring the bell. Beware of the dogs!"

Romashov pulled the bell. The servant's sallow, sleepy face appeared at the wicket.

"Is the Colonel at home?"

"Yes. Please step in, your Honour."

"No. Go and take in my name first."

“It is not necessary. Walk in.” The servant sleepily scratched his thigh. “The Colonel does not like standing on ceremony, you know.”

Romashov strode on, and followed a sort of path of bricks which led across the yard to the house. A couple of enormous, mouse-coloured young bull-dogs ran out of a corner, and one of them greeted him with a rough but not unfriendly bark. Romashov snapped his fingers at it, which was answered in delight by awkward, frolicsome leaps and still noisier barking. The other bull-dog followed closely on Romashov’s heels, and sniffed with curiosity between the folds of his cape. Far away in the court, where the tender, light green grass had already sprouted up, stood a little donkey philosophizing, blinking in delight at the sun, and lazily twitching its long ears. Here and there waddled ducks of variegated hues, fowls and Chinese geese with large excrescences over their bills. A bevy of peacocks made their ear-splitting cluck heard, and a huge turkey-cock with trailing wings and tail-feathers high in the air was courting the favourite sultana of his harem. A massive pink sow of genuine Yorkshire breed wallowed majestically in a hole.

“Colonel Brehm,” dressed in a Swedish leather jacket, stood at a window with his back to the door, and he did not notice Romashov as the latter entered the room. He was very busy with his glass aquarium, into which he plunged one arm up to the elbow, and he was so absorbed by this occupation that Romashov was obliged to cough loudly twice before Rafalski turned round and presented his long, thin, unshaven face and a pair of old-fashioned spectacles with tortoise-shell rims.

“Ah, ha—what do I see?—Sub-lieutenant Romashov? Very welcome, very welcome!” rang his friendly greeting. “Excuse my not being able to shake hands, but, as you see, I am quite wet. I am now testing a new siphon. I have simplified the apparatus, which will act splendidly. Will you have some tea?”

“I am very much obliged to you, but I have just breakfasted. I have come, Colonel, to——”

“Of course you have heard the rumour that our regiment is to be moved to garrison another town,” interrupted Rafalski, in a tone as if he had only resumed a conversation just dropped. “You may well imagine my despair. How shall I manage to transport all my fishes? At least half of them will die on the journey. And this aquarium too; look at it yourself. Wholly of glass and a yard and a half long. Ah, my dear fellow” (here he suddenly sprang into a wholly different train of thought), “what an aquarium they have in Sebastopol! A cistern of continually flowing seawater, big as this room, and entirely of stone. And lighted by electricity too. You stand and gaze down on all those wonderful fishes—sturgeons, sharks, rays, sea-cocks—nay, God forgive me my sins! sea-cats, I mean. Imagine in your mind a gigantic pancake, an arshin[17] and a half in diameter, which moves and wags—and behind it a tail shaped like an arrow. My goodness, I stood there staring for a couple of hours—but what are you laughing at?”

“I beg your pardon, but I just noticed a little white rat sitting on your shoulder.”

“Oh, you little rascal! Who gave you leave?” Rafalski twisted his head and produced with his lips a whistling but extraordinarily delicate sound that was remarkably like the cheeping noise of a rat. The little white, red-eyed beast, trembling all over its body, snuggled up to Rafalski’s cheek, and began groping with its nose after its master’s mouth and chin-tuft.

“How tame your animals are, and how well they know you!” exclaimed Romashov.

“Yes, they always know me well enough,” replied Rafalski. After this he drew a deep sigh and sorrowfully shook his grey head. “It is unfortunate that mankind troubles itself and knows so little about animals. We have trained and tamed for our use or good pleasure the dog, the horse, and the cat, but how much do we know about the real nature and being of these animals? Now and then, of course, some professor—a marvel of learning—comes along—may the devil devour them all!—and talks a lot of antediluvian rubbish that no sensible person either

understands or has the least profit from. Moreover, he gives the poor innocent beasts a number of Latin nicknames as idiotic as they are unnecessary, and to crown it all, he has the impudence to demand to be immortalized for all this tomfoolery, and pretty nearly venerated as a saint. But what can he teach us, and what does he know himself, of animals and their inner life? No! take any dog you like, live together with it for a time, side by side, and, by the study of this intelligent, reflecting creature, you will get more matter for your psychology than all the professors and teachers could dream."

"But perhaps there are works of that nature, though we do not yet know them?" suggested Romashov shyly.

"Books, did you say? Yes, of course, there are plenty. Just glance over there. I have a whole library of them."

Rafalski pointed to a long row of shelves standing along the walls. "Those learned gentlemen write a whole lot of clever things, and show great profundity in their studies. Yes, their learning is absolutely overwhelming. What wonderful scientific instruments, and what acuteness of intellect! But all that is quite different from what I mean. Not one of all these great celebrities has hit upon the idea of observing carefully, only for a single day, for instance, a dog or cat in its private life. And yet how interesting and instructive that is. To watch closely how a dog lives, thinks, intrigues, makes itself happy or miserable. Just think, for example, what all those clowns and showmen can effect. One might sometimes think that one was subjected to an extraordinary hypnosis. Never in all my life shall I forget a clown I saw in the hotel at Kiev—a mere clown. What results might have been attained by a scientifically educated investigator, armed with all the wonderful apparatus and resources of our time! What interesting things one might hear about a dog's psychology, his character, docility, etc. A new world of marvels would be opened to human knowledge. For my part, you should know that I am quite certain that dogs

possess a language and, moreover, a very rich and developed speech."

"But, Ivan Antonovich, tell me why the learned have never made such an attempt?" asked Romashov.

Rafalski replied by a sarcastic smile.

"He, he, he! the thing is clear enough. What do you suppose a dog is to such a learned bigwig? A vertebrate animal, a mammal, a carnivorous animal, etc, and that's the end of it. Nothing more. How could he condescend to treat a dog as if it were an intelligent, rational being? Never. No, these haughty university despots are in reality but a trifle higher than the peasant who thought that the dog had steam instead of a soul."

He stopped short and began snorting and splashing angrily whilst he fussed and fumed with a gutta-percha tube that he was trying to apply to the bottom of the aquarium. Romashov summoned all his courage, made a violent effort of will, and succeeded in blurting out—

"Ivan Antonovich, I have come on an important—very important business——"

"Money?"

"Yes, I am ashamed to trouble you. I don't require much—only ten roubles—but I can't promise to repay you just yet."

Ivan Antonovich pulled his hands out of the water and began slowly to dry them on a towel.

"I can manage ten roubles—I have not more, but these I'll lend you with the greatest pleasure. You're wanting to be off, I suppose, on some spree or dissipation? Well, well, don't be offended; I'm merely jesting. Come, let us go."

"Colonel Brehm" took Romashov through his suite of apartments, which consisted of five or six rooms, in which every trace of furniture and curtains was lacking. Everywhere one's nose was assailed by the curious, pungent odour that is always

rife in places where small animals are freely allowed to run riot. The floors were so filthy that one stumbled at nearly every step. In all the corners, small holes and lairs, formed of wooden boxes, hollow stubble, empty casks without bottoms, etc., etc., were arranged. Trees with bending branches stood in another room. The one room was intended for birds, the other for squirrels and martens. All the arrangements witnessed to a love of animals, careful attention, and a great faculty for observation.

“Look here,” Rafalski pointed to a little cage, surrounded by a thick railing of barbed wire; from the semicircular opening, which was no larger than the bottom of a drinking-glass, glowed two small, keen black eyes. “That’s a polecat, the cruellest and most bloodthirsty beast in creation. You may not believe me, but it’s none the less true, that, in comparison with it, the lion and panther are as tame as lambs. When a lion has eaten his thirty-four pounds or so of flesh, and is resting after his meal, he looks on good-humouredly at the jackals gorging on the remains of the banquet. But if that little brute gets into a hen-house it does not spare a single life. There are no limits to its murderous instinct, and, besides, it is the wildest beast in the world and the one hardest to tame. Fie, you little monster.”

Rafalski put his hand behind the bars, and at once, in the narrow outlet to the cage, an open jaw with sharp, white teeth was displayed. The polecat accompanied its rapid movements backwards and forwards by a spiteful, cough-like sound.

“Have you ever seen such a nasty brute? And yet I myself have fed it every day for a whole year.”

“Colonel Brehm” had now evidently forgotten Romashov’s business. He took him from cage to cage, and showed him all his favourites, and he spoke with as much enthusiasm, knowledge, and tenderness of the animals’ tempers and habits, as if the question concerned his oldest and most intimate friends. Rafalski’s collection of animals was really an extraordinarily large and fine one for a private individual to own, who was, moreover, compelled to live in an out-of-the-way and wretched

provincial hole. There were rabbits, white rats, otters, hedgehogs, marmots, several venomous snakes in glass cases, ant-bears, several sorts of monkeys, a black Australian hare, and an exceedingly fine specimen of an Angora cat.

“Well, what do you say to this?” asked Rafalski, as he exhibited the cat. “Isn’t he charming? And yet he does not stand high in my favour, for he is awfully stupid—much more stupid than our ordinary cats.” Rafalski then exclaimed hotly: “Another proof of the little we know and how wrongly we value our ordinary domestic animals. What do we know about the cat, horse, cow, and pig? The pig is a remarkably clever animal. You’re laughing, I see, but wait and you shall hear.” (Romashov had not shown the least signs of amusement.) “Last year I had in my possession a wild boar which invented the following trick. I had got home from the sugar factory four bushels of waste, intended for my pigs and hot-beds. Well, my big boar could not, of course, wait patiently. Whilst the foreman went to find my servant, the boar with his tusks tore the bung out of the cask, and, in a few seconds, was in his seventh heaven. What do you say of a chap like that? But listen further”—Rafalski peered out of one eye, and assumed a crafty expression—“I am at present engaged in writing a treatise on my pigs—for God’s sake, not a whisper of this to any one. Just fancy if people got to hear that a Lieutenant-Colonel in the glorious Russian Army was writing a book, and one about pigs into the bargain; but the fact is, I managed to obtain a genuine Yorkshire sow. Have you seen her? Come, let me show you her. Besides, I have down in the yard a young beagle, the dearest little beast. Come!”

“Pardon me, Ivan Antonovich,” stammered Romashov, “I should be only too pleased to accompany you, but—but I really haven’t the time now.”

Rafalski struck his forehead with the palm of his hand.

“Oh, yes, what an incorrigible old gossip I am. Excuse me—I’ll go and get it—come along.”

They went into a little bare room in which there was literally nothing but a low tent-bedstead which, with its bottom composed of a sheet hanging down to the floor, reminded one of a boat; a little night-table, and a chair without a back. Rafalski pulled out a drawer of the little table and produced the money.

“I am very glad to be able to help you, ensign, very glad. If you please, no thanks or such nonsense. It’s a pleasure, you know. Look me up when convenient, and we’ll have a chat. Good-bye.”

When Romashov reached the street, he ran into Viätkin. Pavel Pavlich’s moustaches were twisted up ferociously, à la Kaiser, and his regimental cap, stuck on one side in a rakish manner, lay carelessly thrown on one ear.

“Ha, look at Prince Hamlet,” shouted Viätkin, “whence and whither? You’re beaming like a man in luck.”

“Yes, that’s exactly what I am,” replied Romashov smilingly.

“Ah-ah! splendid; come and give me a big hug.”

With the enthusiasm of youth, they fell into each other’s arms in the open street.

“Ought we not to celebrate this remarkable event by just a peep into the mess-room?” proposed Viätkin. “‘Come and take a nip in the deepest loneliness,’ as our noble friend Artschakovski is fond of saying.”

“Impossible, Pavel Pavlich, I am in a hurry. But what’s up with you? You seem to-day as if you meant kicking over the traces?”

“Yes, rather, that’s quite on the cards,” Viätkin stuck his chin out significantly. “To-day I have brought off a ‘combination’ so ingenious that it would make our Finance Minister green with envy.”

“Really?”

Viätkin’s “combination” appeared simple enough, but testified, however, to a certain ingenuity. The chief rôle in the affair was played by Khaim, the regimental tailor,

who took from Pavel Pavlich a receipt for a uniform supposed to have been delivered, but, instead of that, handed over to Viätkin thirty roubles in cash.

“The best of it all is,” exclaimed Viätkin, “that both Khaim and I are equally satisfied with the deal. The Jew gave me thirty roubles and became entitled through my receipt to draw forty-five from the clothing department’s treasury. I am at last once more in a position to chuck away a few coppers at mess. A masterstroke, eh?”

“Viätkin, you’re a great man, and another time I’ll bear in mind your ‘patent.’ But good-bye for the present. I hope you will have good luck at cards.” They separated, but, after a minute, Viätkin called out to his comrade again. Romashov stopped and turned round.

“Have you been to the menagerie?” asked Viätkin, with a cunning wink, making a gesture in the direction of Rafalski’s house.

Romashov replied by a nod, and said in a tone of conviction, “Brehm is a downright good fellow—the best of the lot of us.”

“You’re right,” agreed Viätkin, “bar that frightful smell.”

XII

WHEN Romashov reached Nikoläiev’s house about five o’clock, he noticed with surprise that his happy humour of the morning and confidence that the day would be a success had given place to an inexplicable, painful nervousness. He felt assured that this nervousness had not come over him all at once, but had begun much earlier in the day, though he did not know when. It was likewise clear to him that this feeling of nervousness had gradually and imperceptibly crept over him. What did it mean? But such incidents were not new to him; even from his early childhood he had experienced them, and he knew, too, that he would not regain his mental balance until he had discovered the cause of the disturbance. He remembered, for instance, how he had worried himself for a whole day, and that it was not till

evening that he called to mind that, in the forenoon, when passing a railway crossing, he had been startled and alarmed by a train rushing past, and this had disturbed his balance. Directly, however, the cause was discovered he at once became happy and light-hearted. The question now was to review in inverted order the events and experiences of the day. Svidierski's millinery shop and its perfumes; the hire and payment of Leib, the best cab-driver in the town; the visit to the post-office to set his watch correctly; the lovely morning; Stepan? No, impossible. In Romashov's pocket lay a rouble laid by for him. But what could it be then?

In the street, opposite to the Nikoläievs', stood three two-horse carriages, and two soldiers held by the reins a couple of saddle-horses—the one, Olisár's, a dark-brown old gelding, newly purchased from a cavalry officer; the other Biek-Agamalov's chestnut mare, with fierce bright eyes.

"I know! The letter!" flashed through Romashov's brain. That strange expression "in spite of that"—what could it mean? That Nikoläiev was angry or jealous? Perhaps mischief had been made. Nikoläiev's manner had certainly been rather cold lately.

"Drive on!" he shouted to the driver.

At that moment, though he had neither seen nor heard anything, he knew that the door of the house had opened, he knew it by the sweet and stormy beating of his heart.

"Romochka! where are you going?" he heard Alexandra Petrovna's clear, happy voice behind him.

Romashov, by a strong pull, drew the driver, who was sitting opposite him, back by the girdle, and jumped out of the fly. Shurochka stood in the open door as if she were framed in a dark room. She wore a smooth white dress with red flowers in the sash. The same sort of red flowers were twined in her hair. How wonderful! Romashov felt instantly and infallibly that this was she, but, nevertheless, did not recognize her. To him it was a new revelation, radiant and in festal array.

While Romashov was mumbling his felicitations, Shurochka forced him, without letting go his hands, softly and with gentle violence, to enter the gloomy hall with her. At the same time she uttered half-aloud, in a hurried and nervous tone—

"Thanks, Romochka, for coming. Ah, how much I was afraid that you would plead some excuse! But remember now, to-day you are to be jolly and amiable. Don't do anything which will attract attention. Now, how absurd you are! Directly any one touches you, you shrivel up like a sensitive-plant."

"Alexandra Petrovna, your letter has upset me. There is an expression you make use of...."

"My dear boy! what nonsense!" she grasped both his hands and pressed them hard, gazing into the depths of his eyes. In that glance of hers there was something which Romashov had never seen before—a caressing tenderness, an intensity, and something besides, which he could not interpret. In the mysterious depths of her dark pupils fixed so long and earnestly on him he read a strange, elusive significance, a message uttered in the mysterious language of the soul.

"Please—don't let us talk of this to-day! No doubt you will be pleased to hear that I have been watching for you. I know what a coward you are, you see. Don't you dare to look at me like that, now!"

She laughed in some confusion and released his hands.

"That will do now—Romochka, you awkward creature! again you've forgotten to kiss my hand. That's right! Now the other. But don't forget," she added in a hot whisper, "that to-day is our day. Tsarina Alexandra and her trusty knight, Georgi. Come."

"One instant—look here—you'll allow me? It's a very modest gift."

"What? Scent? What nonsense is this? No, forgive me; I'm only joking. Thanks, thanks, dear Romochka. Volodya," she called out loudly in an unconstrained tone as she entered the room, "here is another friend to join us in our little picnic."

As is always the case before dispersing for a general excursion, there was much noise and confusion in the drawing-room. The thick tobacco smoke formed here and there blue eddies when met by the sunbeams on its way out of the window. Seven or eight officers stood in the middle of the room, in animated conversation. The loudest among them was the hoarse-voiced Taliman with his everlasting cough. There were Captain Osadchi and the two inseparable Adjutants, Olisár and Biek-Agamalov; moreover, Lieutenant Andrusevich—a little, lithe, and active man, who, in his sharp-nosed physiognomy, resembled a rat—and Sofia Pavlovna Taliman, who, smiling, powdered, and painted, sat, like a dressed-up doll, in the middle of the sofa, between Ensign Michin's two sisters. These girls were very prepossessing in their simple, home-made but tasteful dresses with white and green ribbons. They were both dark-eyed, black-haired, with a few summer freckles on their fresh, rosy cheeks. Both had dazzlingly white teeth which, perhaps from their not irreproachable form and evenness, gave the fresh lips a particular, curious charm. Both were extraordinarily like, not only each other, but also their brother, although the latter was certainly not a "beauty" man. Of the ladies belonging to the regiment who were invited were Mrs. Andrusevich—a little, fat, podgy, simple, laughing woman, very much addicted to doubtful anecdotes—and, lastly, the really pretty, but gossiping and lisping, Misses Lykatschev.

As is always the case at military parties, the ladies formed a circle by themselves. Quite near them, and sitting by himself, Staff-Captain Ditz, the coxcomb, was lolling indolently in an easy chair. This officer, who, with his tight-laced figure and aristocratic looks, strongly reminded one of the well-known Fliegende Blätter type of lieutenants, had been cashiered from the Guards on account of some mysterious, scandalous story. He distinguished himself by his unfailing ironical confidence in his intercourse with men, and his audacious boldness with women, and he pursued, carefully and very lucratively, card-playing on a big scale, not, however, in the mess-room, but in the Townsmen's Club, with the civilian officials of the place, as

well as with the Polish landowners in the neighbourhood. Nobody in the regiment liked him, but he was feared, and all felt within themselves a certain rough conviction that some day a terrible, dirty scandal would bring Ditz's military career to an abrupt conclusion. It was reported that he had a liaison with the young wife of an old, retired Staff-Captain who lived in the town, and also that he was very friendly with Madame Taliman. It was also purely for her sake he was invited to officers' families, according to the curious conceptions of good tone and good breeding that still hold sway in military circles.

"Delighted—delighted!" was Nikoläiev's greeting as he went up to Romashov. "Why didn't you come this morning and taste our pasty?"

Nikoläiev uttered all this in a very jovial and friendly tone, but in his voice and glance Romashov noticed the same cold, artificial, and harsh expression which he had felt almost unconsciously lately.

"He does not like me," thought Romashov. "But what is the matter with him? Is he angry—or jealous, or have I bored him to death?"

"As you perhaps are aware, we had inspection of rifles in our company this morning," lied Romashov boldly. "When the Great Inspection approaches, one is never free either Sundays or week-days, you know. However, may I candidly admit that I am a trifle embarrassed? I did not know in the least that you were giving a picnic. I invited myself, so to speak. And truly, I feel some qualms——"

Nikoläiev smiled broadly, and clapped Romashov on the shoulder with almost insulting familiarity.

"How you talk, my friend! The more the merrier, and we don't want any Chinese ceremonies here. But there is one awkward thing—I mean, will there be sufficient carriages? But we shall be able to manage something."

"I brought my own trap," said Romashov, to calm him, whilst he, quite unnoticeably, released his shoulder from Nikoläiev's caressing hand, "and I shall be

very pleased to put it at your service."

Romashov turned round and met Shurochka's eye. "Thank you, my dear," said her ardent, curiously intent look.

"How strange she is to-day," thought Romashov.

"That's capital!" Nikoläiev looked at his watch. "What do you say, gentlemen; shall we start?"

"'Let us start,' said the parrot when the cat dragged it out of its cage by the tail," said Olisár jokingly.

All got up, noisy and laughing. The ladies went in search of their hats and parasols, and began to put on their gloves. Taliman, who suffered from bronchitis, croaked and screamed that, above everything, the company should wrap up well; but his voice was drowned in the noise and confusion. Little Michin took Romashov aside and said to him—

"Yuri Alexievich, I have a favour to ask you. Let my sisters ride in your carriage, otherwise Ditz will come and force his society on them—a thing I would prevent at any price. He is in the habit of conversing with young girls in such a way that they can hardly restrain their tears of shame and indignation. I am not, God knows! a man fond of violence, but some day I shall give that scoundrel what he deserves."

Romashov would naturally have much liked to ride with Shurochka, but Michin had always been his friend, and it was impossible to withstand the imploring look of those clear, true-hearted eyes. Besides, Romashov was so full of joy at that moment that he could not refuse.

At last, after much noise and fun, they were all seated in the carriages. Romashov had kept his word, and sat stowed away between the two Michin girls. Only Staff-Captain Lieschtschenko, whose presence Romashov now noticed for the first time, kept wandering here and there among the carriages with a countenance more doleful and woebegone than ever. All avoided him like the plague. At last

Romashov took pity and called to him, and offered him a place on the box-seat of his trap. The Staff-Captain thankfully accepted the invitation, fixed on Romashov a long, grateful look from sad, moist dog's eyes, and climbed up with a sigh to the box.

They started. At their head rode Olisár on his lazy old horse, repeatedly performing clown tricks, and bawling out a hackneyed operetta air: "Up on the roof of the omnibus," etc.

"Quick—march!" rang Osadchi's stentorian voice. The cavalcade increased its pace, and was gradually lost sight of amidst the dust of the high road.

XIII

THE picnic gave no promise of being anything like so pleasant and cheerful as one might have expected from the party's high spirits at the start. After driving three versts, they halted and got out at Dubetschnaia. By this name was designated a piece of ground hardly fifteen dessyatins in extent, which, sparsely covered with proud, century-old oaks, slowly slanted down towards the strand of a little river. Close thickets of bushes were arrayed beside the mighty trees, and these, here and there, formed a charming frame for the small open spaces covered by the fresh and delicate greenery of spring. In a similar idyllic spot in the oak-woods, servants and footmen, sent on in advance, waited with samovars and baskets.

The company assembled around the white tablecloths spread on the grass. The ladies produced plates and cold meat, and the gentlemen helped them, amidst jokes and flirtations. Olisár dressed himself up as a cook by putting on a couple of serviettes as cap and apron. After much fun and ceremony, the difficult problem of placing the guests was solved, in which entered the indispensable condition that the ladies should have a gentleman on each side. The guests half-reclined or half-sat in rather uncomfortable positions, which was appreciated by all as being something new and

interesting, and which finally caused the ever-silent Lieschtschenko to astonish those present, amidst general laughter, by the following famous utterance: “Here we lie, just like the old Greek Romans.”

Shurochka had on one side Taliman, on the other side Romashov. She was unusually cheerful and talkative, nay, sometimes in such high spirits that the attention of many was called to it. Romashov had never found her so bewitching before. He thought he noticed in her something new, something emotional and passionate, which feverishly sought an outlet. Sometimes she turned without a word to Romashov and gazed at him intently for half a second longer than was strictly proper, and he felt then that a force, mysterious, consuming, and overpowering, gleamed from her eyes.

Osadchi, who sat by himself at the end of the improvised table, got on his knees. After tapping his knife against the glass and requesting silence, he said, in a deep bass voice, the heavy waves of sound from which vibrated in the pure woodland air—

“Gentlemen, let us quaff the first beaker in honour of our fair hostess, whose name-day it is. May God vouchsafe her every good—and the rank of a General’s consort.”

And after he had raised the great glass, he shouted with all the force of his powerful voice—

“Hurrah!”

It seemed as if all the trees in the vicinity sighed and drooped under this deafening howl, which resembled the thunder’s boom and the lion’s roar, and the echo of which died away between the oaks’ thick trunks. Andrusevich, who sat next to Osadchi, fell backwards with a comic expression of terror, and pretended to be slightly deaf during the remainder of the banquet. The gentlemen got up and clinked their glasses with Shurochka’s. Romashov purposely waited to the last, and she observed it. Whilst Shurochka turned towards him, she, silently and with a

passionate smile, held forward her glass of white wine. In that moment her eyes grew wider and darker, and her lips moved noiselessly, just as if she had clearly uttered a certain word; but, directly afterwards, she turned round laughing to Taliman, and began an animated conversation with him. “What did she say?” thought Romashov. “What word was it that she would not or dared not say aloud?” He felt nervous and agitated, and, secretly, he made an attempt to give his lips the same form and expression as he had just observed with Shurochka, in order, by that means, to guess what she said; but it was fruitless. “Romochka?” “Beloved?” “I love?” No, that wasn’t it. Only one thing he knew for certain, viz., that the mysterious word had three syllables.

After that he drank with Nikoläiev, and wished him success on the General Staff, as if it were a matter of course that Nikoläiev would pass his examination. Then came the usual, inevitable toasts of “the ladies present,” of “women in general,” the “glorious colours of the regiment,” of the “ever-victorious Russian Army,” etc.

Now up sprang Taliman, who was already very elevated, and screamed in his hoarse, broken falsetto, “Gentlemen, I propose the health of our beloved, idolized sovereign, for whom we are all ready at any time to sacrifice our lives to the last drop of our blood.”

At the last words his voice failed him completely. The bandit look in his dark brown, gipsy eyes faded, and tears moistened his brown cheeks.

“The hymn to the Tsar,” shouted little fat Madame Andrusevich. All arose. The officers raised their hands to the peaks of their caps. Discordant, untrained, exultant voices rang over the neighbourhood, but worse and more out of tune than all the rest screamed the sentimental Staff-Captain Lieschtschenko, whose expression was even more melancholy than usual.

They now began drinking hard, as, for the matter of that, the officers always did when they forgathered at mess, at each other’s homes, at excursions and picnics,

official dinners, etc. All talked at once, and individual voices could no longer be distinguished. Shurochka, who had drunk a good deal of white wine, suddenly leaned her head near Romashov. Her cheeks and lips glowed, and the dark pupils of her beaming eyes had now attained an almost black hue.

“I can’t stand these provincial picnics,” she exclaimed. “They are always so vulgar, mean, and wearisome. I was, of course, obliged to give a party before my husband started for his examination, but, good gracious! why could we not have stayed at home and enjoyed ourselves in our pretty, shady garden? Such a stupid notion. And yet to-day, I don’t know why, I am so madly happy. Ah, Romochka, I know the reason; I know it, and will tell you afterwards. Oh, no! No, no, Romochka, that is not true. I know nothing—absolutely nothing.”

Her beautiful eyes were half-closed, and her face, full of alluring, promising, and tormenting impatience, had become shamelessly beautiful, and Romashov, though he hardly understood what it meant, was instinctively conscious of the passionate emotion which possessed Shurochka and felt a sweet thrill run down his arms and legs and through his heart.

“You are so wonderful to-day—has anything happened?” he asked in a whisper.

She answered straightway with an expression of innocent helplessness. “I have already told you—I don’t know—I can’t explain it. Look at the sky. It’s blue, but why? It is the same with me. Romochka, dear boy, pour me out some more wine.”

At the opposite side of the tablecloth an exciting conversation was carried on with regard to the intended war with Germany, which was then regarded by many as almost a certainty. Soon an irritable, senseless quarrel arose about it, which was, however, suddenly interrupted by Osadchi’s furious, thundering, dictatorial voice. He was almost drunk, but the only signs of it were the terrible pallor of his handsome face and the lowering gaze of his large black eyes.

“Rubbish!” he screamed wildly. “What do you really mean by war nowadays? War

has been spoilt, transmogrified, and everything else, for the matter of that. Children are born idiots, women are stunted, badly brought-up creatures, and men have—nerves. ‘Ugh, blood, blood! Oh, I shall faint,’” he imitated in an insulting, mockingly pitiful tone. “And all this only because the real, ferocious and merciless character of war has changed. Now, can this be called war when you fire a couple of shots at the enemy at a distance of fifteen versts, and then return home in triumph as a hero? Pretty heroes! You are taken prisoner, and then they say to you: ‘My poor friend, how are you? Are you cold? Would you like a cigarette? Are you quite comfortable?’ Damn it all!” Osadchi gave vent to a few inarticulate roars and lowered his head like a mad bull ready to attack. “In the Middle Ages, gentlemen, things were quite different. Night attacks—storming ladders and naked weapons—murder and conflagration everywhere. ‘Soldiers, the town is yours for three days.’ The slaughter begins, torch and sword perform their office; in the streets streams of blood and wine. Oh, glorious festival of brave men amidst bleeding corpses and smoking ruins, beautiful, naked, weeping women dragged by their hair to the victor’s feet.”

“Anyhow, you haven’t changed much,” interrupted Sofia Pavlovna Taliman jokingly.

“All the town a river of fire, the tempest sporting at night with the bodies of hanged men; vultures shriek and the victor lords it by the campfires beneath the gallows tree. Why take prisoners and waste time and strength for them? Ugh!” Osadchi, with teeth clenched, groaned like a wild beast. “Grand and glorious days! What fights! Eye to eye and chest to chest. An uninterrupted slaughter for hours, till the cold-blooded tenacity and discipline of one party, coupled with invincible fury, brought victory. And what fights then! What courage, what physical strength, and what superior dexterity in the use of weapons! Gentlemen”—Osadchi arose in all his gigantic stature and in his terrible voice insolence and cold-bloodedness reigned—“gentlemen, I know that from your military colleges have issued morbid,

crazy phrases about what's called 'humanity in war,' etc., etc. But I drink at this moment—even if I am to drain my glass by myself—to the wars of bygone days and the joyful, bloody cruelty of old times."

All were silent, hypnotized and cowed by this unexpected horrible ecstasy of an otherwise reserved and taciturn man, whom they now regarded with a feeling of terror and curiosity. At that moment Biek-Agamalov jumped up from where he was sitting. He did this so quickly and suddenly that he alarmed several who were present, and one of the ladies uttered a cry of terror. His widely staring eyes flashed wildly, and his white, clenched teeth resembled a beast of prey's. He seemed to be nearly stifled, and he could not find words.

"Oh, see! here's one who understands and rejoices at what you have said. Ugh!" With convulsive energy, nay, almost furiously, he grasped and shook Osadchi's hand. "To hell with all these weak, cowardly, squeamish wretches! Out with the sabre and hew them down!"

His bloodshot eyes sought an object suitable as a vent for his flaming rage. His naturally cruel instincts had at this moment thrown off their mask. Like a madman he slashed at the oak-copse with his naked sword. Mutilated branches and young leaves rained down on the tablecloth and guests.

"Lieutenant Biek! Madman! Are you out of your mind?" screamed the ladies.

Biek-Agamalov pulled himself together and returned to his place, visibly much ashamed of his barbaric behaviour; but his delicate nostrils rose and fell with his quick breathings, and his black eyes, wild with suppressed rage, looked loweringly and defiantly at the company.

Romashov had heard, and yet not heard, Osadchi's speech. He felt, as it were, stupefied by a narcotic, but celestially delightful, intoxicating drink, and he thought that a warm spider, as soft as velvet, had been spinning softly and cautiously round him with its web, and gently tickled his body till he almost died of an inward,

exultant laughter. His hand lightly brushed—and each time as though unintentionally—Shurochka's arm, but neither she nor he attempted to look at each other. Romashov was quite lost in the land of dreams, when the sound of Biek-Agamalov's and Osadchi's voices reached him, but as though they came from a distant, fantastic mist. The actual words he could understand, but they seemed to him empty and devoid of any intelligent meaning.

"Osadchi is a cruel man and he does not like me," thought Romashov. "Osadchi's wife is a creature to be pitied—small, thin, and every year in an interesting condition. He never takes her out with him. Last year a young soldier in Osadchi's company hanged himself—Osadchi? Who is this Osadchi? See now, Biek, too, is shrieking and making a row. What sort of a man is he? Do I know him? Ah, of course I know him, and yet he is so strange to me, so wonderful and incomprehensible. But who are you who are sitting beside me?—from whom such joy and happiness beam that I am intoxicated with this happiness. There sits Nikoläiev opposite me. He looks displeased, and sits there in silence all the time. He glances here as if accidentally, and his eyes glide over me with cold contempt. He is, methinks, much embittered. Well, I have no objection—may he have his revenge! Oh, my delicious happiness!"

It began to grow dark. The lilac shadows of the trees stole slowly over the plain. The youngest Miss Michin suddenly called out—

"Gentlemen, where are the violets? Here on this very spot they are said to grow in profusion. Come, let us find some and gather them."

"It's too late," some one objected. "It's impossible to see them in the grass now."

"Yes, it is easier to lose a thing now than to find it," interposed Ditz, with a cynical laugh.

"Well, anyhow, let us light a bonfire," proposed Andrusevich.

They at once set about eagerly collecting and forming into a pile an enormous

quantity of dry branches, twigs, and leaves that had been lying there from last year. The bonfire was lighted, and a huge pillar of merrily-crackling, sparkling flame arose against the sky. At the same instant, as though terror-stricken, the last glimpse of daylight left the place a prey to the darkness which swiftly arose from the forest gloom. Purple gleaming spots shyly trembled in the oaks' leafy crests, and the trees seemed at one time to hurry forward with curiosity in the full illumination from the fire, at another time to hasten as quickly back to the dark coverts of the grove.

All got up from their places on the grass. The servants lighted the candles in the many-coloured Chinese lanterns. The young officers played and raced like schoolboys. Olisár wrestled with Michin, and to the astonishment of all the insignificant, clumsy Michin threw his tall, well-built adversary twice in succession on his back. After this the guests began leaping right across the fire. Andrusevich displayed some of his tricks. At one time he imitated the noise of a fly buzzing against a window, at another time he showed how a poultry-maid attempted to catch a fugitive cock, lastly, he disappeared in the darkness among the bushes, from which was heard directly afterwards the sharp rustle of a saw or grindstone. Even Ditz condescended to show his dexterity, as a juggler, with empty bottles.

"Allow me, ladies and gentlemen," cried Taliman, "to perform a little innocent conjuring trick. This is no question of a marvellous witchcraft, but only quickness and dexterity. I will ask the distinguished audience to convince themselves that I have not hidden anything in my hands or coat-sleeves. Well, now we begin, one, two, three—hey, presto!"

With a rapid movement, and, amidst general laughter, he took from his pocket two new packs of cards, which, with a little bang, he quickly and deftly freed from their wrapper.

"Preference, gentlemen," he suggested. "A little game, if you like, in the open air. How would that do, eh?"

Osadchi, Nikoläiev, and Andrusevich sat down to cards, and with a deep and sorrowful sigh, Lieschtschenko stationed himself, as usual, behind the players. Nikoläiev refused to join the game, and stood out for some time, but gave way at last. As he sat down he looked about him several times in evident anxiety, searching with his eyes for Shurochka, but the gleam of the fire blinded him, and a scowling, worried expression became fixed on his face.

Romashov pursued a narrow path amongst the trees. He neither understood nor knew what was awaiting him, but he felt in his heart a vaguely oppressive but, nevertheless, delicious anguish whilst waiting for something that was to happen. He stopped. Behind him he heard a slight rustling of branches, and, after that, the sound of quick steps and the frou-frou of a silken skirt. Shurochka was approaching him with hurried steps. She resembled a dryad when, in her white dress, she glided softly forth between the dark trunks of the mighty oaks. Romashov went up and embraced her without uttering a word. Shurochka was breathing heavily and in gasps. Her warm breath often met Romashov's cheeks and lips, and he felt beneath his hand her heart's violent throbs.

"Let's sit here," whispered Shurochka.

She sank down on the grass, and began with both hands to arrange her hair at the back. Romashov laid himself at her feet, but, as the ground just there sloped downwards, he saw only the soft and delicate outlines of her neck and chin.

Suddenly she said to him in a low, trembling voice—

"Romochka, are you happy?"

"Yes—happy," he answered. Then, after reviewing in his mind, for an instant, all the events of that day, he repeated fervently: "Oh, yes—so happy, but tell me why you are to-day so, so?..."

"So? What do you mean?"

She bent lower towards him, gazed into his eyes, and all her lovely countenance was

for once visible to Romashov.

“Wonderful, divine Shurochka, you have never been so beautiful as now. There is something about you that sings and shines—something new and mysterious which I cannot understand. But, Alexandra Petrovna, don’t be angry now at the question. Are you not afraid that some one may come?”

She smiled without speaking, and that soft, low, caressing laugh aroused in Romashov’s heart a tremor of ineffable bliss.

“My dearest Romochka—my good, faint-hearted, simple, timorous Romochka—have I not already told you that this day is ours? Think only of that, Romochka. Do you know why I am so brave and reckless to-day? No, you do not know the reason. Well, it’s because I am in love with you to-day—nothing else. No, no—don’t, please, get any false notions into your head. To-morrow it will have passed.”

Romashov tried to take her in his arms.

“Alexandra Petrovna—Shurochka—Sascha,”[18] he moaned beseechingly.

“Don’t call me Shurochka—do you hear? I don’t like it. Anything but that. By the way,” she stopped abruptly as if considering something, “what a charming name you have—Georgi. It’s much prettier than Yuri—oh, much, much, much prettier. Georgi,” she pronounced the name slowly with an accent on each syllable as though it afforded her delight to listen to the sound of every letter in the word. “Yes, there is a proud ring about that name.”

“Oh, my beloved,” Romashov exclaimed, interrupting her with passionate fervour.

“Wait and listen. I dreamt of you last night—a wonderful, enchanting dream. I dreamt we were dancing together in a very remarkable room. Oh, I should at any time recognize that room in its minutest details. It was lighted by a red lamp that shed its radiance on handsome rugs, a bright new cottage piano, and two windows with drawn red curtains. All within was red. An invisible orchestra played, we

danced close-folded in each other's arms. No, no. It's only in dreams that one can come so intoxicatingly close to the object of one's love. Our feet did not touch the floor; we hovered in the air in quicker and quicker circles, and this ineffably delightful enchantment lasted so very, very long. Listen, Romochka, do you ever fly in your dreams?"

Romashov did not answer immediately. He was in an exquisitely beautiful world of wonders, at the same time magic and real. And was not all this then merely a dream, a fairy tale? This warm, intoxicating spring night; these dark, silent, listening trees; this rare, beautiful, white-clad woman beside him. He only succeeded, after a violent effort of will, in coming back to consciousness and reality.

"Yes, sometimes, but, with every passing year my flight gets weaker and lower. When I was a child, I used to fly as high as the ceiling, and how funny it seemed to me to look down on the people on the floor. They walked with their feet up, and tried in vain to reach me with the long broom. I flew off, mocking them with my exultant laughter. But now the force in my wings is broken," added Romashov, with a sigh. "I flap my wings about for a few strokes, and then fall flop on the floor."

Shurochka sank into a semi-recumbent position, with her elbow resting on the ground and her head resting in the palm of her hand. After a few moments' silence she continued in an absent tone—

"This morning, when I awoke, a mad desire came over me to meet you. So intense was my longing that I do not know what would have happened if you had not come. I almost think I should have defied convention, and looked you up at your house. That was why I told you not to come before five o'clock. I was afraid of myself. Darling, do you understand me now?"

Hardly half an arshin from Romashov's face lay her crossed feet—two tiny feet in very low shoes, and stockings clocked with white embroidery in the form of an arrow over the instep. With his temples throbbing and a buzzing in his ears, he

madly pressed his eager lips against this elastic, live, cool part of her body, which he felt through the stocking.

“No, Romochka—stop.” He heard quite close above his head her weak, faltering, and somewhat lazy voice.

Romashov raised his head. Once more he was the fairy-tale prince in the wonderful wood. In scattered groups along the whole extensive slope in the dark grass stood the ancient, solemn oaks, motionless, but attentive to every sound that disturbed Nature’s holy, dream-steeped slumbers. High up, above the horizon and through the dense mass of tree trunks and crests, one could still discern a slender streak of twilight glow, not, as usual, light red or changing into blue, but of dark purple hue, reminiscent of the last expiring embers in the hearth, or the dull flames of deep red wine drawn out by the sun’s rays. And as it were, framed in all this silent magnificence, lay a young, lovely, white-clad woman—a dryad lazily reclining.

Romashov came closer to her. To him it seemed as if from Shurochka’s countenance there streamed a pale, faint radiance. He could not distinguish her eyes; he only saw two large black spots, but he felt that she was gazing at him steadily.

“This is a poem, a fairy-tale—a fairy-tale,” he whispered, scarcely moving his lips.

“Yes, my friend, it is a fairy-tale.”

He began to kiss her dress; he hid his face in her slender, warm, sweet-smelling hand, and, at the same time, stammered in a hollow voice—

“Sascha—I love you—love you.”

When she now raised herself somewhat up, he clearly saw her eyes, black, piercing, now unnaturally dilated, at another moment closed altogether, by which the whole of her face was so strangely altered that it became unrecognizable. His eager, thirsty lips sought her mouth, but she turned away, shook her head sadly, and at last whispered again and again—

“No, no, no, my dear, my darling—not that.”

“Oh, my adored one, what bliss—I love you,” Romashov again interrupted her, intoxicated with love. “See, this night—this silence, and no one here, save ourselves. Oh, my happiness, how I love you!”

But again she replied, “No, no,” and sank back into her former attitude on the grass. She breathed heavily. At last she said in a scarcely audible voice, and it was plain that every word cost her a great effort:

“Romochka, it’s a pity that you are so weak. I will not deny that I feel myself drawn to you, and that you are dear to me, in spite of your awkwardness, your simple inexperience of life, your childish and sentimental tenderness. I do not say I love you, but you are always in my thoughts, in my dreams, and your presence, your caresses set my senses, my thoughts, working. But why are you always so pitiable? Remember that pity is the sister of contempt. You see it is unfortunate I cannot look up to you. Oh, if you were a strong, purposeful man——” She took off Romashov’s cap and put her fingers softly and caressingly through his soft hair. “If you could only win fame—a high position——”

“I promise to do so; I will do so,” exclaimed Romashov, in a strained voice. “Only be mine, come to me ... all my life shall....”

She interrupted him with a tender and sorrowful smile, of which there was an echo in her voice.

“I believe you, dear; I believe you mean what you say, and I also know you will never be able to keep your promise. Oh, if I could only cherish the slightest hope of that, I would abandon everything and follow you. Ah, Romochka, my handsome boy, I call to mind a certain legend which tells how God from the beginning created every human being whole, but afterwards broke it into two pieces and threw the bits broadcast into the world. And ever afterward the one half seeks in vain its fellow. Dear, we are both exactly two such unhappy creatures. With us there are so many

sympathies, antipathies, thoughts, dreams, and wishes in common. We understand each other by means of only half a hint, half a word—nay, even without words. And yet our ways must lie apart. Alas! this is now the second time in my life——"

"Yes, I know it."

"Has he told you this?" asked Shurochka eagerly.

"No; it was only by accident I got to know it."

They were both silent. In the sky the first stars began to light up and display themselves to the eye as little, trembling, emerald, sparkling points. From the right you might hear a weak echo of voices, laughter and the strains of a song; but in all the rest of the wood, which was sunk in soft, caressing darkness, reigned a deep, mysterious silence. The great blazing pyre was not visible from this spot in the woods, but the crests from the nearest oaks now and then reflected the flaming red glow that, by its rapid changes from darkness to light, reminded one of distant and vivid sheet-lightning. Shurochka softly and silently caressed Romashov's hair and face. When he succeeded in seizing her fingers between his lips, she herself pressed the palm of her hand against his mouth.

"I do not love my husband," she said slowly and in an absent voice. "He is rough, indelicate, and devoid of any trace of fine feeling. Ah, I blush when I speak of it—we women never forget how a man first takes forcible possession of us. Besides, he is so insanely jealous. Even to-day he worries me about that wretched Nasanski. He forces confessions from me, and makes the most insignificant events of those times the ground for the wildest conclusions. Ah—shame, he has unblushingly dared to put the most disgusting questions to me. Good God! all that was only an innocent, childish romance, but the mere mention of Nasanski's name makes him furious."

Now and then, whilst she spoke, a nervous trembling was noticeable in her voice, and her hand, still continuing its caress, was thrilled, as it were, by a shudder.

"Are you cold?" asked Romashov.

“No, dear—not at all,” she replied gently. “The night is so bewitchingly beautiful, you know.” Suddenly, with a burst of uncontrollable passion, she exclaimed, “Oh, my beloved, how sweet to be here with you.”

Romashov took her hand, softly caressed the delicate fingers, and said in a shy, diffident tone:

“Tell me, I beg you. You have just said yourself that you do not love your husband. Why, then, do you live together?”

She arose with a rapid movement, sat up, and began nervously to pass her hands over her forehead and cheeks, as if she had awakened from a dream.

“It’s late; let us go. Perhaps they are even now looking for us,” she answered in a calm and completely altered voice.

They got up from the grass, and both stood for a while silent, listening to each other’s breathings, eye to eye, but with lowered gaze.

“Good-bye,” she suddenly cried in a silvery voice. “Good-bye, my bliss—my brief bliss.”

She twined her arms round his neck and pressed her moist, burning-hot lips to his mouth. With clenched teeth and a sigh of intense passion she pressed her body to his. To Romashov’s eyes the black trunks of the oaks seemed to reel and softly bend towards the ground, where the objects ran into each other and disappeared before his eyes. Time stood still....

By a violent jerk she released herself from his arms, and said in a firm voice:

“Farewell—enough. Let us go.”

Romashov without a sound sank down on the grass at her feet, embracing her knees, and pressing his lips against her dress in long, hot kisses.

“Sascha—Saschenka,” he whispered, having now lost all self-command, “have pity on me.”

“Get up, Georgi Alexandrovich! Come—they might take us unawares. Let us return to the others.”

They proceeded on their way in the direction from which they heard the sound of voices. Romashov’s temples throbbed, his knees gave way, and he stumbled like a drunken man.

“No, I will not,” Shurochka answered at last in a fevered, panting voice. “I will not betray him. Besides, it would be something even worse than betrayal—it would be cowardice. Cowardice enters into every betrayal. I’ll tell you the whole truth. I have never deceived my husband, and I shall remain faithful to him until the very moment when I shall release myself from him—for ever. His kisses and caresses are disgusting to me, and listen, now—no, even before—when I thought of you and your kisses, I understood what ineffable bliss it would be to surrender myself wholly to the man I love. But to steal such a joy—never. I hate deceit and treacherous ways.”

They were approaching the spot where the picnic had taken place, and the flames from the pyre shone from between the trees, the coarse, bark-covered trunks of which were sharply outlined against the fire, and looked as if they were molten in some black metal.

“Well,” resumed Romashov, “if I shake off my sluggishness, if I succeed in attaining the same goal as that for which your husband is striving, or perhaps even something still higher—would you then ...?”

She pressed her cheek hard against his shoulder, and answered impetuously and passionately—

“Yes, then, then!”

They gained the open. All the vast, burning pyre was visible; around it a crowd of small, dark figures were moving.

“Listen, Romochka, to still another last word.” Shurochka spoke fast, and there was

a note of sorrow and anguish in her voice. “I did not like to spoil this evening for you, but now it must be told. You must not call at my house any more.”

He stopped abruptly before her with a look of intense astonishment. “Not call? But tell me the reason, Sascha. What has happened?”

“Come, come; I don’t know, but somebody is writing anonymous letters to my husband. He has not shown them to me, only casually mentioned several things about them. The foulest and most disgusting stories are being manufactured about you and me. In short, I beg you not to come to us any more.”

“Sascha,” he moaned, as he stretched out his arms to her.

“O my friend, my dearest and most beloved. Who will suffer more from this than I? But it is unavoidable. And listen to this, too. I am afraid he is going to speak to you about this. I beseech you, for God’s sake, not to lose your temper. Promise me you won’t.”

“That is all right; don’t be afraid,” Romashov replied in a gloomy tone.

“That is all. Farewell, poor friend. Give me your hand once more and squeeze mine tight, quite tight, till it hurts. Oh! good-bye, darling, darling.”

They separated without going closer to the fire. Shurochka walked straight up the slope. Romashov took a devious path downwards along the shore. The card-playing was still going on, but their absence had been remarked, and when Romashov approached the fire, Ditz greeted him so insolently, and with such a vulgar attack of coughing in order to draw attention, that Romashov could hardly restrain himself from flinging a firebrand at his face.

Directly after this he noticed that Nikoläiev left his game, took Shurochka aside, and talked to her for some time with angry gestures and looks of hatred. Suddenly she pulled herself together, and answered him in a few words with an indescribable expression of indignation and contempt on her features. And that big, strong man all at once shrivelled up humbly in her presence, like a whipped hound which

obediently goes its way, but gnashes its teeth with suppressed fury.

The party broke up soon after this. The night felt chilly, and a raw mist rose from the little river. The common stock of good humour and merriment had long been exhausted, and all separated, weary, drowsy, and without hiding their yawns. Romashov was soon once more sitting in his trap, opposite the Misses Michin, but he never uttered a word during the course of the journey. Before his mind's eye still stood the mighty dark and silent trees and the blood-red sunset over the brow of the woodland hill. There, too, in the soft, scented grass, he saw beside him a female shape robed in white, but during all his intense, consuming pain and longing, he did not fail to say of himself, pathetically—

"And over his handsome countenance swept a cloud of sorrow."

XIV

IN May the regiment went into camp, which, year after year, was pitched in the same spot outside the town, and not far from the railway. The young officers had, whilst the camp was on, according to the regulations, to live in wooden barracks near their respective companies; but Romashov continued to enjoy his own dwelling in the town, as the officers' barracks of the 6th Company had long been in a ruinous and uninhabitable condition, on account of there being no money available for repairs. Every day he had to journey four times between the town and the camp. In the morning off to the camp for drill, thence back to the officers' mess in the town for his dinner; after that, off to the afternoon exercises, and, finally, at night, his last walk back to his home. This fatiguing life was seriously affecting his health. After the first fortnight he began to get thin and hollow-eyed, and soon lost the fresh colour of his cheeks.

Even the rest, officers as well as men, fared little better. Preparations were being made for the great General Review, and nobody ventured to speak of fatigue or

weariness. The Captains of companies exhausted the utmost strength of their men by two or three hours' extra drill every day. During all the drill the smacking sound of ears being boxed and other maltreatment was heard all over the plain. More than once Romashov noticed how the Captains, in a furious rage, like wild beasts, attacked the poor recruits, and boxed the ears of the entire line from first to last; but, nevertheless, the "non-coms." displayed the greatest cruelty. They punished with unbridled rage the slightest mistake in marching or manual exercise; teeth were knocked out, drums of the ears were broken, and the defenceless victims were thrown down senseless. But none of all these martyrs ever entertained the thought of drawing a sword. It was just as if the whole regiment had become the prey of a wild hypnosis or had been attacked by nightmare. And all these terrors and sufferings were multiplied by a fearful heat, for May this year was unusually hot.

Wherever you went an unnatural nervousness was discernible. The most absurd quarrels would, all of a sudden, break out during meals at the officers' mess. They insulted each other, and sought quarrels without rhyme or reason. The soldiers, with their sunken cheeks and sallow eyes, looked like idiots. Never, during the few hours' rest they were allowed to enjoy, was a laugh heard from the tents; never a joke. At night, after bugle-call, the rank and file were ordered to get into line for games and singing, and with an absolutely apathetic expression of voice and features they howled the old campsong—

"Oh, the gallant Russian soldier, Fear with him can find no place; He, when bombs are bursting round him, Calls them 'brother' to their face."

Then a dance would be played on the harmonium, and the ensign would roar out—

"Gregorash, Skvortzov, up and dance, you hounds!"

The two recruits obeyed the order without a murmur, but in both their song and dance there lay something dead, mechanical, and resigned, at which one was inclined to weep.

Only in the 5th Company were they easy-going and free, and there the drills began every day an hour later than the rest and were concluded an hour earlier. You might have fancied that every member of it had been specially chosen, for they all looked lively, well-fed. The lads of the 5th Company looked their officers bravely and openly in the face, and the very rubashka[19] was worn with a certain aristocratic elegance. Their commander, Stelikovski—a very eccentric old bachelor and comparatively rich (he drew from some unknown quarter two hundred roubles every month), was of an independent character, with a dry manner, who stood aloof from his comrades, and lastly, was in bad odour on account of his dissolute life. He attracted and hired young girls from the lower class, often minors, and these he paid handsomely, and sent back to their native places after the lapse of a month. Corporal punishment—nay, even threats and insulting words—were strictly forbidden in his company, although, as far as that goes, there was by no means any coddling of the men, who, however, in appearance, and readiness, and capability, were not inferior to any company of guardsmen in existence. Being himself masterful, cool, and self-reliant in the highest degree, he was also able to implant those qualities firmly in his subordinates. What, in other companies, could not be attained after a whole week's drill amid threats, yells, and oaths, blows and stripes, Stelikovski attained with the greatest calm in a single day. He was a man of few words, seldom raised his voice, and when, on occasion, he did speak, the soldiers stood as if carved in stone. Among the officers he was shunned and hated, but worshipped by his men—a state of things that, most certainly, was unique in the whole of the Russian Army.

At length the 15th of May arrived, when the Great Review, ordered by the Brigadier-General, was to take place. In all the companies, except the 5th, the non-coms. had their men drawn up by 4 a.m. The poor, tortured, drowsy, gaping soldiers were trembling as though with cold in their coarse shirts, although the air was mild and balmy and the weather serene, and their gloomy, depressed glances and sallow, greyish, chalky faces gave a painful impression in the gleaming, bright

summer morning.

When the clock struck six, the officers began to join their companies. The regiment had not to be assembled and in line before 10 a.m., but, with the exception of Stelikovski, not one of the Captains thought of letting their poor wearied soldiers have their proper sleep and gain strength for the toils awaiting them that day. On the contrary, never had their fussiness and zeal been greater than on this morning. The air was thick with oaths, threats, and insults; ear-boxing, slaps on the mouth, kicks, and blows with the fist rained down, at each slightest blunder, on the miserable, utterly exhausted soldiers.

At 9 a.m. the companies marched to the parade-ground, about five hundred paces in front of the camp. Sixteen outposts, provided with small, multi-coloured flags for signalling, were stationed in an absolutely straight line about half a verst long, so as to mark out, with mathematical accuracy, the points where each company's right wing should be placed at the parade past the Brigadier-General. Lieutenant Kovák̀o, who had been allotted this highly important task, was, of course, one of the heroes of the day, and, conscious of this, he galloped, like a madman—red, perspiring, and with his cap on his neck—backwards and forwards along the line, shouting and swearing, and also belabouring with his sabre the ribs of his lean white charger. The poor beast, grown grey with age and having a cataract in its right eye, waved its short tail convulsively. Yes, on Lieutenant Kovák̀o and his outposts depended the whole regiment's weal and woe, for it was he who bore the awful responsibility of the sixteen companies' respective "gaps" and "dressing."

Precisely at ten minutes to 10 a.m., the 5th Company marched out of camp. With brisk, long, measured steps, that made the earth tremble, these hundred men marched past all the other companies and took their place in the line. They formed a splendid, select corps; lithe, muscular figures with straight backs and brave bearing, clean, shining faces, and the little peakless cap tipped coquettishly over the right ear.

Captain Stelikovski—a little thin man, displaying himself in tremendously wide breeches—carelessly promenaded, without troubling himself in the least about the time his troops kept when marching, five paces on the side of the right flank, peering amusedly, and now and then shaking his head whimsically now to the right, now to the left, as though to control the troops' "dressing" and attention. Colonel Liech, the commander of the battalion, who, like the rest of the officers, had been, ever since dawn, in a state of examination-fever and nervous irritability, rushed up to Stelikovski with furious upbraidings for having "come too late." The latter slowly and coolly took out his watch, glanced at it, and replied in a dry, almost contemptuous tone:

"The commander of the regiment ordered me to be here by ten o'clock. It still wants three minutes to that hour. I do not consider I am justified in worrying and exerting my men unnecessarily."

"Don't, if you please," croaked Liech, gesticulating and pulling his reins. "I must ask you to be silent when your superior officer makes a remark."

But he only too well understood that he was wrong and would get the worst of it, and he rode quickly on, and visited his wrath on the 8th Company, whose officers had ordered the knapsacks to be opened.

"What the deuce are you about? What is this foolery? Are you thinking of opening a bazaar or a general shop? This is just like beginning a hunt by cramming the hounds with food. Close your knapsacks and put them on quickly. You ought to have thought of this before."

At a quarter to eleven they began dressing the companies on the lines laid down. This was for all a very minute, tedious, and troublesome task. Between the échelons long ropes were tightly stretched along the ground. Every soldier in the front rank was obliged to see, with the most painful accuracy, that his toes just grazed the tightly-stretched rope, for in that lay the fundamental condition of the faultless

dressing of the long front. Moreover, the distance between the toes, like the breadth of the gun-stock and the somewhat inclined position of the upper part of the body, had to be the same along the whole line. While anxiously superintending these details the Captains often flew into a towering rage. Frantic shouts and angry words of command were heard everywhere: “Ivanoff, more forward, you—Syaroschtan, right shoulder forward, left back!”

At 10.30 a.m. the commander of the regiment arrived. He rode on a powerful chestnut-brown gelding with white legs. Colonel Shulgovich was an imposing, almost majestic, figure on horseback. He had a firm “seat,” although he rode in infantry style, with stirrups far too short. In greeting his regiment he yelled in his tremendous voice, in which a certain jubilant heroic note in honour of the occasion was audible—

“Good morning, my fine fellows.”

Romashov, who remembered his 4th platoon and especially Kliabnikov’s wretched appearance, could not refrain from smiling. “Pretty choice specimens, in all truth,” thought he.

The standards were unfurled amidst the strident notes of the regimental band. After this came a long and trying moment. Straight away to the station, from which the Brigadier-General was expected, were posted a number of signallers who, by certain arranged signs, were to prepare the regiment for the approach of the Generals. More than once they were disturbed by a false alarm. The loose, slack ropes were once more tightened in mad haste, “dressings” and “lines” were ordered, and all stood for several minutes at the most painful “attention,” until weariness once more asserted its claims, and the poor soldiers collapsed, yet, at the very last, striving to keep the position of their feet, at any rate, unmoved. Out in the plain, about three hundred paces off, the ladies displayed their clothes, parasols, and hats of variegated and loud colours. Romashov knew very well that Shurochka was not in that bright, festive

group. But every time he glanced in that direction he felt, as it were, an icy-cold shudder in the region of his heart, and his quick, nervous breathing bore witness to a strong inward excitement.

Suddenly, like a strong gust of wind, a rumour ran through the ranks, and a timorous cry was heard: “He’s coming; he’s coming!” It was clear to all that the important, eventful moment was approaching. The soldiers, who had been since dawn the victims of the prevailing excitement, dressed in their ranks without orders, but with a certain nervous haste, and became rigid in apparently lifeless immobility. Now and then a nervous coughing was heard.

“Ranks, attention!” rang out Shulgovich’s order.

Romashov, glancing to the right, discovered, at a good distance down the plain, a small but dense group of horsemen who, now and then obscured for an instant by a faint yellow cloud of dust, were rapidly approaching the front. Shulgovich rode, with a severe and solemn countenance, from his place in front of the middle company, right out into the plain, most certainly a good fourth further than the regulations demanded. The tremendous importance of the moment was reflected in his features. With a gesture of noble dignity, he first glanced upwards, then calmed the dark, motionless mass of soldiers by a glance, withering, it is true, but mingled with tremulous exultation, and then let his stentorian voice roll over the plain, when commanding—

“Attention! Should—er——”

He purposely kept back the last syllable of that longest word of command—the so-called “effective” word, just as if an infinite power and sanctity lay hidden in the pronunciation of those few wretched letters. His countenance became a bluish-red, the veins in his neck were strained like thick cords, and, finally, the releasing word was discernible in the wild-beast-like roar—

“—— arms!”

One—two. A thousand slamming and rattling of hard blows from soldiers' fists on the stocks of their rifles, and the violent contact of locks with the coarse metal clasps of belts echoed through the air. At the same moment the electrifying strains of the regimental march were audible from the right wing. Like wild, excited, undisciplined children let loose, the flutes and cornets ran riot, trying by their shrill, ear-piercing voices to drown the coarse bellowing of trombones and ophicleides, whilst the thunder of drums and kettledrums, warning and threatening, exhorted frivolous, thoughtless young men of the consideration due to the seriousness and supreme importance of the moment. From the station there rang out, almost like a soothing piccolo-strain, the whistle of the engine, mingling harmoniously with the joyful music of the band.

Romashov suddenly felt himself caught, as it were, by a mighty, roaring wave that, irresistibly and exultingly, carried him away. With a sensation of joy and courage such as he had never experienced before, his glance met the sun's gold-steeped rays, and it seemed to him as if, at that moment, he was, for the first time, conscious of the blue sky paled by the heat, and the warm verdure of the plain that disappeared in the far distance. For once he felt young and strong and eager to distinguish himself; proud, too, of belonging to this magnificent, motionless, imposing mass of men, gathered together and quelled by an invisible, mysterious will.

Shulgovich, with his sabre drawn to a level with his face, rode in a ponderous gallop to meet the General.

Directly the band's rough martial, triumphant strains had ceased, the General's calm, musical voice rang out—

"Good-day, 1st Company."

The soldiers answered his salutation promptly and joyfully. Again the locomotive made its voice heard, but this time in the form of a sharp, defiant signal. The Brigadier-General rode slowly along the line, saluting the companies in their proper

order. Romashov could already distinguish his heavy, obese figure with the thin linen jacket turned up in deep folds across his chest and fat belly; his big square face turned towards the troops; the gorgeous saddle-cloth with his monogram embroidered in bright colours, the majestic grey charger, the ivory rings on the martingale, and patent-leather riding boots.

“Good-day, 6th Company.”

The soldiers round Romashov replied with a shout that was pretty nearly destructive both to throats and ear-drums. The General sat his horse with the careless grace of an accomplished rider. His noble charger, with the gentle, steadfast glance from his handsome, though slightly bloodshot eyes, tugged hard at its bit, from which, now and then, a few white foam-drops fell to the ground, and careered gently on with short, quick, dancing steps.

“He’s grey about the temples, but his moustache is black—dyed, perhaps,” was Romashov’s reflection just then.

Through his gold-rimmed pince-nez the General answered with his dark, clever, youthful and satirically questioning eyes the soldiers’ glances directed at him. When he came up to Romashov he touched the peak of his cap with his hand. Romashov stood quite still, with every muscle strained in the most correct attitude of “attention,” and he clasped the hilt of his sabre with such a hard, crushing grip that it almost caused him pain. A shudder of infinite, enthusiastic devotion rushed through his whole being, and whilst looking fixedly at the General’s face, he thought to himself in his old naïve, childish way—

“The grey-haired old warrior’s glances noted with delight the young ensign’s slender, well-built figure.”

The General continued his slow ride along the front, saluting company after company. Behind him moved his suite—a promiscuous, resplendent group of staff officers, whose horses shone with profuse rubbing down and dressing. Romashov

glanced at them, too, benevolently, but not one of them took the slightest notice of him. These spoilt favourites of fortune had long since had more than enough of parades, reviews, and the boundless enthusiasm of little, insignificant infantry officers, and Romashov felt in his heart a bitter, rebellious feeling at the thought that these superior people belonged to a world quite beyond his reach.

The band suddenly received a sign to stop playing. The General returned at a sharp trot to the right wing, and after him, in a long, variegated line, his mounted suite. Colonel Shulgovich galloped off to the 1st Company. Pulling his reins and throwing all his enormous body back in the saddle, he yelled in a hoarse and trembling voice—

“Captain Osadchi, advance company. Quick, march!”

Between the commander of the regiment and Captain Osadchi there was an incessant rivalry, during drill hours, to outdo each other in lung power, and not many seconds elapsed before the latter was heard to order in his mighty, rolling bass—

“Company, shoulder arms! Dress in the middle. Forward, march!” Osadchi had, with fearful sacrifice of time and labour, succeeded in introducing in his company a new kind of marching. This consisted in the soldiers raising their foot high in the air in very slow time, and afterwards putting it down on the ground with the greatest possible force. This wonderful and imposing manner of moving along the ground excited not only much interest, but also a certain envy among the other captains of companies.

But the 1st Company had hardly marched fifty paces before they heard the General’s angry and impatient voice exclaim—

“What the deuce is this? Halt with the company. Halt, halt! Come here to me, Captain. Tell me, sir, what in the name of goodness that is supposed to represent. Is it a funeral or a torch procession? Say. March in three-time. Listen, sir, we’re not

living in the days of Nicholas, when a soldier served for twenty-five years. How many precious days have you wasted in practising this corps de ballet? Answer me."

Osadchi stood gloomy, still and silent before his angry chief, with his drawn sabre pointing to the ground. The General was silent for an instant, and then resumed his harangue with an expression of sorrow and irony in his voice—

"By this sort of insanity you will soon succeed in extinguishing the last spark of life in your soldiers. Don't you think so yourself? Oh, you luckless ghosts from Ivan the Cruel's days! But enough of this. Allow me instead to ask you, Captain, the name of this young lad."

"Ignati Mikhailovich, your Excellency," replied Osadchi in the dry, sepulchral, regulation voice.

"Well and good. But what do you know about him? Is he a bachelor, or has he a wife and children? Perhaps he has some trouble at home? Or he is very poor? Answer me."

"I can't say, your Excellency? I have a hundred men under my command. It is hard to remember all about them."

"Hard to remember, did you say?" repeated the General in a sad and serious voice. "Ah, gentlemen, gentlemen. You must certainly know what the Scripture says: 'Do not destroy the soul,' and what are you doing? That poor, grey, wretched creature standing there, may, perhaps, some day, in the hour of battle, protect you by his body, carry you on his shoulders out of a hail of bullets, may, with his ragged cloak, protect you against snow and frost, and yet you have nothing to say about him, but 'I can't say!'"

In his nervous excitement the General pulled in the reins and shouted over Osadchi's head, in an angry voice, to the commander of the regiment—

"Colonel, get this company out of my way. I have had enough. Nothing but marionettes and blockheads."

From that moment the fate of the regiment was sealed. The terrified soldiers' absolute exhaustion, the non-coms.' lunatical cruelty, the officers' incapacity, indifference, and laziness—all this came out clearly as the review proceeded. In the 2nd Company the soldiers did not even know the Lord's Prayer. In the 3rd, the officers ran like wild fowls when the company was to be drilled in "open order." In the 4th, the manual exercise was below criticism, etc. The worst of all was, however, that none of the companies, with the exception of the 5th, knew how to meet a sudden charge of cavalry. Now, this was precisely the General's hobby; he had published independently copious instructions on this, in which he pointed out minutely the vital importance of the troops' mobility and quickness, and of their leader's resolution and deliberation.

After each company had in turn been reviewed, the General commanded the officers, both commissioned and non-commissioned, to go out of ear-shot, after which he questioned the soldiers with regard to their wishes and grounds of complaint; but everywhere he met with the same good-humoured reply: "Satisfied with everything, your Excellency." When that question was put to No. 1 Company, Romashov heard an ensign in it remark in a threatening voice—

"Just let me hear any one daring to complain; I'll give him 'complaints'!"

For the 5th Company only was the whole review a complete triumph. The brave, young, lusty soldiers executed all their movements with life and energy, and with such facility, mobility, and absence of all pedantry that the whole of the review seemed to officers and men, not a severe, painful examination, but like a jolly and amusing game. The General smiled his satisfaction, and soon could not refrain from a "Well done, my lads"—the first words of approval he uttered during the whole time.

When, however, the ominous pretended charge was to be met, Stelikovski literally took the old General by storm. The General himself started the exercise by suddenly

shouting to the commander of the company: “Cavalry from the right, eight hundred paces.” Stelikovski formed, without a second’s hesitation and with the greatest calm and precision, his company to meet the supposed enemy, which seemed to approach at a furious gallop. With compactly closed ranks—the fore-rank in a kneeling position—the troops fired two or three rounds, immediately after which was heard the fateful command: “Quick fire!”

“Thanks, my children,” cried the old General joyously—“that’s the way it should be done. Thanks, thanks.”

After the oral examination the company was drawn up in open file; but the General delayed his final dismissal. It was as if it seemed hard to him to say good-bye to this company. Passing as slowly as possible along the front, he observed every soldier with particular and deep interest, and a very delighted smile gleamed through the pince-nez from the clever eyes beneath the heavy, prominent eyebrows. Suddenly he stopped his charger, turned round on his saddle to the head of his staff, and exclaimed—

“No; come here and look, Colonel, what muzzles the rascals have. What do you feed them on, Captain? Pies? Hi, you thick nose” (he pointed to a young soldier in the ranks), “your name’s Kovál?”

“Mikhail Borichuk, your Excellency,” boldly replied the young recruit with a frank, happy smile.

“Oh, you scamp, I thought you were called Kovál. Well, this time I was out of my reckoning,” said the General in fun, “but there’s no harm done; better luck next time,” he added, with the same good-humour.

At these words the soldier’s countenance puckered in a broad grin.

“No, your Excellency, you are not wrong at all,” shouted the soldier in a raised voice. “At home, in the village, I am employed as a farrier, and, therefore, they call me Kovál.”

The General nodded in delight, and he was evidently very proud of his memory. “Well, Captain, is he a good soldier?”

“Very good, General. All my soldiers are good,” replied Stelikovski in his usual confident tone.

The General’s eyebrows were knitted, but his lips kept smiling, and the crabbed old face gradually resumed its light and friendly expression. “Well, well, Captain; we will see about that. How is the punishment-list?”

“Your Excellency, for five years not a single man in my company has been punished.”

The General bent forward heavily and held out to Stelikovski his hairy hand in the white, unbuttoned glove that had slipped down to the knuckles.

“I heartily thank you, my friend,” he replied in a trembling voice, and tears glistened in his eyes. The General, like many old warriors, liked, now and then, to shed a slight tear. “Again my thanks for having given an old man pleasure. And you, too, my brave boys, accept my thanks,” he shouted in a loud and vigorous voice to the soldiers.

Thanks to the good impression left behind from Stelikovski’s inspection, the review of the 6th Company also went off nearly satisfactorily; the General did certainly not bestow praise, but neither were any reproaches heard. At the bayonet attack on the straw mannikin this company even went astray.

“Not that way, not that way, not that way!” screamed the General, shaking with wrath in the saddle. “Hold, stop! that’s damnable. You go to work as if you were making a hole in soft bread. Listen, boys. That’s not the way to deal with an enemy. The bayonet should be driven in forcibly and furiously right in the waist up to the muzzle of your rifle. Don’t forget.”

The remaining companies made, one after the other, a hopeless “hash” of everything. At last the General’s outburst of anger ceased. Tired and listless, he

watched the miserable spectacle with gloomy looks, and, without uttering a word, he entirely excused himself from inspecting the 15th and 16th Companies, exclaiming with a gesture of disgust—

"Enough, enough of such abortions."

There still remained the grand march past, and the parade. The whole regiment was formed into columns with half companies in front, and reduced gaps. Again the everlasting markers were ordered out to set the line of march by their ropes. The heat was now almost unbearable, and the soldiers could hardly bear any longer the fearful stench that exuded from their own freely perspiring bodies.

But for the forthcoming "solemn" march past, the men now made a final effort to pull themselves together. The officers almost besought their subordinates to strain every nerve for this final proof of their endurance and discipline. "Brothers, for the honour of the regiment, do your best. Save yourselves and us from disgracing ourselves before the General." In this humble recourse on the part of the officers to their subordinates there lay—besides much else that was little edifying—too, an indirect recognition of their own faults and shortcomings. The wrath aroused in such a great personage as the General of the regiment was felt to be equally painful and oppressive to officers and troops alike, and it had, to some extent, a levelling effect, so that all were, in an equally high degree, dispirited, nervous, and apathetic.

"Attention! The band in front!" ordered Colonel Shulgovich, in the far distance.

And all these fifteen hundred human beings for a second suppressed their faint inward murmurings; all muscles were once more strained, and again they stood in nervous, painful expectation.

Shulgovich could not be detected by any eye, but his tremendous voice again rang across the field—

"Stand at ease!"

Four battalion Captains turned in their saddles to their respective divisions, and each

uttered the command—

“Battalion, stand at——” after which they awaited with feverish nervousness the word of command.

Somewhere, far away on the field, a sabre suddenly gleamed like lightning in the air. This was the desired signal, and all the Captains at once roared—

“—— ease!” whereupon all the regiment, with a dull thud, grounded their rifles. Here and there was heard the click of a few unfortunate bayonets which, in the movement, happened to clash together.

But now, at last, the solemn, never-to-be-forgotten moment had arrived, when the commander of the regiment’s tremendous lungs were to be heard by the world in all their awful majesty. Solemnly, confidently, but, at the same time, menacingly, like slow rumblings of thunder, the strongly accentuated syllables rolled across the plain in the command—

“March past!”

In the next moment you might hear sixteen Captains risking their lives in mad attempt to shout each other down, when they repeated all at once—

“March past!”

One single poor sinner far away in detail of the column managed to come too late. He whined in a melancholy falsetto:

“March pa—!”

The rest of the word was unfortunately lost to the men, and probably drowned in the oaths and threats of the bystanders.

“Column in half companies!” roared Colonel Shulgovich.

“Column in half companies!” repeated the Captains.

“With double platoon—hollow!” chanted Shulgovich.

“With double platoon—hollow!” answered the choir.

“Dress-ing—ri-ight!” thundered the giant.

“Dress-ing—ri-ight!” came from the dwarfs.

Shulgovich now took breath for two or three seconds, after which he once more gave vent to his voice of thunder in the command—

“First half company—forward—march!”

Rolling heavily through the dense ranks across the level plain came Osadchi’s dull roar—

“First half company, dress to the right—forward—march!”

Away in the front was heard the merry rattle of drums. Seen from the rear, the column resembled a forest of bayonets which often enough waved backwards and forwards.

“Second half company to the middle!” Romashov recognized Artschakovski’s squeaky falsetto.

A new line of bayonets assumed a leaning position and departed. The thunder of the drums grew more and more faint, and was just about to sink down, as it were, and be absorbed in the ground, when suddenly the last sounds of drum-beats were dispersed by the rhythmically jubilant, irresistible waves of music from the wind instruments. The sleepy marching time of the companies filing past at once caught fire and life; languid eyes and greyish cheeks regained their colour, and tired muscles were once more braced to save the honour of the regiment.

The half companies proceeded to march, one after the other, and at every step the soldiers’ torpid spirits were revived under the influence of the band’s cheerful strains. The 1st Battalion’s last company had already got some distance when, lo! Lieutenant-Colonel Liech advanced gently on his thin, raven-black horse, followed close at his heels by Olisár. Both had their sabres ready for the salute, with their sabre-hilts’ knots dangling on a level with their mouths. Soon Stelikovski’s quiet,

nonchalant command was heard. High above the bayonets, the standard lorded on its long pole, and it was now the 6th Company's turn to march. Captain Sliva stepped to the front and inspected his men by a glance from his pale, prominent, fishy eyes. With his miserable shrunken figure stooping, and his long arms, he had a striking resemblance to an ugly old monkey.

"F-irst half company—forward!"

With a light and elegant step Romashov hurried to his place right in front of the second half company's pivot. A blissful, intoxicating feeling of pride came over him whilst he allowed his glance to glide quickly over the first row of his division. "The old swashbuckler viewed with an eagle's eyes the brave band of veterans," he declaimed silently, after which in a prolonged sing-song he gave the order—

"Second half company—forward!"

"One, two," Romashov counted softly to himself, marking time with a soft stamping on the spot. Pronouncing the word at the right moment was of infinite importance, as upon it depended the exact carrying out of the inexorable command that the half company should begin marching with the proper foot, i.e., with the same foot as the preceding division, "left, right; left, right." At last a start was made. With head erect, and beaming with a smile of boundless happiness, he cried in a loud, resonant voice—

"March!"

A second afterwards he made, as quick as lightning, a complete turn on one foot towards his men, and commanded, two tones lower in the scale—

"Dress—right!"

The profound solemnity and "infinite beauty" of the moment almost took away his breath. At that instant it seemed to him as if the music's waves of melody surrounded him, and were changed into a seething, blinding ocean of light and fire; as if these deafening brazen peals had descended on him from on high, from heaven,

from the sun. Even now, as at his last never-to-be-forgotten tryst with Shurochka, he was thrilled by a freezing, petrifying shudder that made the very hair on his head stand up.

With joy in their voices and in time with the music, the 5th Company replied to the General's salute. Nearer and nearer to Romashov sounded the jubilant notes of the parade march. On the right and onwards, he could now distinguish the General's heavy figure on his grey horse, and, somewhat farther off, the ladies' brilliant dresses, which, in the blinding glare of the noon-day sun, reminded him of the flaming flower-petals in the old sagas. On the left gleamed the bandsmen's gold instruments, and it seemed to Romashov as if, between the General and the band, was drawn an invisible, enchanted thread, the passing of which was combined peril and bliss.

At this moment the first half company reached "the thread."

"Good, my lads," rang the General's delighted voice. "Ah, ah, ah, ah!" was the soldiers' rapid, joyous answer. Stronger and stronger at every second grew the alluring influence of the parade march, and Romashov could hardly restrain his feelings any longer. "O thou, my ideal," thought he of the General, with deep emotion.

The blissful moment had come. With elastic strides that scarcely touched the ground, Romashov approached his "enchanted thread." He threw his head bravely back with a proud and defiant twist to the left. So potent a feeling of lightness, freedom, and bliss rushed through his being that he fancied he could at any moment whirl himself into space. And while he felt he was an object of delight and admiration to the eyes of all—a centre of all the universe contains of strength, beauty, and delight, he said to himself, as though under the witchery of a heavenly dream—

"Look, look, there goes Romashov! The ladies' eyes are shining with love and

admiration. One, two; left, right, ‘Colonel Shulgovich,’ shouts the General, ‘your Romashov is a priceless jewel; he must be my Adjutant.’ Left, right! One, two!”

Another second and Romashov knew he had started and passed his mystic “thread.” The parade march had changed to a joyous peal of trumpets announcing victory. “Now comes the General’s salute and thanks,” thought Romashov, and his soul returns to the regions of bliss; but he fancies he hears the Colonel’s voice and certain other voices.

“What has happened; what is the matter? Of course the General has saluted, but why don’t my men respond?—What’s this?”

Romashov turned round, and his face became white. Instead of a well-ordered troop in two lines as straight as an arrow, his men formed a shapeless mass—a crowd—resembling a flock of sheep—of individuals mad with imbecility and misery, pushing and jolting each other. The cause of this was that Romashov, whilst he was in his paradisaical world of dreams and intoxication of victory, failed to notice that, step by step, he deviated from the line of march, and more and more approached the right wing of his division. His trusty, unfortunate “markers” followed close on the heels of their leader, and, of course, in consequence of this the whole of the half company finally got into the wildest confusion. Romashov saw all this at the very moment he became aware that the wretched Khliabnikov was stalking, on his own account, twenty paces behind the division, right under the very nose of the General.

Romashov immediately let his wings droop. Covered with dust, he stood quite still to await and collect his poor veterans, who, absolutely dead beaten with the weight of their knapsacks and ammunition, were now hardly able to crawl along on all-fours with one hand still grasping the rifle and the other fumbling in the air or in the region of their perspiring noses.

To Romashov it seemed as if the glorious May sun had suddenly lost its radiance; as

if he had been buried under an infinite weight, under sand and gravel, and that the music that so lately sounded such triumphant strains now rang softly and ominously in his ears, like a funeral march. And he felt so small and weak and wretched, so loathsome in every respect, that it was all he could do to keep himself upright on his leaden, palsied legs.

The Colonel's Adjutant at that moment rushed up to him. Federovski's face was as red as fire and distorted with passion. His lower jaw trembled, and he was panting with rage and his hard riding. Even at a distance he began shrieking like a man possessed, and uttering inarticulate and incomprehensible words.

"Sub-lieutenant Romashov, the commander of your regiment condemns, in the strongest terms, your behaviour to-day. Seven days' arrest in the staff cells. What a monstrous scandal! The whole regiment—on account of you. Oh, such an abortion!"

Romashov did not make the slightest reply, nor did he even turn his head. And, besides, what answer could he make? Federovski had, most certainly, a right to be furious. But the troops, the soldiers who heard every single insulting word of the Adjutant's—what would they think? Romashov felt at that moment a boundless hatred and contempt of himself. "I am lost; I am dishonoured for ever. I'll shoot myself. Can I suppose I am worthy to live! What am I? An insignificant, ridiculous, contemptible wretch—a caricature, an ugly, disgusting, idiotic creature. My own soldiers will laugh at me, and, behind my back, they will make merry with nudges and secret signs, at my expense. Or, perhaps, they will pity me. All the same, everything is lost, and I—I'll shoot myself."

After passing the General, all the companies made a half-turn to the left, and then went back to their original places, where they were successively drawn up again and in open file. Whilst waiting for the return of the last companies to march past, the men were allowed to "stand easy," and the officers utilized the occasion to smoke a cigarette and chat with one another. Only Romashov stood quite alone, silent and

motionless in front of his half company. He dug the earth incessantly with the point of his sabre, and though he cast his eyes down fixedly, he felt he was, on all sides, a mark for curious, sarcastic, and contemptuous glances.

Captain Sliva purposely passed by Romashov without stopping except to look at him, and spoke, as it were, to himself through his clenched teeth, and in a voice hoarse and unrecognizable through hatred and fury—

"Be good enough to send in to-day a request to be transferred to another company."

A little while afterwards Viätkin came. In his kindly, frank glance and the drawn corners of his mouth, Romashov read that expression of pity and compassion with which people usually regard a dog that has been run over and crushed in the street. And, at the same time, Romashov felt with disgust that he had, half mechanically, twisted his mouth into an unmeaning, pitiful smile.

"Yuri Alexievich," exclaimed Viätkin, "come and smoke a cigarette with me," and with a click of the tongue and slightly throwing his head back, he added in a despondent tone—

"Well, well, old chap!"

Romashov's chin and the corners of his mouth twitched, and a lump came into his throat. Tears were not far off, and he replied in the faltering and fretful voice of an aggrieved child—

"No, no; not now!—I don't want to!"

Viätkin withdrew.

"Suppose I were to go and give that fellow Sliva a bang on his ear," thought Romashov, buffeted here and there by his melancholy introspections. "Or to go up to that grey-bearded General and say: 'Aren't you ashamed, at your age, to play with soldiers and torture men? Release us from here instantly, and let us rest. For two long weeks the soldiers have been ill-treated solely on account of you.'"

Romashov, however, remembered his own proud, stuck-up thoughts only a brief while ago—of the young ensign as handsome as a picture, of the ladies' ideal, of the General's favourite future Adjutant, etc., etc.—and he felt so much shame and pain that a deep blush overspread, not only his face, but even his chest and back.

"You wretched, absurd, contemptible being!" he shrieked to himself in thought. "Let all know that I shall shoot myself to-day."

The review was over. The regiment had, nevertheless, to parade several times before the General, first by companies in the ordinary march, afterwards in quick march, and finally in close columns. The General became a little less severe, as it were, and he even praised the soldiers several times. At last the clock was close upon 4 p.m. Then at length the men got a little rest whilst the officers assembled to criticize them.

The staff-trumpeter blew a signal. "The officers are summoned to the General," it shouted through the companies.

The officers left the ranks, and formed themselves into a dense circle round the General, who remained on horseback, stooping and visibly extremely tired; but he peered through his glasses as shrewdly and scornfully as before.

"I shall be brief," said he in an abrupt and decisive tone. "The regiment is inefficient, but that's not the fault of the soldiers, but of the officers. When the coachman is bad the horses will not go. Gentlemen, you have no heart, no mind or sympathy, so far as the men's needs and interests are concerned. Don't forget, 'Blessed is he who lays down his life for his friend.' With you there is only one thought, 'How shall I best please the General at the review?' You treat your men like plough horses. The appearance of the officers witnesses to moral slovenliness and barbarism. Here and there an officer puts me in mind of a village sexton dressed in an officer's uniform. Moreover, I will refer to my orders of the day in writing. An ensign, belonging probably to the sixth or seventh company, lost his head entirely

and hopelessly muddled up his division. Such a thing is a disgrace. I do not want a jog-trot march in three-time, but, before everything else, a sound and calm judgment."

"That last referred to me," thought Romashov, and he fancied he felt all the glances of those present turned towards him at once. But nobody even stirred: all stood speechless, petrified, with their eyes immovably fixed on the General's face.

"My very heartiest thanks to the Captain of the 5th Company. Where are you, Captain? Oh, there you are!" The General, a little theatrically, took off his cap with both hands and bared his powerfully shaped bald head, whilst making a profound bow to Stelikovski. "Once more I thank you, and it is a pleasure for me to shake you by the hand. If God should ordain that this corps is to fight under my command, remember, Captain, that the first dangerous task belongs to you. And now, gentlemen, good-bye. Your work for the day is finished, and it will be a pleasure for me to see you again, but under different and more pleasing circumstances. Make way for my horse now."

Colonel Shulgovich stepped out of the circle.

"Your Excellency, in the officers' name, I invite you respectfully to dine at our mess. We shall be——"

"No, I see no reason for that," interrupted the General dryly. "I thank you, as I am in duty bound to do, but I am invited to Count Liedochovski's."

The officers cleared a way, and the General galloped off to the place where the regiment was awaiting the officers' return.

"I thank you, my lads," he shouted lustily and kindly to the soldiers. "I give you two days' leave. And now, off with you to your tents. Quick march, hurrah!"

It was just as if he had, by this last brief shout, turned the whole regiment topsy-turvy. With a deafening yell of delight, fifteen hundred men dispersed, in an instant, in all directions, and the ground shook beneath the feet of the fugitives.

Romashov separated himself from the other officers, who returned, in groups, to the town, and took a long circuit through the camp. He felt just then like a banned, excommunicated fugitive; like an unworthy member expelled from the circle of his comrades—nay, even like a creature beyond the pale of humanity, in soul and body stunted and despised.

When he at length found himself behind the camp, near his own mess, he heard a few cries of sudden but restrained rage. He stood an instant and saw how his ensign, Rynda—a small, red-faced, powerful fellow—was, with frightful invectives and objurgations, belabouring with his fists Khliabnikov's nose and cheeks. In the poor victim's almost bestially dull eyes one could see an indescribable terror, and, at every blow, Khliabnikov staggered now to the right, now to the left.

Romashov hurried away from the spot almost at running speed. In his present state of mind, it was beyond his power to protect Khliabnikov from further ill-treatment. It seemed to Romashov as if this wretched soldier's fate had to-day become linked with his own. They were both, he thought, cripples, who aroused in mankind the same feeling of compassion and disgust. This similarity in their position certainly excited, on Romashov's part, an intolerable feeling of shame and disgust at himself, but also a consciousness that in this lay something singularly deep and truly human.

XV

ONLY one way led from the camp to the town, viz. over the railway-line, which at this spot crossed a deep and declivitous ravine. Romashov ran briskly down the narrow, well-trodden, almost precipitous pathway, and was beginning, after that, a toilsome clamber up the other slope. He had not reached more than half-way to the top of the ravine before he noticed a figure there in uniform with a cloak over his shoulders. After a few seconds' close examination, Romashov recognized his friend Nikoläiev.

"Now," thought Romashov, "comes the most disagreeable of all," and he could not suppress a certain unpleasant feeling of anxiety; but he continued on his way resigned to his fate, and was soon on the plateau.

The two officers had not seen each other for five days, but neither of them made even an intimation of greeting, and it seemed, at any rate to Romashov, as if this were quite the correct thing on this memorable, miserable day.

"I have purposely waited for you here, Yuri Alexievich," began Nikoläiev, whilst he looked over Romashov's shoulder into the distance, towards the camp.

"I am at your service, Vladimir Yefimovich," replied Romashov in a strained, unconcerned tone, and with a slight tremor in his voice. He stooped down to the ground and broke off a dry, brown stalk of grass from the previous year. Whilst absently biting the stalk of grass, he stared obstinately at the bright buttons on Nikoläiev's cape, and he saw in them his own distorted figure—a little narrow head upwards; downwards two stunted legs, and between them an abnormally broad big belly.

"I shall not keep you long waiting—only a few words," said Nikoläiev. He spoke with a strikingly peculiar softness in his voice and with the forced politeness of an angry and hot-tempered person who has made up his mind not to forget himself. But whilst both tried to shun the other's glances, the situation became every moment more and more intolerable, so that Romashov in a questioning tone proposed—

"It would be best perhaps if we went on our way together?"

The winding steps, worn by foot-passengers, cut through a large field of white beet. In the distance the town, with its white houses and red-tiled roofs, might be distinguished. Both officers walked side by side, yet with an evident effort to keep as far as possible from each other, and the beets' thick, luxuriant, and juicy leaves were crushed and bruised beneath their feet. Both observed, for a long time, an obstinate silence. Finally, after taking a deep breath, Nikoläiev managed, with a

visible effort, to blurt out—

“First of all, I must ask you a question. Have you invariably shown my wife, Alexandra Petrovna, due regard and respect?”

“I don’t understand what you mean, Vladimir Yefimovich,” replied Romashov; “but I, too, have a question....”

“Excuse me,” interrupted Nikoläiev in a sharp tone, “our questions ought, to avoid confusion, to be put in turn—first I, then you. And now let us talk openly and without restraint. Answer me this question first. Is it a matter of supreme indifference to you that my wife—that her good name—has been the subject of scandal and slander? No, no, don’t interrupt me. You can hardly deny, I suppose, that on my part you have never experienced anything but goodwill, and that, in our house, you have always been received as an intimate friend—nay, almost as a relation.”

Romashov made a false step and stumbled on the loose ground. In an embarrassed tone he mumbled in reply—

“Be assured, Vladimir Yefimovich, that I shall always feel grateful to you and Alexandra Petrovna.”

“Ah, that’s not the question,” said Nikoläiev, angrily interrupting him. “I am not soliciting your gratitude. I’ll only tell you that my wife has been the victim of dirty, lying scandal in which” (Nikoläiev almost panted out the words, and he wiped his face with his handkerchief)—“well, to put it shortly, a scandal in which you, too, are mixed up. We both—she and I—are greeted almost every day with the most shameless anonymous letters. It is too disgusting to me to put these letters before you, but you shall know a good deal of their contents.” Nikoläiev broke off his speech, but, in the next minute, he continued with a stammer. “By all the devils—now listen—they say that you are Alexandra Petrovna’s lover, and that—how horrible!—secret meetings daily take place in your room. The whole

regiment is talking about it. What a scandal!”

He bit his teeth in rage and spat.

“I know who has written these letters,” answered Romashov in a lowered voice, and turned away.

“Do you?” Nikoläiev stopped suddenly and clutched Romashov’s arm tightly. It was quite plain now that his forced calm was quite exhausted. His bestial eyes grew bigger, his face became blood-red, foam began to appear at the corners of his mouth, and, as he bent in a threatening manner towards Romashov, he shrieked madly—

“So you know this, and you even dare to keep silence! Don’t you understand that it is quite plainly your bounden duty to slay this serpent brood, to put a stop at once to this insidious slander? My—noble Don Juan, if you are an honourable man and not a ____”

Romashov turned pale, and he eyed Nikoläiev with a glance of hatred. He felt that moment that his hands and feet were as heavy as lead, his brain empty, that the abnormal and violent beating of his heart had sunk still lower in his chest, and that his whole body was trembling.

“I must ask you to lower your voice when you address me,” he interrupted him by saying in a hollow voice. “Speak civilly; you know well enough I do not allow any one to shout at me.”

“I’m not shouting,” replied Nikoläiev, still speaking in a rough and coarse, though somewhat subdued tone. “I’m only trying to make you see what your duty is, although I have a right to demand it. Our former intimate relations give me this right. If Alexandra Petrovna’s unblemished name is still of any value to you, then, without delay, put a stop to these infamies.”

“All right. I will do all I can as regards that,” was Romashov’s dry answer.

He turned away and went on. In the middle of the pathway, Nikoläiev caught him up

in a few steps.

“Please wait a moment.” Nikoläiev’s voice sounded more gentle, and seemed even to have lost some of its assertiveness and force. “I submit, now the matter has at last been talked about, we ought also to cease our acquaintance. What do you say yourself?”

“Perhaps so.”

“You must yourself have noticed the kindness and sympathy with which we—that is to say, Alexandra Petrovna and I—received you at our house. But if I should now be forced to—I need say no more; you know well enough how scandal rankles in this wretched little provincial hole.”

“Very well,” replied Romashov gloomily. “I shall cease my visits. That, I take it, was what you wished. I may tell you, moreover, that I had already made up my mind not to enter your door again. A few days ago I paid Alexandra Petrovna a very short call to return her some books, but you may be absolutely certain that was the last time.”

“Yes, that is best so; I think——”

Nikoläiev did not finish the sentence, and was evidently anything but easy in his mind. The two officers reached the road at this moment. There still remained some three hundred yards before they came to the town. Without uttering another word or even deigning to glance at each other, they continued on their way, side by side. Neither of them could make up his mind either to stop or turn back, and the situation became more awkward every minute.

At length they reached the furthest houses of the town. An isvostschik drove up and was at once hailed by Nikoläiev.

“That’s agreed then, Yuri Alexievich.” Nikoläiev uttered these words in a vulgar, unpleasant tone, and then got into the droshky. “Good-bye and au revoir.”

The two officers did not shake hands, and their salute at parting was very curt. Romashov stood still for a moment, and stared, through the cloud of dust, at the hurrying droshky and Nikoläiev's strong, white neck. He suddenly felt like the most lonely and forsaken man in the wide world, and it seemed to him as if he had, then and there, despoiled himself of all that had hitherto made his life at all worth living.

Slowly he made his way home. Hainán met him in the yard, and saluted him, from a distance, with his broad grin. His face beamed with benevolence and delight as he took off his master's cloak, and, after a few minutes, he began his usual curious dance.

"Have you had dinner?" he asked in a sympathetic, familiar tone. "Oh, you have not. Then I'll run to the club at once and fetch some food. I'll be back again directly."

"Go to the devil!" screamed Romashov, "and don't dare to come into my room. I'm not at home to anybody—not even to the Tsar himself."

He threw himself on the bed, and buried his face in the pillow. His teeth closed over the linen, his eyes burned, and he felt a curious stabbing sensation in his throat. He wanted to cry. With eager longing he waited for the first hot, bitter tears which would, he hoped, afford him consolation and relief in this dark hour of torture and misery. Without pity on himself, he recalled once more in his mind the cruel events of the day; he purposely magnified and exaggerated his shame and ignominy, and he regarded, as it were, from outside, his own wretched Ego with pity and contempt.

Then something very strange happened. It did not seem to Romashov that he slept or even slumbered for an instant, but simply that he was for some moments wholly incapable of thinking. His eyes were shut, but, all of a sudden, he felt he had regained full consciousness, and was suffering the same anguish as before. It was completely dark in the room now. He looked at his watch and discovered to his indescribable astonishment that this mysterious trance had lasted more than five hours.

He began to feel hungry. He got up, put on his sabre, threw his cloak over his shoulder and started for the officers' mess. The distance there from Romashov's door was scarcely two hundred yards, and besides, he always made use of a short cut through unbuilt-upon plots and fenced-in kitchen-gardens, etc.

A bright gleam issued from the half-open windows of the salle-à-manger, billiard-room, and kitchen, but the dirty backyard, blocked up with and partly covered by all sorts of rubbish, was in thick darkness. Every moment one heard loud chatter and laughter, singing, and the sharp click of billiard balls.

Romashov had already reached the courtyard steps when he recognized his Captain's angry and sneering voice. Romashov stopped at once, and cautiously glancing into one of the open windows of the salle-à-manger, he caught sight of Captain Sliva's humped back.

He was stammering: "All my c-c-company m-m-marches as one man." Sliva marked time by raising and lowering the palm of his hand. "But th-that d-d-damned fool m-must upset everything." Sliva made with his first finger several clumsy and silly motions in the air. "But, g-gentlemen, I s-said to him, 'M-march to another c-c-company, my f-fine f-f-fellow, or s-still b-better m-march out of the regiment. Who the devil will have s-such an officer?'"

Romashov shut his eyes, and shrivelled up with shame and rage. He feared that, at the next movement on his part, all the officers at mess would rush to the window and discover him. For one or two minutes he did not stir; then with his head hidden in his cloak, and scarcely venturing to breathe, he stole on tip-toe along the wall, out through the gate to the street, the moonlit portion of which he crossed by a couple of brisk jumps so as to reach the deep protecting shadow of the high hoarding on the other side.

Romashov sauntered for a long time that evening about the streets of the town. Often he did not even know where he was. Once he stopped in the shadow right

under Nikoläiev's house, the green-painted sheet-iron roof and white walls of which were brilliantly illumined by the moon's clear bright rays. Not a soul was in the street, not a sound was audible. The sharply marked outlines of the shadows from the houses opposite divided the street into two halves.

Behind the thick dark-red curtains in one of the rooms at the Nikoläievs' a lamp was burning. "My beloved," whispered Romashov, "don't you feel how near I am to you, how much I love you?" He pressed his hands to his chest, and had much difficulty in restraining his tears.

Suddenly, however, he got the idea that, in spite of the distance and the house's thick walls, he might possibly make Shurochka notice his presence. With closed teeth and hands so tightly clenched that the nails were driven into the flesh, and with a sensation as if icy-cold ants were creeping over his body, he began to concentrate all his will-power to a single object. "Get up from your sofa. Come to the window. Draw the curtain. Look, look through the window out into the street. Obey. I command you; come to the window at once."

But the curtain remained motionless. "You don't hear me, then," whispered Romashov, with sorrow and indignation in his heart. "You are sitting by the lamp beside him, calm, indifferent, and as beautiful as ever. Oh, my God, my God, how wretched I am!"

He sighed deeply, and with bowed head and crippled with weariness he continued his melancholy wandering.

He even passed Nasanski's place, but it was dark there. It seemed to Romashov as if a white spectre had quickly fluttered past one of the house's dark windows. A shudder ran through him, and he dared not call to Nasanski.

Some days later Romashov remembered this fantastic—nay, idiotic—ramble as a strange, far-off dream which, nevertheless, could not be forgotten. He had even been in the Jewish cemetery, but how he got there he could not tell himself. This silent

and mysterious burial-ground lay beyond the town, on a height, and was surrounded by a low white wall. From the luxuriant, slumbering grass arose the icy-cold gravestones, simple, unadorned, like each other, and casting behind them long, narrow shadows. And over all this gloomy place reigned the grave, solemn, austere note of solitude.

After this he saw himself in another quarter of the town, but this, nevertheless, was perhaps only a dream. He stood in the middle of a long, carefully constructed dam that divided the River Bug across its entire breadth. The dark-hued water ran slowly and lazily away beneath his feet, and now and then it, as it were, strove to render a well-known melody by its capricious splashing. The moon was mirrored on the lightly curled surface of the river, like an infinitely long, trembling pillar, around which you might fancy you saw millions of fishes playing in the water whilst they slowly withdrew and disappeared in the direction of the distant shore, which lay afar off, silent, dark, and deserted. Wherever he might be, whether in or out of the town, he was followed by a faint, sweet, aromatic scent from the white acacia flower.

Wonderful thoughts entered his brain this night—thoughts sometimes sad and melancholy, at other times childishly ridiculous. Most frequently he reasoned like the inexperienced gambler who with the frivolity and optimism of youth pondered upon the fact that he had in a single night played away all he possessed. Thus Romashov tried again and again to delude himself into believing that the wretched events of the past day had absolutely no importance—nay, he even succeeded in resuscitating that “irresistible” Sub-lieutenant Romashov who so ideally conducts his parade march under the General’s critical eyes, who at the front is the object of the General’s thanks and admiration, and who afterwards drains his goblet of wine among his rejoicing comrades. But the next moment he hears Federovski’s furious threats, his chief’s insulting words, Nikoläiev’s painful questions and complaints, and he is once more the disgraced and hopelessly ruined Sub-lieutenant Romashov.

An irresistible force from within brought him back in the course of his nocturnal wandering to the place where he came upon Nikoläiev after the review. Here he walked about meditating suicide, though by no means seriously, but only—according to his ingrained habit—to pose in his own worthy person as a martyr and hero.

Hainán comes rushing out of Romashov's room. His countenance is distorted with terror. Pale and trembling all over, he hurries on to the officers' salle-à-manger, which is full of people. At the sight of Hainán all spontaneously get up from their places. "Your Excellencies—the lieutenant has—shot himself," Hainán at last stammers out. General uproar; dismay is to be read in the faces of all. "Who has shot himself? Where? What lieutenant?" Finally somebody recognizes Hainán. "Gentlemen, this is Hainán, you know—Lieutenant Romashov's servant. It's the Circassian, you know." All hurry to Romashov's house; some do not even give themselves time to put on their caps. Romashov is discovered lying on his bed; on the floor beside him is a large pool of blood, in which is found a revolver of the Smith and Wesson celebrated make. Through a crowd of officers, who occupy every corner of the little room, Znoiko, the regimental surgeon, pushes his way with some difficulty. "Shot in the temple," he says amidst a general hush. "All is over, nothing can be done." Some one among the bystanders says in a lowered voice, "Gentlemen, uncover your heads before the majesty of Death!" Many make the sign of the Cross. Viätkin finds on the table a note on which the deceased has written in a firm hand a few lines in pencil. Viätkin reads them out—

I forgive all. I die of my own free will. My life is intolerable. Break the news gently to my mother.

Georgi Romashov.

All gaze at one another, and each reads on his neighbour's countenance the unuttered thought: "We are his murderers." Softly rocks the coffin covered with

gold brocade and carried by eight comrades. The entire corps of officers takes part in the procession. After the officers comes the 6th Company. Captain Sliva frowns gloomily. Viätkin's kind face is disfigured by tears, but now in the street he makes an effort to compose himself. Lbov—oh, heart of gold!—weeps incessantly without blushing for his emotion. Like deep, heavy sighs sound the hollow strains of the Dead March. There stand all the ladies of the regiment, including Shurochka. "I kissed him," she thinks with despair in her heart. "I loved him—I might have saved him." "Too late!" thinks Romashov, with a bitter smile. The officers accompanying their dead comrade to the grave softly converse with each other. "Ah," thinks each of them to himself, "how sorry I am for him, poor fellow. What an excellent comrade, what a handsome and capable officer!—Yes, yes, that is true, but we did not appreciate him." Loud and more touching sound the strains of the Dead March. It is Beethoven's immortal music, "By a Hero's Bier." But Romashov is lying in his coffin, cold and still, with an everlasting smile on his lips. On his chest rests a modest bouquet of violets, but no one knows from where they came. He has forgiven all—Shurochka, Sliva, Federovski, Shulgovich—all. But they waste no tears. He is better off where he is now; he was too pure, too good for this world.

This gloomy, silent monologue forced tears from Romashov's eyes, but he did not wipe them away. It was so delicious to imagine himself a martyr, an innocent victim to the malignity of mankind.

He had now reached the white-beet field, the extensive surface of which had an almost oppressive influence on Romashov. He climbed on to a little hillock just beside the ravine in which the railway ran.

There he stood. This side of the ravine lay in deep shadow, but the opposite one was so powerfully illuminated that one might fancy it possible to distinguish every blade of grass. The ravine was very precipitous near the place where Romashov was now standing, and at the bottom of it the rails, worn bright by traffic, shone. Far away in

the field on the other side of the railway the white, pyramid-like tents could be seen in even rows.

A little way down the slope of the ravine was a small platform. Romashov glided down to it and sat on the grass. He felt nearly sick from hunger and weariness, and his legs shook from exhaustion. The great deserted field behind him, the air, clear and transparent in spite of the shades of night, the dew-soaked grass—all was sunk in a deep, insidious, luminous silence, the intensity of which was felt by Romashov like a strong buzzing in his ear. Rarely indeed might be heard from a locomotive manœuvring at the railway station a shrill whistling which, in the solemn stillness of the night, brought with it something impetuous, impatient, and threatening.

Romashov laid himself on his back in the grass. The fleecy white clouds right above him stood motionless, but over them the round moon glided rapidly on in the dark firmament which, cold and bare and boundless, riveted Romashov's gaze. All the illimitable space between earth and heaven seemed to him fraught with eternal terror and eternal longing. "There dwells—God," thought Romashov, and suddenly, with a naïve outburst of sorrow, anger, and self-pity, he whispered passionately and bitterly—

"God, why hast Thou turned Thy countenance from me? What offence can I—a miserable worm, a grain of sand—have committed against Thee? Thou art almighty, Thou art good, Thou seest and hearest everything—why hast Thou suffered injustice and malice so to triumph over me?"

But instantly afterwards he was filled with alarm at his blasphemous speech, and he went on to say in fervour and anguish—

"No, no; forgive and forget my sinful words. I know Thou art as wise as Thou art merciful, and I shall never murmur any more. Do with me what seems best in Thy sight. I will always submit to Thy will with gratitude and a meek heart."

Simultaneously with these pious words of penance and reformation there stirred in

the depth of his soul a secret calculating thought that his solemnly promised submission to our Lord's will would move the All-seeing God suddenly to work, on his behalf, a miracle whereby all the bitter sorrows and trials of this day would appear only as a hideous dream.

"Where are you?" shrieked just then a locomotive down at the station with a short, angry, impatient whistle. Another engine at once answered, in a hollow, threatening tone, "I am coming."

From the moonlit crest of the ravine's opposite slope a soft rustle was heard. In order more easily to detect the cause, Romashov raised his head from the ground. A grey, shapeless, scarcely human figure was sliding down to the bottom of the ravine. In spite of the bright moonlight, it was difficult to distinguish the night-walker in the high grass, and only by the movements of his shadow was it possible for any one to follow with the eye his course down the declivity.

Now he was crossing the railway-line. "Judging from everything," guessed Romashov, "he is a soldier. Anyhow it's a human being; but who can it be? A drunkard or a sleep-walker?"

The strange figure had already crossed the railway, stepped into the shade, and was climbing toilsomely up the slope on which Romashov was. The latter now saw distinctly that the wanderer was a soldier, who, however, immediately afterwards disappeared from Romashov's sight. Two or three minutes elapsed before he again became visible. A round-clipped head without a cap was slowly lifted in Romashov's direction, who now recognized, without difficulty, the left wing soldier in his own half-company—the unfortunate Khliabnikov.

Khliabnikov went on his way bareheaded and with his cap in his hand, looking fixedly before him. It was evident that he was labouring under the influence of a mysterious inward force. He passed so near Romashov that the latter's cloak almost grazed his own. The moon's keen rays were reflected in the motionless pupils

beneath the unnaturally wide-open eyelids.

“Khliabnikov, is it you?” cried Romashov.

“A-ah!” shouted the soldier, who stopped immediately, and began to shake all over.

Romashov jumped up from the ground. He saw before him a disfigured face, as pale as a corpse’s, with severed, bleeding lips, and one eye almost closed up by a tremendous bump turning blue. In the uncertain evening light the traces of the disgusting violence that had been perpetrated gained a still more horrible appearance. And as Romashov gazed at Khliabnikov, his thoughts ran thus: “Behold the man who with me brought shame on the entire regiment to-day. We are both equally to be pitied.”

“Where were you going, my friend? what’s the matter?” asked Romashov, in his tenderest tone, and, without thinking, he put both his hands on the soldier’s shoulders. Khliabnikov stared at him out of his uninjured eye with the wild look of one who had been frightened out of his wits, but he turned away at once. His bleeding lips, welded together, slowly opened with a soft, smacking sound, but all he could utter was a hoarse rattle. Romashov suddenly experienced an intolerable feeling of sickness, and he thought he felt in his chest and abdomen certain symptoms which usually precede fainting.

“Has some one beaten you, eh? Tell me! Come and sit down beside me.” He pulled the soldier by the sleeve of his coat down to the ground. Khliabnikov obediently collapsed, like a dummy fallen in a heap, and sank noiselessly down on the damp grass beside Romashov.

“Where were you going?” asked the latter. Khliabnikov did not answer a word where he sat, in a very unnatural and uncomfortable position, with his legs straddling. Romashov noticed that his head sank slowly, with scarcely perceptible little nods, on his chest. Again Romashov heard the same short, hoarse, rattling sound, and his whole soul was filled by an unspeakable pity. “Do I understand that

you wanted to run away? Put on your cap and listen, Khliabnikov. At this moment I am not your officer or superior, but, like yourself, only a lonely, unlucky, ruined creature. I can understand how hard and burdensome it is for you to live, therefore speak to me frankly, tell me all. Perhaps you meant to kill yourself?" he added in a hollow, whispering tone.

A gurgling noise was again heard in the soldier's throat, but not a word passed his lips. At the same moment Romashov noticed that his companion in misfortune was shaking from head to foot as if from a chill, and he was himself now attacked by an unconquerable terror. This sleepless night passed in feverish excitement; this feeling of loneliness and desertion; the moon's unchangeable, oppressive, cold gleam; the ravine's black depth beneath his feet; the dumb, cruelly maltreated soldier at his side—all this seemed to him like a mad, insufferable dream—one of those dreams that are wont to herald the approach of death. But directly afterwards he was again seized by the same infinite pity for the unfortunate victim beside him, and it was clear to him at once how petty and insignificant was his own sorrow in comparison with Khliabnikov's cruel fate. With sincere tenderness he threw his arm round the soldier's neck, drew him forcibly to him, and said, with the warmth that belongs to conviction—

"Khliabnikov, you find life unsupportable, but, my friend, believe me, even I am an exceedingly unhappy man. The whole world wherein I live is to me a puzzle. Everything is so savage, cruel, and senseless. However, one must be patient, one must learn to suffer."

Khliabnikov's bowed head fell suddenly on Romashov's knee, which he embraced with both arms. All his being shook with suppressed weeping.

"I can't stand any more," he uttered at last, "I'll bear it no longer. Oh, my God! They beat me, they mock me; the sergeants shriek for schnapps and money. Where is a poor devil like me to get money? And then they beat me again—me, who have

suffered from childhood from an incurable pain—a severe rupture."

Romashov bent down over his head, which shook convulsively backwards and forwards against Romashov's knee. He perceived the smell of the soldier's dirty, unhealthy body, and the rank stench of his cloak, which also served as a counterpane during the cold nights in his tent. An infinite sorrow for and disgust at himself, his profession, and the whole world harrowed the young officer's soul. With overflowing heart he rested his forehead against Khliabnikov's burning head and stubbly hair, at the same time whispering scarcely audibly—

"My brother!"

Khliabnikov grasped Romashov's hand, on which a few warm tears fell. Romashov even felt two cold, clammy lips kissing his fingers, but he did not withdraw his hand, and he spoke simple, calming, touching words, just as when one talks to a weeping, injured child.

Then he escorted Khliabnikov back to the camp, and then sent for Shapovalenko, the sergeant on duty that day in the 6th Company. The latter came out hurriedly, clad in an obviously imperfect costume, peered for a while with a pair of drowsy eyes, scratched himself both back and front with an earnestness that was probably more than justified. After several tremendous yawns he became gradually awake to the situation.

Romashov ordered him to release Khliabnikov from any duties he might happen to have just then.

"Your Honour, this may perhaps be a little premature."

"No arguing!" shrieked Romashov in a furious tone. "Tell the Captain to-morrow that you acted on my instructions." Then turning to Khliabnikov, he added: "We meet to-morrow, you know, at my house," and received in reply a long, shy, grateful look.

Romashov slowly turned his steps homewards along the camp. A few words caught

from a whispered conversation in one of the tents caused him to stop and listen: “You see, comrades,” says a subdued voice, “that this same devil sends the soldier his very chief magician. When the magician catches sight of the soldier, he roars at him like this: ‘What’s a soldier to me? I’ll eat him!’ ‘No,’ replies the soldier, ‘you can’t do that, old chap, for I myself am a magician——’”

Romashov soon reached the ravine again. Once more that indescribable feeling of disgust at life and contempt of the inanity and senselessness of the work of creation. Whilst descending the declivity he stopped suddenly and raised his eyes to heaven. Again he was met by the same infinite, icy-cold firmament; again he experienced the same longing, mingled with fear and anguish, and almost unconsciously he raised his fists threateningly against heaven, and in the voice of a man foaming with rage, in words of unspeakable blasphemy, challenged his Maker’s omnipotence, and dared Him, in proof of it, to break off his arms and legs.

Romashov, deliberately and with his eyes shut, threw himself down the precipice, and alighted unscathed on the railway bank. With two leaps he gained the opposite slope, the top of which he reached without stopping or taking breath. His nostrils were dilated, and his chest heaved violently under convulsive efforts to regain his breath, but in the depths of his soul there blazed a proud, triumphant feeling of malicious joy and defiance.

XVI

THERE was a lesson on military drill going on in the school of recruits. In a close room, on benches arranged in a square, sat the soldiers of the 3rd platoon facing one another. In the middle of this square Corporal Syeroshtán walked to and fro. Close by, walking backwards and forwards in the centre of a similar square, was the non-commissioned officer Shapovalenko.

“Bondarenko!” cried Syeroshtán in a piercing voice.

Bondarenko brought his feet down on the floor with a bang, and jumped up just like a jack-in-the-box.

“Now, Bondarenko, suppose that you were standing at arms, and the commander came to you and asked: ‘What is that in your hands, Bondarenko?’ What ought you to answer?”

“A gun,” replied Bondarenko after reflection.

“Wrong! Do you mean to tell me you would call it a gun? At home you might call it a gun, certainly, but in the service it is called simply a sharp-shooting infantry rifle of small calibre, maker Berdan, number two, with a sliding bolt. Repeat that now, you son of a——!”

Bondarenko gabbled over the words, which he evidently knew by heart.

“Sit down!” commanded Syeroshtán graciously. “And for what purpose is the rifle given you?” His stern gaze wandered round the class. “Shevchuk! you answer this question.”

Shevchuk stood up with a morose expression, and answered in a deep bass voice, speaking through his nose, and very slowly, and in detached phrases, as if there were a full stop after each:

“It is given to me in order that in time of peace I may practise with it. But in time of war that I may protect my Emperor and my country from enemies.” He stopped, scratched his nose, and added obscurely: “Whether they be external or internal.”

“Right! You know that very well, Shevchuk, only you mumble. Sit down. And now, Ovechkin, tell me, whom do we call external enemies?”

Ovechkin, a sprightly soldier from Orlov, answered rapidly and with great animation, spluttering with excitement:

“External enemies are all those nations with whom we might go to war; the French, Germans, Italians, Turks, Europeans——”

“Wait,” Syeroshtán cut him short. “All that is not in the text. Sit down. And now tell me—Arkhipov! Who are our internal enemies?”

He uttered the last two words very loudly, as if to emphasize them, and threw a meaning glance at the volunteer, Markouson.

The clumsy, pock-marked Arkhipov was obstinately silent, and stood gazing out of the window. Outside the service he was an active, intelligent, clever fellow; but in class he behaved like an imbecile. Obviously the trouble lay in the fact that his healthy mind, accustomed to observe and think about the simple, straightforward affairs of village life, was quite unable to grasp the connection between hypothetical problems and real life. For this reason he could not understand nor learn the simplest things, to the great astonishment and indignation of his platoon commander.

“We-ll! How much longer am I to wait while you get ready to answer?” cried Syeroshtán, beginning to get angry.

“Internal enemies—enemies——”

“You don’t know it?” cried Syeroshtán in a threatening tone, and he would have fallen upon Arkhipov, but, glancing with a side glance at the officer, he contented himself with shaking his head and rolling his eyes terribly. “Well, listen. Internal enemies are those who resist the law; for example, who shall we——?” He glanced at Ovechkin’s sharp eyes. “You tell us, Ovechkin.”

Ovechkin jumped up and cried joyfully:

“Such as rebels, students, horse-stealers, Jews and Poles.”

Shapovalenko was occupied with his platoon close by. Pacing up and down between the benches, he asked questions from the “Soldier’s Manual,” which he held in his hand.

“Soltuis, what is a sentry?”

Soltuis, a Lithuanian, cried, opening and shutting his eyes rapidly in the effort to

think: “A sentry must be incorruptible.”

“Well, and what else?”

“A sentry is a soldier placed at a certain post with a rifle in his hand.”

“Right. I see, Soltuis, that you are beginning to try. And why is he placed there, Pakhorukov?”

“That he may neither sleep, nor doze, nor smoke, nor accept bribes.”

“And the pass-word?”

“And that he may give the pass-word to the officers who pass in and out.”

“Right. Sit down.”

Shapovalenko had noticed some time ago the ironical smile on the face of the volunteer Fokin, and for this reason he cried with extra severity:

“Now, volunteer! But is that the way to stand? When your chief asks a question you should stand as straight as a ramrod. What do you mean by the Colours?”

The volunteer Fokin, with a University badge on his breast, stood in front of the non-commissioned officer in a respectful attitude, but his young, grey eyes sparkled with laughter.

“By the Colours is meant the sacred Standard of War under which——”

“Wrong!” broke in Shapovalenko angrily, bringing the Manual down hard on the palm of his hand.

“No, that is quite right,” replied Fokin calmly.

“Wh-a-at? If your chief says it is wrong, it is wrong.”

“Look in the book and see for yourself.”

“I am your officer, and as such I must know better than you. A fine thing, indeed! Perhaps you think that I want to enter a cadet school for instruction? What do you know about anything? What’s a St-a-a-n-dard? Ste-ndard! There’s no such word as

Sta-a-andard. The sacred Stendard of War——”

“Don’t quarrel now, Shapovalenko,” put in Romashov. “Get on with the lesson.”

“Very good, your Honour!” drawled Shapovalenko. “Only allow me to inform your Honour that all these volunteers are far too clever.”

“That will do, that will do! get on with the lesson.”

“Very good, your Honour—Khliabnikov! Who is the commander of this corps?”

Khliabnikov stared with wild eyes at the “non-com.” All the sound which came from his open mouth was a croak, which might have been made by a hoarse crow.

“Answer!” cried Shapovalenko furiously.

“His——”

“Well! ‘His.’ What else?”

Romashov, who had just turned away, heard him mutter in a low voice: “You wait! Won’t I just give you a stroking down after the lesson.” But directly Romashov turned back to him he said loudly and kindly: “His Excellency—well, how does it go on, Khliabnikov?”

“His—infantry—lieutenant,” muttered Khliabnikov in a broken, terrified voice.

“A-a-a!” cried Shapovalenko, grinding his teeth. “Whatever shall we do with you, Khliabnikov? I am really afraid to think what will become of you; you are just like a camel, except that you can’t even make yourself heard. You don’t make the slightest attempt to learn. Stand there until the end of the lesson, and after dinner come to me, and I’ll take you alone. Grechenko! Who is the commander of this corps?”

“As it is to-day, so it will be to-morrow, and so on to the end of my life,” thought Romashov, as he passed from platoon to platoon. “Shall I throw it all up? Shall I leave the service? I don’t know what to do!”

After the instruction the men were kept busy in the yard, which was arranged as a shooting range. While one party practised shooting in a looking-glass, another

learned to hit a target with a shot, and a third learned rifle-shooting. Ensign Lbov's clear, animated tenor voice giving orders to the 2nd platoon could be heard at a distance.

"Right—turn—firing company—one, two!" "Compan-y!" he dragged out the last syllable, paused, and then, abruptly: "Fire!"

There was a loud report, and Lbov in his joyful, inspiring voice, cried again:

"Present!"

Sliva went from platoon to platoon, stooping and walking slowly, finding fault and making coarse remarks:

"Is that the way to hold a rifle? Any one would think you were a deacon holding a candle! What are you keeping your mouth open for, Kartashov? Do you want some porridge? Sergeant-major, put Kartashov under arms for an hour after drill. How do you fold up a cloak, Vedenyeev? Look at it, you lazy fellow!"

After the shooting practice the men piled their rifles and threw themselves down beside them on the young spring grass, already trampled on by the soldiers' boots. It was a warm, clear day. The air smelled of the leaves of young poplar trees, of which there were two rows planted round the causeway. Viätkin again approached Romashov:

"Dreaming again, Yuri Alexeich," he said. "What is the use of it? As soon as the drill is over we will go to the club, and after a drink or two you will be all right."

"I am bored, my dear Pavel Pavlich," said Romashov wearily.

"It is not very cheerful, I admit," said Viätkin. "But how can it be helped? The men must be taught their business, or what would happen if war suddenly broke out?"

"What is war after all?" said Romashov sadly, "and why——? Perhaps it is nothing more than a mistake made by all, a universal error, a madness. Do you mean to tell me that it is natural to kill?"

“Oh, the devil take your philosophy! If the Germans were to attack us suddenly, who would defend Russia?”

“I know nothing about it, so I can’t talk about it,” said Romashov shortly. “I know nothing, and yet, take——”

“For my part,” said Viätkin, “I think that if those are your ideas about war, it would be better for you to be out of the service. We are not supposed to think in our profession. The only question is, What could we do if we were not in the service? What use should we be anywhere when we know nothing but ‘Left! Right!’ We can die, of course, that is true. And die we should, as soon as we began to be in want, for food is not provided gratis, you know. And so, Mr. Philosopher, come to the club with me after drill.”

“Very well,” agreed Romashov indifferently. “If you ask me, I should say that it’s a hog’s life that we are leading; but, as you say, if one thinks so it is better to leave the service altogether.”

While they talked they walked up and down, and at length halted close to the 4th platoon. The soldiers were sitting or lying around their piled arms; some of them were eating bread, for soldiers eat bread all day long, and under all circumstances, at reviews, at halting-places in the manœuvres, in church before confession, and even before physical punishment.

Romashov heard a quietly provocative voice say:

“Khliabnikov! I say, Khliabnikov!”

“Yes?” said Khliabnikov gruffly, through his nose.

“What do you do at home?”

“Work,” answered the other sleepily.

“What kind of work, you blockhead?”

“All kinds—ploughing, cattle driving.”

Romashov glanced at the grey, pitiful face of Khliabnikov, and again was seized by an uneasy pain at his heart.

“Rifle practice!” cried Sliva from the centre. “Officers to their places.”

They unpiled their arms and took their places with much bustle.

“Close up!” commanded Sliva. “Stand at ease!”

And then, coming nearer to the company, he shouted:

“Manual exercise—count aloud. On guard!”

“One!” cried the soldiers, and held their guns aloft.

Sliva went amongst them in a leisurely manner, making abrupt remarks: “Bayonets higher.—Hold the butt-end to you.”

Then he again took up his position in front of the company and gave the order: “Two!”

“Two!” cried the soldiers.

And once more Sliva went amongst them to see if they were doing the exercises correctly.

After the manual exercise by division they had exercise by company, then turnings, form fours, fixing and unfixing bayonets and other forms. Romashov performed like an automaton all that was required of him, but all the time the words so carelessly uttered by Viätkin were running through his mind: “If I thought that, I would not stay in the service.” And all the arts of war—the skilful evolutions, the cleverness of the rifle exercise, and all those tactics and fortifications on which he had wasted nine of the best years of his life, which would fill the rest of his life, and which not so very long ago had seemed to him important and so full of wisdom—all had suddenly become deadly dull, unnatural, inventions without value, a universal self-deceit resembling an absurd dream.

When the drill was finished he and Viätkin went to the club and drank a lot of vodka

together. Romashov, hardly knowing what he was doing, kissed Viätkin and wept hysterically on his shoulder, complained of his empty, miserable life, and also that no one understood him, also that a certain woman did not love him—who she was no one should ever know. As for Viätkin, he drank glass after glass, only saying from time to time with contemptuous pity:

“The worst of you is, Romashov, that you can’t drink. You take one glass and you are all over the place.”

Then suddenly he struck his fist on the table threateningly, and cried: “If they want us to die, we’ll die!”

“We’ll die,” answered Romashov pitifully. “What is dying? A mere trifle! Oh, how my heart aches!”

Romashov did not remember going home and getting into bed. It seemed to him that he was floating on a thick blue cloud, upon which were scattered milliards and milliards of microscopic diamonds. His head seemed swollen to a tremendous size, and a pitiless voice was calling out in a tone which made him feel sick:

“One! Two!”

XVII

FROM this night Romashov underwent a profound inward change. He cut himself entirely adrift from the company of his comrades, usually took his dinner at home, never frequented the soirées dansantes of his regiment, and ceased to indulge in drink. He had grown older, riper, and more serious, and he noticed this himself in the calm resignation with which he bore the trials and adversities of life. Often, too, he recalled to mind the assertion he had long ago picked up from books or in the way of conversation, that human life is made up of periods of seven years, and that, in the course of each period, not only the organism, but also the character, views taken of life, and inclinations are completely renewed. And it was not so long since

Romashov had completed his twenty-first year.

The soldier Khliabnikov used to visit him, but at first, however, only after being again urged to do so. Afterwards his visits became more and more frequent. During the first period he put one in mind of a starved and whipped dog which flinches from the hand held out caressingly; but Romashov's kindness and goodness gradually drove away his fear and embarrassment and restored to him the faculty of gratitude and confidence. With something akin to remorse and shame, Romashov learned more of Khliabnikov's sad conditions of life and family circumstances. At home lived his mother, his father—a confirmed drunkard—a semi-idiotic brother, and four young sisters. The family's little plot of land had been confiscated, contrary to all law and justice, by the commune, which afterwards was kind enough to shelter the poor wretches in a miserable hut. The elder members were journeymen employed by strange and occasional employers, the younger ones went out to beg. Khliabnikov could, therefore, not reckon on any support from his people, and, on account of his delicate health, was not in a position to undertake any remunerative manual labour in such leisure as the service left him. But the soldier's life is unendurable without money. He receives twenty-two and a half copecks a month from the State, and out of this he must defray the costs of tea, sugar, soap, etc., and in addition, the indispensable presents to greedy and unconscionable sergeants. Woe betide the soldier who cannot, by presents, money, or schnapps, bribe his torturers. He becomes a helpless victim to insult and gross maltreatment, and all the heavy and disgusting work in the camp falls unmercifully to his lot.

With surprise, terror, and pain Romashov realized that Fate had daily united him by the closest ties with hundreds of these grey "Khliabnikovs," with those defenceless victims of their own ignorance and brutal coarseness, of the officers' heartless indifference and cruelty, of a humiliating, systematic slavery; but the most horrible of all, however, was the fact that not a single officer—and, up to that day, not even Romashov himself—saw in these stereotyped crowds of slaves anything beyond

mechanical quantities bracketed under the name of companies, battalions, regiments, etc.

Romashov did his best to procure Khliabnikov, now and then, a little income. Of course it was not very long before both this and other unaccustomed marks of humanity on the part of an officer became noticed in the company. Romashov noticed very frequently how the “non-coms.” in his presence acted towards Khliabnikov with comical, exaggerated politeness in manner and tone. That even Captain Sliva had got scent of Romashov’s changed attitude as regards the treatment of soldiers was palpable enough, and more than once, from remarks made by him—

“D-d-damned Liberals—come here to ruin the people—ought to be thrashed—f-f-flayed alive, every man Jack of ‘em!”

Now, as Romashov more and more abandoned himself to loneliness and self-examination, those curious, entangling contemplations, which a month previously, at the time of his arrest, had such a disturbing effect on him, now assailed him with even greater frequency. These generally happened after his duties for the day had been done, when he strolled silently backwards and forwards, beneath the thick, slumbering foliage of the trees near his dwelling, and when, lonely and oppressed, he listened to the solemn bass of the booming beetles or, with dreamy eyes, gazed at the roseate and rapidly darkening sky.

This new life of his surprised him by the richness of its shifting impression. In days gone by he would never have even dared to entertain a notion of what pure and calm joy, what potency and secret depths, lie hidden in something so simple and common as human thought.

Romashov had already determined irrevocably not to remain on active service, but to join the reserves as soon as his period of service as an officer by examination had expired, but he did not yet know where he would find suitable employment and an income on which he might exist. He went over in his mind all possible

occupations—post-office, customs, telegraph service, railway, etc., etc. He pondered on whether he might seek the post of estate-manager, or enter the Civil Service. And now he was astounded at the thought of all the innumerable different trades and professions that exist in the world. “How have they arisen,” thought he, “all these absurd, comical, wonderful and more or less repulsive occupations—prison-warders, acrobats, chiropodists, professors, actors, dog-barbers, policemen, jugglers, prostitutes, bath-men, veterinary surgeons, grave-diggers, beadles, etc., etc? And perhaps there’s not a human invention or caprice, however idiotic, paradoxical, barbarous, and immoral it may be, that does not at once find ready and willing hands to bring it to completion and realization.”

So, too, in meditating more profoundly, it struck him what a countless number of “intelligent” means of bread-winning there are, which are all based on mistrust of the honour and morality of mankind—supervisors and officials of all sorts, controllers, inspectors, policemen, custom-house officers, bookkeepers, revising-officers, etc., whose existence has, without exception, found justification in man’s weakness for or lack of resistance against crime and corruption.

He also called to mind priests, schoolmasters, lawyers and judges—in short, all those persons who, according to the nature of their work, are in continual and intimate contact with other men’s ideas, strivings, sorrows, and sufferings. At the thought of these, Romashov came to the tragic conclusion that these individuals become more quickly than others hard, heartless egoists, who, wrapping themselves in the dressing-gown of selfishness, very soon grow frozen for ever in dead formalism. He knew that there also exists another class, i.e. those who create and look after the external conditions of human luxury and enjoyment—engineers, architects, inventors, manufacturers, and all those who, by their united efforts, can render mankind inestimable temporal services, and place themselves solely at the disposal of the rich and powerful. They think only of their own skin, of their own nest, of their own brood, and they become, in consequence of this, the slaves of gold

and tyranny. Who is there then to raise up, instruct, and console the brutally used slave, Khliabnikov, and say to him, “Shake hands with me, brother”?

Pondering over similar subjects, Romashov certainly probed slowly and fumblingly, but more and more deeply, into the great problem of life. Formerly everything seemed to him as simple as simple could be. The world was divided into two categories very different in size and importance. The one, the guild of officers, constituting the military caste, which alone attains power, honour, and glory, the fine uniform of which confers an uncontested monopoly of bravery, physical strength, and unbounded contempt for all other living creatures; the other, the civilian element of society—an enormous number of indeterminable petty insects; another race, a pariah class hardly worthy to live, obscure individuals to be thrashed and insulted without rhyme or reason, whose nose every little gilded popinjay may tweak, unless he prefers, to the huge delight of his comrades, to crush their tall silk hats over his victims’ ears.

When Romashov thought, he stood apart from reality; when he viewed military life, as it were, from a secret corner through a chink in the wall, he gradually began to understand that the army and all that pertains to it, with its false glamour and borrowed plumes, came into the world through a mad, cruel confusion of ideas in mankind. “How,” Romashov asked himself, “can so large a class of society, in profound peace, and without doing the country the least good, be suffered to exist, to eat the bread of others, to walk in other men’s clothes, to dwell in other men’s houses, only with the obligation, in the event of war, to kill and maim living creatures of the same race as themselves?”

And more and more clearly it dawned on his mind that only the two following domains of activity are worthy of man, viz. science and art and free manual labour. And with new force the old dreams and hopes of a future literary career arose in him. Now and again, when Chance put into his hand a valuable book rich in noble

and fructifying ideas, he thought with bitter melancholy of himself: “Good gracious, how simple, clear and true all this is which I myself, moreover, have known and experienced! Why cannot I, too, compose something similar?” He wished he could write a novel or a great romance, the leitmotiv of which should be his contempt and disgust for military life. In his imagination everything fell so excellently into groups, his descriptions of scenery became true and splendid, his puppets woke to life, the story developed, and his treatment of it made him so boisterously cheerful and happy. But when he sat down to write, everything suddenly became so pale and feeble, so childish, so artificial and stereotyped. As long as his pen ran quickly and boldly over the paper he noticed none of these defects; but directly he compared his own work with that of some of the great Russian authors—if only with a small, detached piece from them—he was seized at once by a deep despair, and by shame and disgust at his own work.

He often wandered, harassed by such thoughts, about the streets in the balmy nights of the latter part of May. Without noticing it himself, he invariably selected for these promenades the same way—i.e. from the Jewish cemetery to the great dam, and thence to the high railway bank. It happened occasionally that, entirely absorbed in his dreams, he failed to notice the way he took, and, suddenly waking up, he found himself, much to his astonishment, in a wholly different part of the town.

Every night he passed by Shurochka’s window. With stealthy steps, bated breath, and beating heart, he prowled along the opposite side of the street. He felt like a thief who, in shame and anguish, tries hard to leave the scene of his crime as unobserved as possible. When the lamp was extinguished in the Nikoläiev’s drawing-room, in the black window-panes of which there was only a weak reflection of the moon’s faint rays, Romashov hid himself in the deep shade of the high hoarding, pressed his crossed arms convulsively against his breast, and uttered in a hot whisper—

“Sleep, sleep, my beloved one, my queen! I am here watching over you.”

In such moments he felt tears in his eyes, but in his soul stirred, besides love, tenderness and self-sacrificing affection, and also the human animal’s blind jealousy and lust.

One evening Nikoläiev was invited to a whist party at the commander’s. Romashov was aware of this. When, as usual of a night, he passed Nikoläiev’s dwelling, he smelt, from the little flower-bed behind the hoarding, the fragrant, disturbing perfume of daffodils. He jumped over the hedge, soiled his hands with the sticky mould of the bed, and plucked a whole armful of soft, moist, pale flowers.

The window of Shurochka’s bedroom was open. It was dark within, and not a sound could be heard from it. With a boldness that astonished himself, Romashov approached the wall, and threw the flowers into the room. Still the same mysterious silence. He stood quite still for three minutes, listening and waiting. His heart-beats, so it seemed to him, echoed along the whole of the long, dead-silent street; but no answer. Not the faintest sound reached the listener’s ears. With bent back, and blushing for shame, he stole away on tip-toe.

The next day he received the following curt and angry letter from Shurochka—

Never dare to repeat what you did yesterday. Courting in the Romeo and Juliet style is always absurd, particularly in this little hole of a place.

In the daytime Romashov tried to obtain a distant glimpse of Shurochka in the street, but he never succeeded. He often thought he recognized the mistress of his heart in some lady walking along. With beating heart and thrills of bliss he hurried nearer, but every time this turned out a bitter disappointment; and when he found out his mistake he felt in his soul an abandonment and deadly void that caused him pain.

XVIII

ONE day towards the end of May, a young soldier belonging to Captain Osadchi's company hanged himself. Curiously enough, this suicide happened on the same date as a similar dreadful event in the previous year, and that, too, in Osadchi's company.

About this time drinking-bouts were arranged in the regiment. These, in spite of their quasi-official character, were not one whit inferior in coarseness to the regular and more private gatherings inter pocula. It is highly probable that such stimulating entertainments were felt a special necessity when men, who have been tied to one another by fate, through a soul-destructive inactivity or senseless cruelty towards their kind, have chanced to look somewhat more deeply into each other's hearts, and then—in spite of prejudices, unscrupulousness, and spiritual darkness—suddenly realize in what a bottomless pit of darkness they all are. In order to deaden the pangs of conscience and remorse at a life ruined and thrown away, all their insidious, brutish instincts have to be let loose at once and all their passions satisfied.

Shortly after the suicide in question, a similar crisis occurred among the officers. Osadchi, as might be expected, became the instigator and high-priest of the orgies. In the course of several days he organized in the mess, games of hazard more recklessly than ever, during which fearful quantities of spirit were consumed. Strangely enough, this wild beast in human form soon managed to entice pretty nearly all the officers of his regiment into a whirl of mad dissipations. And during all these carousals Osadchi, with unparalleled cynicism, insolence, and heartlessness, tried to provoke expressions of disapproval and opposition, by invoking all the powers of the nether-world to insult the name and memory of the unhappy man who had taken his own life.

It was about 6 p.m., Romashov was sitting at his window with his legs resting on the window-sill, and whistling softly a waltz out of Faust. The sparrows and magpies were making a noise and laughing at each other in the garden. It was not yet evening, but the shadows beneath the trees grew longer and fainter.

Suddenly a powerful voice was heard outside singing, not without a certain spirit, but out of tune—

“The chargers are champing, snorting, and neighing. The foam-covered bridle still holds them in sway.”

Immediately afterwards the door was flung wide open, and Viätkin rolled into Romashov’s room with a loud peal of laughter. Although it was all he could do to stand on his legs, he kept on singing—

“Matrons and maidens with sorrowful glances Watch till their hero is lost to their sight.”

Viätkin was still completely intoxicated from the libations of the preceding day, and his eyelids were red and swollen from a night without sleep. His hat was half off his head, and his long, waxed moustache hung down like the tusks of a walrus.

“R-romuald, Syria’s holy hermit, come, let me kiss you!” he roared in a way that echoed through the whole house. “How long do you intend to sit brooding here? Come, let us go. There’s wine and play and jolly fellows down there. Come!”

Viätkin gave Romashov a sounding kiss and rubbed his face with his wet moustache.

“Well, well, that will do, Pavel Pavlich. Is that the way to go on?” Romashov tried to defend himself against Viätkin’s repeated caresses, but in vain.

“Hold out your hand, my friend. Osadchi is kicking up a row down there, so there’s not a pane of glass unbroken. Romashevich, I love you. Come here and let me give you a real Russian kiss, right on the mouth—do you hear?”

Viätkin with his swollen face, glassy eyes, and stinking breath was unspeakably forbidding to Romashov, but, as usual, the latter could not ward off such caresses, to which he now responded by a sickly and submissive smile.

“Wait and you shall hear why I came,” shrieked Viätkin, hiccupping and stumbling

about the room. “Something important, you may well believe. Bobetinski was cleaned out by me to his last copeck. Then he wanted, of course, to give an IOU. ‘Much obliged, dear boy, but that cock won’t fight. But perhaps you have something left to pledge.’ Then he drew out his revolver—here it is, by the way.” Viätkin drew from his breeches pocket, which followed, turned inside out, a choice little, well-constructed revolver protected by a chamois-leather case. “As you see, dear boy, the Mervin type. ‘Well,’ I said to him, ‘how much will you venture on that—twenty—ten—fifteen?’ And can you imagine such a curmudgeon? The first time only a rouble, on the ‘colour,’ of course. But all the same—hey, presto! slap-bang! After five raisings the revolver was mine and the cartridges too. And now you shall have it, Romashevich, as a keepsake of our old friendship. Some day you will always think of me thus: ‘Viätkin was always a brave and generous officer.’ But what are you doing? Are you writing verses?”

“Well, well, what have you brought this for, Pavel Pavlich? Put it away.”

“All right. Perhaps you think it’s no good? I could kill an elephant with it. Will experiment with it at once. Where’s that slave of yours? He shall get us a target on the spot. Wait a second. Hainán!—slave!—squire-at-arms!—hi!”

Viätkin rolled out of the door and then into Hainán’s closet, where for several minutes he was heard kicking up a row. Suddenly he returned in triumph with Pushkin’s bust under his arm.

“Well I never, Pavel Pavlich! Don’t make a fool of yourself. Let that alone.” But there was not sufficient force in Romashov’s objections, and Viätkin went on as he pleased.

“Rubbish! You chatter like a starling. Now we’ll put this on the tabouret. Stand up, you ass. I’ll teach you, by Jove!”

With these adjurations to poor Pushkin, Viätkin returned to Romashov, took his stand at the window-sill, and cocked his revolver. As he was not sober, he swung the

muzzle of the weapon here and there, and Romashov expected every second that one of them would be killed.

The distance was about five paces. Viätkin was long in taking aim, during which the muzzle described some dangerous curves in the air. At last the shot rang out, and in Pushkin's right cheek appeared a big black, irregular hole. Romashov was for some moments deafened by the report.

"Well aimed!" shrieked Viätkin, rejoicing. "Here's your revolver, and don't forget my friendship. Hurry on now with your uniform jacket and come with us to the mess. Long live the glorious Russian Army!"

"Pavel Pavlich, I really cannot to-day," protested Romashov weakly. He could not defend himself. In his resistance to the other's strenuous pressing, he neither found the proper decisive word nor the tone of voice requisite for enforcing respect, and, blaming himself inwardly for his despicable passive weakness, he wearily followed Viätkin, who with his shaky legs bravely stumbled among the cucumbers and turnips in the kitchen-garden.

The officers' meeting that night was more than usually noisy and stormy, and finally assumed an absolutely mad character. First they caroused at mess, then drove to the railway station to drink wine, after which the orgy proceeded in the officers' casino. Romashov held aloof at first, was angry with himself for yielding, and experienced the feeling of loathing that overcomes every sober individual in a company of drunkards. The laughter struck him as being artificial, the witticisms poor, and the singing out of tune. But the hot red wine he drank at the station mounted to his head and produced in him a noisy, nervous merriment. A curtain of millions, as it were, of grains of sand dancing round each other was spread before his eyes, which were heavy with wine, and at the same time everything seemed to him so enjoyable, comic, and humorous.

The hours flew like seconds, and it was only when the lamps of the salle-à-manger

were lighted that Romashov began to realize how the time had sped and that night had set in.

“Gentlemen,” called some one, “the ladies are waiting for us. Let us be off to Schleyfer’s.”

“Hurrah!—to Schleyfer’s, to Schleyfer’s.”

The proposal was hailed with laughter and jubilation. All got up and the chairs danced along the floor. This evening everything, moreover, went off, as it were, automatically. Outside the mess-room door stood a whole row of phaetons, but nobody knew who ordered them and how they came there. Romashov was for some time tossed between moments of semi-consciousness and the fully wide-awake state and alertness of mind of a sober man. Suddenly he found himself sitting in a carriage beside Viätkin. On the front seat sat a third person whose features Romashov could not distinguish in the darkness of the night, however much he might, by violent jerks of his body sidewards, bend forward to look closely at the unknown. The latter’s face was quite dark. Now it shrunk up to the size of a man’s fist, at another time it stretched itself out awry, and then seemed to Romashov extraordinarily familiar. Romashov suddenly burst out into a roar of laughter that sounded unnatural and idiotic, and did not seem to come from himself, but from some stranger in his immediate vicinity.

“You’re lying, Viätkin. I know very well, my dear fellow, where we are going to,” babbled Romashov, in a drunken, chaffing tone. “You’re taking me to the girls, you rascal.”

At that moment a carriage passed them with a deafening noise. By the light of the lamp the outlines of a couple of brown country horses dragging quickly along in an awkward and ridiculous gallop an open carriage with a drunken coachman slashing his whip in a frantic way, and four no less intoxicated officers, were reproduced for a second.

Consciousness and the faculty of reflection returned to Romashov for a moment. Yes, it could not be disputed; he was actually on his way to a place where women surrendered their bodies to caresses and embraces for payment in cash. “Ugh! after all, it’s perhaps the same thing in the end. Women are women,” shouted a wild, brutish, impatient voice within him. At the same time, there rang in his soul a lovely, far-away, scarcely audible music—the memory of Shurochka, but in this unconscious coincidence there was nothing low, defiling, or insulting. On the contrary, the thought of her at this moment had a refreshing, soothing, and at the same time exciting and inflaming effect on his heart.

In a short time he would then find himself in close contact with that curious, mysterious, and much-vaunted species of women that he had never gazed on before. He dreamt of how he would meet their glances, take their hands, and listen to their merry laughter and joyous songs, and he felt that all this would bring him relief and consolation in his incessant longing and torturing desire for Shurochka, the only woman in the world who existed for him. In all these dreams, however, there was not a trace of degraded, sensual lust. As a dead-tired bird on the wing rushes, in the cold and darkness of an autumn night, blindly against the irresistibly attractive flood of light from the lighthouse, so, too, his soul, tortured by a cruel and capricious woman, was drawn into this sphere of undisguised, sensual tenderness and careless, boisterous merriment.

Suddenly the horses made a sharp swerve to the right, and at once the noise of the carriage and the squeaking of the wheel-tyres ceased. The carriage rocked here and there in the shallow cavities of the deep, sandy road. Romashov opened his eyes. Far beneath him and on a wide stretch of land, a multitude of small lights or lamps here and there cast their faint, uncertain glimmer. Now they disappeared behind invisible trees and houses, now they bobbed up before his eyes, and it looked as if a huge, fantastic, disordered crowd of people or a procession with torches and lanterns was moving forward down the road. An acrid smell of wormwood, a big dark branch

slowly waved up and down over the heads of the parties who were being driven along, and, at the same time, they found themselves suddenly environed by a new atmosphere—cold, raw, and moist, as if it had arisen from a vault.

“Where are we?” asked Romashov.

“At Savalie,” shrieked in reply the dark figure sitting on the box-seat, in whom Romashov now recognized Lieutenant Epifanov. “We’re at Schleyfer’s, you know. Haven’t you ever been here before?”

“Go to hell,” grumbled Romashov. Epifanov kept on laughing.

“Hark you, Yuri Alexievich, shall we tell the little darlings in a whisper what an innocent you are? Later on, you’ll put all our noses out of joint.”

Again Romashov felt, half-unconsciously, that he had sunk back into impenetrable darkness, until he, as suddenly, found himself standing in a large room with parqueted floor and Vienna chairs along the walls. Over the entrance to the room, and over three other doors leading to small, dark chambers, lay hangings of red and yellow flowered cotton. Curtains of the same stuff and colour flickered in the draught from the windows opened on a gloomy backyard. Lamps were burning on the walls, but the great room was filled with smoke and the smell of meat from the adjacent kitchen; and the fumes were only dispersed occasionally by the balmy spring air entering through the window, and by the fresh scent of the white acacias that bloomed outside the house.

About ten officers took part in this excursion. All seemed bent on solving the delicate problem of contriving to shriek, laugh, and bawl at the same time. Romashov strolled about the room with a feeling of naïve, unreflecting enjoyment, and, with a certain astonishment and delight, gradually recognized all his boon-companions—Biek-Agamalov, Lbov, Viätkin, Epifanov, Artschakovski, Olisár, etc. Even Staff-Captain Lieschtschenko was discovered there. He sat huddled up in a window with his usual, eternal, resigned Weltschmerz grin. On a table stood

a respectable row of bottles containing ale and a dark, thick, syrupy cherry-cordial. No one knew who had ordered all these bottles. They were thought—like so much else that night—to have come of their own accord. Romashov drank, proposed healths, and embraced every one he met, and began to feel sticky and messy about his lips and fingers.

There were five or six women in the room. One of them—a girl of fourteen dressed as a page, with rose-coloured stockings—sat on Biek-Agamalov's knee and played with his epaulettes. Another—a big, coarse blonde in a red silk basquine and dark skirt, and with powdered face, and broad, black, painted eyebrows—went straight up to Romashov.

"Gracious, my good sir, why do you look so miserable? Come with me into that room," she added in a whisper.

She threw herself carelessly on a table, and there sat with one leg over the other. Romashov noticed how the strong outlines of her well-formed knee were shown off by the thin skirt. A shudder thrilled him, and his hands trembled.

"What's your name?"

"Mine? Malvina." She turned away with an air of indifference, and began swinging her legs. "Order me a cigarette."

Two Jewish musicians came on the scene, one with a violin, the other with a tambourine. Soon a vulgar, hackneyed, screeching polka tune was heard in the room, whereupon Olisár and Artschakovski at once began to dance the cancan. They hopped round the room first on one leg, then on the other, snapped their fingers, wagged their hips, and bent backwards and forwards with vulgar, cynical gestures. This unattractive ballet was suddenly interrupted by Biek-Agamalov, who jumped off the table, shrieking in his sharp, penetrating voice—

"To hell with the starar! Out with the ragtag and bobtail!"

Down by the door stood two young exquisites, both of whom had many

acquaintances among officers, and had even been guests at the regimental soirées. One of them was a Treasury official, the other a landed proprietor and brother of the police magistrate of the town. They both belonged to the so-called “cream” of Society.

The Treasury official turned white, but forced a smile, and answered in an affable tone—

“Excuse me, gentlemen, but can’t we join? We are old acquaintances, you know. My name is Dubiezki. We should not interfere with you at all.”

“Possibly in making love, but not when the fight begins,” added the magistrate’s brother, who tried to adopt a good-humoured tone.

“Out of this!” screamed Biek-Agamalov. “March to the door!”

“Gentlemen, by all means, put the starar out,” sneered Artschakovski.

A horrible confusion arose in the room. Tables and chairs were thrown over; the men shrieked, laughed, and stamped with all their might. The flames of the lamps rose like fiery tongues on high. The cold night air penetrated through the open windows, but without any cooling or calming effect on all these half-demented fighting-cocks. The two civilians had already been thrown into the backyard, where they were heard fiercely screeching and threatening with tears in their voices—

“Opritschniker,[20] brigands! This affair will cost you dear. We shall lodge a complaint with your commander, with the Governor.”

“Oo-oo-oo-oo-oo,” Viätkin sneered in mockery, whilst stretching out of the window. “Go to blazes!”

It seemed to Romashov as if all the events of the day had followed one another without a break, but also without the least intelligible connection, just as if a series of wild pictures in loud and motley colours had been unrolled before his eyes. Again were heard the scraping of the violin and the tambourine’s blustering noise. One of

the “partners” had now gone so far as to pirouette on the floor with nothing but his shirt on. A pretty, slender woman, who had up to then escaped Romashov’s notice, with dishevelled hair over her bare neck, and sharp, prominent shoulder-blades, wound her arms round poor Lieschtschenko’s neck and sang in his ear in her shrill soprano, and in unison with the violin’s awful melody:

“When consumption sets its mark, And you’re lying pale and stark, And doctors are seen fumbling round your couch.”

Bobetinski slung a glass of ale between the curtains of one of the little, dark cabinets, whence very soon proceeded an angry, but sleepy, thick voice—

“Aren’t you ashamed, sir? Who dares ...? Such a low swine!”

“I say! how long have you been here?” asked Romashov of the lady in the red basquine, whilst, as it were, in an absent-minded way, he rested his hand on her strong, warm knee.

She made some answer, but he did not hear it. A fresh scene of savagery had absorbed all his attention. Sub-lieutenant Lbov was driving before him one of the musicians, and banging him on the head all the time with the tambourine. The poor Jew, terrified out of his wits, ran from corner to corner, screaming and babbling his unintelligible jargon, with wholly ineffectual attempts to catch his long, fluttering coat-tails, and incessantly glancing behind him from the corners of his eyes at his unmerciful persecutor. Everybody was laughing. Artschakovski fell flat on the floor, and wriggled with tears in his eyes and in alarming convulsions of laughter. Directly afterwards the other Jew’s piercing yells were audible. Another of the company had snatched the violin, and thrown it down with fearful violence. With a crashing sound that harmonized, in an almost touching way, with the musician’s desperate cries for help, the instrument broke into a thousand fragments. What followed this Romashov never perceived, inasmuch as, for several minutes, he was in a sort of dark “nirvana.” When he had somewhat regained the use of his reason, he saw, as though

in a fever-dream, that all in the room were running round each other with wild shrieks and gestures of despair. For an instant the whole swarm gathered round Biek-Agamalov, only in the next instant to be scattered like chaff in all directions. The majority sought safety in the little, dark cabinets.

“Out of it! I won’t stand a single one!” shrieked Biek-Agamalov in Berserker fury. He ground his teeth, stamped on the floor, and struck about him with his clenched fists. His face was crimson; the veins in his forehead from the roots of his hair to his nose stood like strained ropes; his head was lowered like a bull’s, and his unnaturally prominent eyes with their bloodshot whites were terrifying. He was unable to utter any human sounds, but groaned, like a wild beast, in a vibrating voice—

“Ah-ah-ah-ah!”

Suddenly, whilst bending the upper part of his body to the left with the suppleness of a panther, he drew his sabre, as quick as lightning, from its sheath. The broad, sharp blade described, with a whistling sound, several rapid circles over his head.

In frantic terror every living creature fled helter-skelter from the room through doors and windows, the women screaming hysterically, the men trampling down all that lay in their way. Romashov was carried by the current irresistibly towards the door, where an officer rushing past caused him, by the sharp facet of his uniform-button, a long, bleeding scratch on his face. The next moment all stood whooping and yelling in the yard, except Romashov, who alone remained by the door of the room. He felt his heart beating with increased force and quickness; but the murderous, unbridled scene filled him not only with terror, but also with an intoxicating feeling of savage, exulting defiance.

“I will have blood!” screamed Biek-Agamalov, with gnashing teeth. The sight of the terror he inspired deprived him of the last remains of understanding and reflection. With frantic strength and rage he smashed, with a few strokes, all the furniture

nearest to him, and, after that, hurled his sabre with such force at a large mirror that the glass splinters hailed on all sides. With another blow he laid waste the table, which was crowded with a number of bottles and glasses, the fragments and contents of which were thrown all over the floor.

But just at that moment cried a piercing voice of indescribable fury and boldness—

“Fool! Cad!”

This insult was hurled by the same bare-headed woman with naked arms as had just embraced Lieschtschenko. This was the first time that Romashov had noticed her. She was standing in a recess behind the stove, leaning forward with clenched hands tightly pressed against her hips, and pouring out an uninterrupted flow of “Billingsgate” with a rapidity and readiness which the vilest market-woman might have envied.

“Fool! Cad! Scum! I am not afraid of you! Fool! Fool! Fool!”

Biek-Agamalov lowered his sabre, and seemed, for a moment, to lose all power over himself. Romashov saw how his face grew whiter and whiter, how his eyebrows puckered, and how the yellow pupils first darkened and then hurled a blinding flash of diabolical hatred and rage which no longer knew bounds. His knees gave way, and his head fell on his chest. At that moment, Biek-Agamalov was no longer a human being. He was transformed into a bloodthirsty wild beast straining every nerve for the fatal leap.

“Silence!” It sounded as if he had spat out the word. Speak he could not.

“Scoundrel, brute, beast, I shall not be silent!” shrieked the fury in the stove corner, her body trembling all over at every word she hurled.

Romashov felt himself getting whiter and whiter every moment. He felt a sensation of void in his brain, a sensation of release from every oppressive act of thought or reflection. A curious mixture of joy and terror arose in his soul, just as the bubbles of sparkling wine ascend to the edge of a goblet. He saw Biek-Agamalov, whilst

continually following the woman with his eyes, slowly raise his sabre above his head. An irresistible flow of frantic jubilation, fear, inconsiderate boldness, carried Romashov away. He rushed forward so rapidly that he did not even hear Biek-Agamalov hiss his last question—

“Will you be silent? For the last time——”

Romashov, with a force he never thought he was capable of, gripped Agamalov’s wrist. During the course of a few seconds and at a distance of a couple of inches between their faces, the two officers eyed one another without moving, stiff as if carved out of stone. Romashov heard his comrade’s quick, panting breath; he saw his eyes glitter with hate and a thirst for revenge, and his lips foam with the spasmodic movements of his lower jaw; but he felt that the fire of wrath would, in a few minutes, be extinguished in this man who had never yet sought, of his own accord, to curb his passions. But to Romashov this feeling of proud triumph in a game of life and death, from which he now knew he should come out the victor, was almost intolerable. He knew that all those who were anxiously watching this scene from outside also realized in what deadly danger he stood. Out in the yard and by the open windows there brooded such a hush and quiet that, all of a sudden, a nightingale a few paces off began to trill her joyous lay.

“Let me go,” came at last like a hoarse whisper from Biek-Agamalov’s bitten lips.

“Biek, you must never strike a woman,” replied Romashov calmly. “You would blush for it as long as you lived.”

The last sparks of rage and madness now died out in Agamalov’s eyes. Romashov drew a deep breath as if from a long swoon. His heart beat irregularly and quick, and his head was again heavy and feverishly hot.

“Let me go!” shrieked Biek-Agamalov once more in a fierce tone, and tried to release himself. Romashov felt he would no longer be able to keep his hold of him; but he had no further dread of his wrath. He said in a caressing brotherly tone, as he

laid his hand on his comrade's shoulder—

"Forgive me, Biek, but I know that a day will come when you will thank me for this."

Biek-Agamalov with a loud snap stuck his sabre into its sheath.

"All right, confound you!" he screamed in an angry tone, in which, however, there was a note of shame and confusion. "We'll settle this matter afterwards. But what right have you——?"

The valiant crowd in the yard now understood that all danger was over for the present. With loud, but not quite natural, peals of laughter, the lot now rushed into the room. But he now seemed extinguished, his strength exhausted, and there was something apathetic and ironically contemptuous about him.

Now Madame Schleyfer herself—a massive lady with a hard look, small dark pouches under her eyes, disappearing eyelashes, and great layers of fat on her neck and bosom—entered the room. She attacked first one and then the other of the officers; took tight hold of one by a button, of another by a sleeve, and howled to each of them who could stand and listen her everlasting song—

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, who will make good all this? Who will pay for the mirror, the furniture, the bottles, the girls?"

All this meanwhile was settled to the satisfaction of the authorities by the same mysterious "benefactor" who had provided for everything else in the course of this memorable excursion. The officers left the room in groups. Every one of them inhaled with delight the mild, pure air of the May night. Romashov felt all his being thrilled with a certain joyous agitation. It seemed to him as if all traces of the day's orgies had vanished from his brain, as if a pair of innocent fresh lips had repurified and refreshed him by a soft kiss on his brow.

Biek-Agamalov came up to him, took his hand, and said—

“Romashov, come and ride in my carriage. I wish you to do so.”

And when Romashov, on one occasion during the journey home, turned towards the right to observe the awkward gallop of the horses, Biek-Agamalov seized his hand and pressed it for a long time warmly—nay, so hard that it almost caused pain. Not a word, however, passed between the two officers during the whole way.

XIX

THE violent emotion felt by every member of the company during the wild scene we have just depicted found expression in a nervous irritability which, on their return to the mess-room, took the form of reckless arrogance and gross misbehaviour to all who happened to come across the officers on their way home. A poor Jew coming along was stopped and deprived of his cap. Olisár got up in the carriage, and insulted, in the outskirts of the town, in the middle of the street, all passers-by in a manner which cannot be decently described. Bobetinski whipped his coachman for no reason whatever. The others sang and bawled with all their might; only Biek-Agamalov, who rode beside Romashov, sat all the time angry, silent, and taciturn.

Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, the mess-rooms were brilliantly illuminated and full of people. In the card and billiard-rooms and at the buffet creatures with unbuttoned coats, flaming faces, vacantly staring eyes and of uncertain gait, helplessly collided with each other, heavily fuddled by the fumes of wine and tobacco smoke. Romashov, who was walking about and nodding to several of the officers, also found among them, to his great astonishment, Nikoläiev. He was sitting by Osadchi, red in face and intoxicated, but holding himself upright. On seeing Romashov approaching he eyed him sharply for a few seconds, but afterwards turned abruptly aside, so as to avoid holding out his hand to the latter, meanwhile conversing with his neighbour with increased interest.

“Viätkin, come here and sing,” bellowed Osadchi over the heads of the rest.

“Yes, come let us sing,” chanted Viätkin, in reply, parodying, imitating, and caricaturing a melody from the Church ritual—

“Three small boys found lurching Got an awful birching At the parson’s stile.”

Viätkin imitated in quick succession and in the same tone the strophes recited in the remainder of the antiphon at Mass—

“Sexton, parson, and his clerk Thought the smacking quite a lark. Then the beadle said, ‘By hell, Nikifor, you smack right well.’”

“Nikifor, you smack right well!”

answered pianissimo in complete harmony the hastily improvised choir of drunken officers, seconded by Osadchi’s softly rumbling bass voice.

Viätkin conducted the singing, standing on a table in the middle of the room, whilst stretching his arms in an attitude of benediction over the heads of the “congregation.” Now his eyes flashed terrifying glances of threat and condemnation; at another time they were raised to heaven with a languishing expression of infinite beatitude; then he hissed with rage at those who sang out of tune; again he stopped in time by a scarcely perceptible tremolo of the palm of his hand a run to a misplaced crescendo.

“Staff-Captain Lieschtschenko, you’re singing damnably. Damn it, what a wretched ear!” roared Osadchi. “Keep quiet in the room, gentlemen. No noise, please, when there’s singing.”

“Once on a time a farmer so rich— Who used to like iced punch”—

continued Viätkin, in his improvised service of the Church. His eyes, however, now began to smart dreadfully from the dense tobacco smoke. Romashov was reminded by the wet and sticky tablecloth that he had not washed his hands since dinner. He went out and made his way across the yard to a side room called the “Officers’

Shelter," which served as a sort of lavatory. It was a cold, dismal little crib with only one window. Several common cupboards stood along the wall, and between them, in hospital fashion, were placed two beds, the sheets, etc., of which were never changed. Not a man in the entire regiment could recollect when this room was swept and cleaned. There was an intolerable stench there, the main ingredients of which were rotting bedclothes, stinking boots, and bad tobacco. The room was originally intended for officers of other regiments who happened to be visiting the garrison town, but it gradually became converted into a sort of morgue for those who got dead drunk at mess. It was almost officially designated as "the mortuary," which name, by a dreadful irony of fate, received its full justification from the fact that no less than two officers and one soldier had committed suicide in it during the few years the regiment had been garrisoned in the town. Moreover, not a year elapsed without one suicide taking place among the officers of this regiment.

When Romashov entered "the mortuary" he found two men sitting there on a bed near the window. The room was dark, and it was some time before Romashov recognized in one of the "guests" ex-Staff-Captain Klodt, alcoholist and thief, and on those grounds expelled from the command of his company. The other was a certain Ensign Solotuchin—a tall, lean, bald-headed, worn-out rake and gambler, feared and despised wherever he went for his evil, lying tongue and his conversation interlarded with coarse cynicisms and improprieties—a veritable type of the ensigns of the storybooks.

Between these two worthy "birds of a feather" might be seen on the table the dim outline of a schnapps bottle, an empty plate, and two full glasses. The pair of boon companions were silent when Romashov entered the room, and tried, as it were, to hide themselves in the darkness; but when he leaned over them, they looked at him with a sly smile.

"What, in the name of goodness, are you two doing here?" asked Romashov, in

alarm.

“Hush!” Solotuchin made a mysterious warning gesture with his forefinger. “Wait here, and don’t disturb us.”

“Hold your jaw!” ordered Klodt in a whisper.

At the same moment the rattling noise of a telega was heard somewhere in the distance. Then the two strangers raised their glasses, clicked them together, and drained the contents.

“But answer me. What is the meaning of it all?” repeated Romashov in the same anxious tone.

“My little greenhorn,” replied Klodt in a significant whisper, “if you must know, it’s only our usual little morning repast; but now I hear the telega, Ensign,” Klodt went on to say as he turned to Solotuchin. “It’s time then to finish our drink and be off. What do you think of the moonlight? Will it suit?”

“My glass is empty already,” replied Solotuchin, glancing out of the window at the moon’s slender, pointed sickle that stood drowsy and sleepy in the sky, and hung down over the little slumbering town. “But let’s just wait a wee bit. S-sh! I thought I heard a dog barking.”

And again they bent towards one another to resume their mysterious conversation, carried on in a low voice; the spluttering tone and evident lack of coherence witnessed clearly enough that the schnapps had begun to take effect. From the salle-à-manger hard by came now and then the melancholy, hollow tones of Viätkin’s and Osadchi’s improvised Mass for the Dead, which had a weird and threatening ring about it in the silent night.

Romashov seized his head with both hands.

“I beseech you, gentlemen, to stop this. I can’t stand it any longer.”

“Go to the devil!” roared Solotuchin. “No, stop, dear boy—whither away? But, by

all that's unholy, you shall first drink a glass with two fine fellows. Catch tight hold of him, Captain, I'll shut the door."

With a yell of laughter the two scoundrels jumped up to seize Romashov; but the latter's self-command was exhausted. The whole hideous situation—this disgusting drinking-bout in the weird, dark room with its insufferable, stifling atmosphere—this mysterious midnight meeting between two individuals who were a danger to society—the vulgar bellowing of the drunken officers and their blasphemous parody of the Russian Mass—all this filled him with frantic terror and nausea. With a piercing shriek, he thrust Solotuchin from him, and, trembling in every limb, rushed deliberately from the mortuary.

Common sense now urged him to go home, but a strange, unfathomable inward force again drove him, against his will, to the mess-room. There some of the wine-soaked company were asleep on the window-sills and chairs. A stifling heat prevailed, and, in spite of the wide-open windows, the drowsily burning lights and lamps were never reached by a quickening draught of air. The poor, dead-tired soldiers who attended to the waiting could scarcely stand on their legs, and every moment stifled a yawn, but as yet none of the champion boozers had entertained a thought of breaking up.

Viätkin had again taken his place on a table, and was singing in his high, caressive tenor voice—

"Swift as the ocean's Roaring billows, Vanishes life in eternity."

There were several officers in the regiment with really beautiful voices, which even now were very effective in spite of the drink.

This simple, plaintive melody exercised, at this moment, an ennobling influence on all, and more than one of them experienced a pricking, remorseful feeling at the thought of his worthless, sinful life.

"Once you're in your coffin, Soon the world forgets your name,"

continued Viätkin in a voice of emotion, and his sleepy but good eyes were dimmed with tears. Artschakovski seconded him with unimpeachable care. To make his voice thrill he grasped his larynx with two fingers and shook it. Osadchi accompanied it all with his heavy, long-drawn, organ notes.

After the singing there reigned a deep silence for a few moments. Suddenly Osadchi began again to recite in a subdued tone and eyes cast down—

"All ye who wander in sorrow's heavy, narrow road——"

"No, that's enough of it," a voice exclaimed. "This is now, I suppose, the tenth time we have taken up this cursed Mass of Requiem——"

But the rest had already intoned the solemn melody that divides the recitative of the antiphon, and once more, in the reeking and dirty room, resounded the requiem over St. John of Damascus in clear, full-voiced strains that express in so masterly a way the inconsolable sorrow for death's inexorable cruelty—

"All ye who believe in Me enter into the joy of My Father."

Artschakovski, who was as familiar with the ritual as the most experienced choir-singer, at once repeated the following answer in accordance with the text—

"With our whole soul we all praise," etc.

And so the whole antiphon was chanted; but when Osadchi's turn came to take up the recitation for the last time, he lowered his head like an infuriated bull, the veins in his neck swelled, and as he directed his melancholy, cruel, and threatening glances towards those present, he declaimed in a half-singing tone, and in a voice that resembled the roar of distant thunder—

"Give, O Lord, Thy departed slave, Nikifor, A blessed departure hence and eternal rest."

In the midst of this lofty and pious invocation he stopped short, and, to the horror of the bystanders, uttered two words of the most blasphemous, cynical, and disgusting

import.

Romashov jumped up, and thumped his fist, like a madman, on the table.

“Be silent! I forbid this,” he roared in a voice trembling with anger and pain. “What are you laughing at, Captain Osadchi? You ought to be ashamed. Your eyes are mocking, but I see and know that remorse, terror, and the tortures of hell are raging in your heart.”

A hideous silence on the part of all followed this outbreak of temper. Then a voice from the crowd was heard to exclaim—

“Is he drunk?”

These three words relaxed all the terrible tension of the situation; but at the same moment let loose afresh—just as a few hours previously in Schleyfer’s den of infamy—all the evil spirits of orgy. There was shrieking, hooting, stamping, jumping, and dancing; the whole room was turned in a trice into an indescribable, savage, motley chaos. Viätkin, who jumped on to a table, hit his head against the big hanging lamp, which then swayed in awful zigzag curves, producing for some time a fantastic series of dissolving views on the ceiling and walls, on which drunken, frantic human beings were depicted as marvellous, gigantic shapes, or as huddled, dwarfish figures resembling embryos.

The debauch seemed at last to reach its height. All these wretched creatures were possessed, as it were, by a savage, exultant, ruthless fiend who, mocking at all the laws of sense and decency, forced his victims, by blasphemies, oaths, and all kinds of shamelessness, to abdicate the last shreds of their human dignity.

Romashov, in the smoke and stuffiness, suddenly caught sight of a person with features distorted by rage and incessant hooting, which for that reason seemed to him, in the first instant, unrecognizable. It was none other than Nikoläiev, who, now foaming with hate and fury, roared to his enemy:

“You’re a disgrace to the whole regiment, you and Nasanski! Not a word or, by

God! I'll——"

Romashov felt that some one was pulling him, gently and cautiously, a few paces backwards. He turned round and recognized Agamalov, but at the same instant forgot him, and turned quickly round to Nikoläiev. White with suppressed rage, he answered in a low, hoarse voice and a forced and bitter smile—

"What reason have you to mention Nasanski's name? But perhaps you have some private, secret cause for hating him?"

"Rascal, scoundrel, your hour is come!" screamed Nikoläiev in a loud, trembling voice. With flashing eyes he raised his tightly clenched fist to Romashov's face, but the expected blow never fell. Romashov experienced a momentary fear, together with a torturing, sickening sensation in his chest and ribs, and he now noticed, for the first time, that he was grasping some object with the fingers of his right hand. Then with a rapid movement he threw the remains of his half-emptied glass of ale into Nikoläiev's face.

Instantly after this a violent blow in the region of his left eye struck him like a deafening thunderclap, and with the howl of a wounded wild beast, Romashov rushed at his foe. A heavy fall, and the two rolled over one another on the ground with furious blows and kicks. A thick cloud of dust eddied round the combatants; chairs and tables were flung in all directions, but the two continued, with unabated fury, to force, in turn, each other's head against the filthy floor, and panting and with rattling throats, tried to tear each other to pieces. Romashov knew he had managed somehow or other to get his fingers well into Nikoläiev's mouth at one of the corners, and he strove with all his might to rend Nikoläiev's cheek, with the object of destroying those hateful features for all time. He himself, however, felt no pain when his head and elbows were bumped time after time, in the course of the fight, against the hard floor.

He had not the slightest notion as to how the battle finally ended. He suddenly found

himself standing in a corner, plucked from the fight by kindly hands, and, by the same well-meaning helper, prevented from renewing his attack on Nikoläiev. Biek-Agamalov handed Romashov a glass of water, and his teeth could be heard chattering, through the convulsive twitchings of his lower jaw, against the side of the glass. His uniform was torn to tatters in the back and elbows, and one shoulder-strap swung hither and thither on its torn fastening. Romashov was unable to speak, but his silent lips moved incessantly in fruitless efforts to whisper audibly—

"I'll—show—him. I challenge him."

Old Liech, who had been in a delightful slumber at the edge of his table during all that fearful row, now arose fully awake, sober, and severe in countenance, and, in a bitter and hectoring tone rarely employed by him, said—

"Gentlemen, in my capacity as the eldest here present, I order you all to leave the mess instantly, and to go to your respective quarters. A report of what has taken place here to-night is to be handed in to the commander of the regiment to-morrow."

The order was obeyed without the slightest demur. All departed, cowed and shamefaced, and consequently shy at meeting each other's glances. Each individual dreaded to read in his comrade's eyes his own shame and self-contempt, and they all gave one the impression of dirty little malicious animals, to whose dim and undeveloped brains a gleam of human understanding had suddenly managed to grope its way.

Day began to dawn. A delightful, glorious morning with a clear, fleckless sky, refreshing coolness, and infinite harmony and peace. The moist trees, wrapped in thin, curling exhalations arising from the earth, and scarcely visible to the eye, had just awakened silently and imperceptibly from their deep, mysterious, nocturnal sleep. And when Romashov, on his way home, glanced at them, at the sky, and at the grass faintly sparkling like silver in the dew, he felt himself so low, vile,

degenerate, and disgusting that he realized, with unutterable melancholy, how unworthy he was to be greeted by the innocent, smiling child-eyes of awakening Nature.

XX

ON that same day—it was Wednesday—Romashov received the following curt official communication—

The Court of Honour of the—th Infantry Regiment hereby requests Sub-lieutenant Romashov to attend at 6 p.m. the officers' common-room. Dress: ordinary uniform.

Lieutenant-Colonel Migunov, President of the Court.

On perusing the letter, Romashov could not restrain an ironical smile. This so-called "ordinary uniform," i.e. undress uniform with shoulder-knots and belt, was to be worn, under the most extraordinary circumstances, before the Court, for public reprimand, when appearing for examination by the commander of his regiment, etc., etc.

At 6 p.m. Romashov put in an appearance at the mess, and told the orderly to send in his name to the president. The answer was to the effect that he was to wait. Romashov sat down by an open window in the dining-room, took up a paper and began to read; but he did not understand a word of the contents: everything seemed to him so uninteresting as he cast his eyes mechanically down one column after another. Three officers who were in the mess before Romashov returned his salutation with marked coldness, and continued their conversation in a low voice, with the obvious intention of preventing Romashov from catching what they were saying. Only one of them, Michin, pressed Romashov's hand long and warmly, with moist eyes, blushing and tongue-tied. He at once turned away, put on his cloak and hat hurriedly and awkwardly, and ran out of the room.

Nikoläiev shortly afterwards entered through the buffet. He was pale, his eyelids

were of a bluish hue, his left hand was shaking with spasmodic twitches, and just below his temples a bluish swelling was visible. At once the recollection of the fight on the previous day came to Romashov with painful distinctness. He hung his head, frowned, and, almost annihilated with shame, hid himself behind his newspaper. He closed his eyes, and listened in nervous tension to every sound in the room.

Romashov heard Nikoläiev order a glass of cognac from the waiter, and then greet one of the company. After that he walked up to where Romashov was sitting, and passed him quite closely. Somebody left the room, the door of which was shut again. A few seconds later Romashov heard in a whispering tone behind him—

"Don't look back. Sit still and listen carefully to what I have to say."

It was Nikoläiev. The newspaper shook in Romashov's hands.

"As you're aware, all conversation between us is now forbidden; but damn all these French niceties. What occurred yesterday can never be put straight again, made little of, or be consigned to oblivion. In spite of everything, however, I regard you as a man of conscience and honour. I implore you—do you hear?—I implore you, not a word about my wife and the anonymous letters. You understand me?"

Romashov, who was hidden by the newspaper from the eyes of his brother officer, made a slow inclination of his head. The sound of steps crunching the sand was audible from the courtyard. Romashov allowed a few minutes to elapse, after which he turned round and glanced through the window. Nikoläiev had gone.

"Your Honour!" the orderly suddenly stood, as if he had risen from the earth, at Romashov's side. "I am ordered to ask you to walk in."

Along one side of the wall were placed several card tables, over which a green cloth had been spread. Behind these tables sat the members of the court, with their backs to the window. In consequence of this, it was difficult to distinguish their faces. In the midst of them, in an arm-chair, was seated Lieutenant-Colonel Migunov, the president—a fat, pursy man without a neck, but with big, round shoulders which

protruded in quite an unnatural manner. On each side of Migunov sat Lieutenant-Colonels Rafalski and Liech, and moreover, on the right, Osadchi and Peterson; on the left, Captain Duvernois and the commissary to the regiment, Staff-Captain Doroshenko. The table in front of all these gentlemen was virtually empty, except that before Doroshenko, the court prosecutor-in-ordinary, lay a heap of papers. It was cold and dark in the great, bare room, although out-of-doors the sunshine was gloriously warm. Everywhere the nose was assailed by a drowsy smell of mustiness and rotting, moth-eaten furniture.

The president laid his big, white, fat hands on the tablecloth, examined them minutely, and then began in a dry, official tone—

"Sub-lieutenant Romashov, the Officers' Court of Honour, which meets to-day by order of the commander of the regiment, is directed to examine closely into the circumstances of the deplorable and, to the officers as a body, disgraceful scene that took place between you and Lieutenant Nikoläiev last night, and it is incumbent on you to render to us a most punctilious account of what you have to say with regard to this painful affair."

Romashov stood before his judges with his arms hanging down, and plucked at the fur lining of his cap. He felt like a hunted animal, but at the same time as clumsy, feeble, and indifferent to everything as a schoolboy just "ploughed" at an examination is to his teachers' threats and his school-fellows' jeers. Coughing and stammering, in unconnected phrases and with contradictions and repetitions, Romashov began his report. At the same time, and whilst slowly observing the high "tribunal" seated before him, he made a sort of appraisement of the private or personal feelings of its individual members towards him. "Migunov has a heart of stone, and it is a matter of supreme indifference to him how the affair turns out; but the place of honour as president and the great responsibility attached to it are, in the highest degree, flattering to his vanity. Lieutenant-Colonel 'Brehm' is looking

miserable. Oh, you good old chap, perhaps you are sitting thinking of that ten-rouble note which was never returned to you? Old Liech looks glum. He's sober to-day in honour of the occasion, but the pouches under his eyes are bigger than usual. He's not my enemy, but has so many sins of his own to answer that he must take advantage of the occasion, and play the part of guardian and protector of morality and the 'honour of an officer.' So far as Osadchi and Peterson are concerned, they are both notoriously my enemies. By invoking the law, I might certainly challenge Osadchi—the whole of the row began through his blasphemously parodying the Mass for the Dead—but what then? The result in any case will be the same. Peterson smiles out of one corner of his mouth in his usual snake-like way. I am just wondering what share he had in those anonymous letters. Duvernois—a sleepy beast, whose great, troubled eyes put one in mind of a cuttlefish's. Ah, yes, I've never been one of Duvernois's favourites, and just as little of Doroshenko's. Yuri Alexievich, my dear boy, the prospect does indeed look gloomy for you."

"One instant, if you please," interrupted Osadchi. "President, will you permit me to put a question?"

"Certainly," replied Migunov, with a gracious nod.

"Tell me, Sub-lieutenant Romashov," began Osadchi, in an affectedly imposing and drawling tone, "where were you before you came to the mess in such an inexcusable condition?"

Romashov blushed deeply, and felt big drops of sweat on his forehead.

"I was—I was," he stammered, "I was in a brothel," he added almost in a whisper.

"Ha, ha—in a brothel," repeated Osadchi, as he purposely raised his voice and pronounced every word with unsparing distinctness. "And no doubt you had drinks there."

"Yes, I had been drinking," answered Romashov, in an abrupt tone.

"I have no wish to put any more questions," said Osadchi, turning with a bow to the

president.

“Sub-lieutenant, be good enough to continue your report,” resumed Migunov, “You remember you have acknowledged that you threw the glass of ale at Nikoläiev—well?”

Romashov began his story again as unmethodically and unconnectedly as before, but honourably endeavouring not to give any details. He had already, in an indirect way and with much shame, succeeded in expressing the regret he felt at his unworthy conduct, when he was once more interrupted, this time by Captain Peterson. The latter was rubbing his long, yellow-wax coloured hands with their sharp, dirty finger-nails just as if he were washing himself, and said in his studiously polite—nay, almost friendly—thin, wheedling voice—

“Ah, all that is quite fit and proper, and such a voluntary confession, in a way, does you credit; but tell me, were you not, before this painful story began, in the habit of visiting Lieutenant Nikoläiev’s house?”

Romashov drew himself up and, looking straight, not at Captain Peterson, but at Migunov, replied bluntly:

“That is true, but I cannot understand what that has to do with the matter.”

“Pray don’t get excited,” exclaimed Peterson. “I only want you to answer my questions. Tell me then, was there any special cause of mutual enmity between you and Lieutenant Nikoläiev? I do not mean any difference in the service, but a cause of a quite—er—if I may so put it, domestic nature?”

Romashov pulled himself up to his full height, and his glance pierced with undisguised hatred his enemy’s treacherous, black, consumptive eyes.

“I have not visited Lieutenant Nikoläiev’s home more frequently than those of my other acquaintances,” he replied in a hard and cutting tone. “No previous enmity has existed between us. The whole thing happened unexpectedly and accidentally, when we were both the worse for liquor.”

“Heh, heh, heh, we have already heard about the insobriety,” Captain Peterson chimed in; “but I will ask you once more, had not an unfriendly meeting already taken place between you and Lieutenant Nikoläiev? I do not for an instant suggest that you had quarrelled or come to blows, but quite simply that—how shall I put it?—you were a little at variance in your views of certain scandalous reports and intrigues?”

“President, am I bound to reply to all questions that are put to me?” exclaimed Romashov.

“That rests entirely with you,” replied Migunov coldly. “You can, if you wish, absolutely refuse to answer. You can also commit your answer to writing. That is your privilege.”

“In such case I hereby declare that I will not answer any of Captain Peterson’s questions, and that not only in my interest but in his.”

After Romashov had answered a few questions of minor importance the examination was declared closed. Nevertheless, he had on two occasions to give the court supplementary information, first in the evening of the same day, and then again on the day following, viz., Thursday morning. However careless and inexperienced Romashov might be in all the practical circumstances of life, he nevertheless saw soon enough that the court was performing its functions in the most negligent and indiscreet way, and had therefore been guilty, not only of a revolting lack of tact, but also of utter illegality. In defiance of Section 149 of the “Statute concerning Discipline,” by which every communication to unauthorized persons of what takes place at such examinations is in plain language strictly forbidden, the members of the “Court of Honour” did not scruple to relate everything straight off to their wives and relations. The latter spread the scandal still further among the other ladies of “Society,” who in their turn discussed the matter with their maidservants, charwomen, etc. Before twenty-four hours had elapsed Romashov was the talk of

the entire town and “hero of the day.” When he passed along the street he was gazed at from windows and doors, between the hedge-posts of backyards, and from the vantage of garden-bushes and arbours. Women from a good distance off pointed at him with their finger, and he often heard his name whispered behind his back. Nobody in the town doubted that a duel between him and Nikoläiev was inevitable—nay, they even began to bet about the upshot of it.

As Romashov was passing Lykatschev’s house on Thursday morning he suddenly heard his name shouted.

“Yuri Alexievich, Yuri Alexievich, come here.”

Romashov stopped, and soon discovered Katya Lykatschev standing on a bench inside the fence. She was still in morning dress, which chiefly consisted of a kimono, the triangular arrangement of which in front left the delicate virginal neck wholly exposed. And she was altogether so fresh and rosy that for an instant Romashov even felt light at heart.

Katya leant over the fence to enable Romashov to reach her hand, which was still cool and moist from the morning bath. She began at once to chatter and lisp at her usual pace:

“Where have you been all this time? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, forgetting your friends in that way! Zoi, zoi, zoi—hush! I have long known everything, everything.” She stared at Romashov with great terror-stricken eyes. “Take this and hang it round your throat. Hear and obey at once. Look, if you please.”

From the fold of her kimono, straight from her bosom, she drew out an amulet that hung by a silk cord, and shyly put it into Romashov’s hand. The amulet still felt balmy from its nest against the young woman’s warm body.

“Will it help?” asked Romashov, in a jesting tone. “What is it?”

“That’s a secret, and don’t you dare to laugh, you ungodly creature. Zoi, zoi!”

“Hang it, if I’m not beginning to be a man of note,” thought Romashov, as he said good-bye to Katya. “Splendid girl!” But he could not prevent himself, though it might be for the last time, from thinking of himself in the third person:

“And over the old warrior’s rugged features stole a melancholy smile.”

On that same evening he and Nikoläiev were again summoned to the Court. The two enemies stood before the green table almost side by side. They did not once look at each other, but they equally felt each other’s high-strung emotion, and were, in consequence, still more excited. Their eyes were fixed, as though by magnetism, on the president’s face when he at last began to read the verdict of the Court.

“The members of the Officers’ Court of Honour of the—th Regiment” (here followed their Christian and surnames in full), “under the presidency of Lieutenant-Colonel Migunov, have inquired into the matter of the fight, in the mess, between Lieutenant Nikoläiev and Sub-lieutenant Romashov, and the Court, by reason of the serious nature of the case, finds a duel is necessary to satisfy the wounded honour of the regiment. This decree of the Court is ratified by the commander of the regiment.”

Lieutenant-Colonel Migunov took off his spectacles, and replaced them in their case.

“It is incumbent on you, gentlemen,” he went on to say in a sepulchral voice, “to choose two seconds apiece, who are to meet here at 9 p.m. to agree as to the conditions of the duel. Moreover,” added Migunov, as he got up and put his spectaclecase in his back-pocket, “moreover, I must tell you that the verdict just read possesses only a conditionally binding force on you, viz. it rests in your free discretion either to submit to the decree of the Court or”—Migunov paused and made a gesture by which he meant to express his absolute indifference—“leave the regiment. You ought, gentlemen, to keep apart. However, one thing more. Not in my capacity as president of the Court, but as an old comrade, I must advise you,

gentlemen, for the avoidance of further unpleasantness and complications prior to the duel, not to visit the mess. Au revoir."

Nikoläiev made a sharp, military "Face-about," and walked with rapid steps out of the room. Romashov followed slowly after. He had no fear, but he felt at once utterly lonely, abandoned, and shut off from the entire world. When he reached the steps he gazed for some time, calm and astonished, at the sky, the trees, a cow grazing on the other side of the fence, the sparrows burrowing in the high road, and thought, "So everything lives, struggles, and worries about its existence, except myself. I require nothing and I have no interests. I am doomed; I am alone, and dead already to this world."

With a feeling of sickness and disgust he went to find Biek-Agamalov and Viätkin, whom he had chosen for his seconds. Both granted his request; Biek-Agamalov with a gloomy, solemn countenance, Viätkin with many hearty handshakes.

It was impossible for Romashov to return home.

Never had the thought of his uncomfortable abode seemed so repulsive to him as at the present moment. In these gloomy hours of spiritual depression, abandonment, and weariness of life, he needed a trusty, intelligent, and sympathetic friend—a man with brains and heart.

Then he thought of Nasanski.

XXI

NASANSKI was, as always, at home. He had only just awakened from a heavy sleep following intoxication, and was lying on his back with only his underclothing on and his hands under his head. In his troubled eyes might be read sickness of life and physical weariness. His face had not yet lost its sleepy and lifeless expression when Romashov, stooping over his friend, said in a troubled and uncertain voice—

“Good-day, Vasili Nilich. Perhaps I have come at an inconvenient time?”

“Good-day,” replied Nasanski, in a hoarse and weak voice. “Any news? Sit down.”

He offered Romashov his hot, clammy hand, but looked at him, not as at a dear and ever-welcome friend, but as it were a troublous dream-picture that still lingered after his drunken sleep.

“Aren’t you well?” asked Romashov shyly, as he threw himself down on the corner of the bed. “In that case I’ll go at once, I won’t disturb you.”

Nasanski lifted his head a couple of inches from the pillow, and by an effort he peered, with deeply puckered forehead, at Romashov.

“No—wait. Oh, how my head aches! Listen, Georgi Alexievich. I see that something unusual has happened. If I could only collect my thoughts! What is it?”

Romashov looked at him with silent pity. Nasanski’s whole appearance had undergone a terrible change since the two friends had last seen each other. His eyes were sunken and surrounded by black rings; his temples had a yellow hue; the rough, wrinkled skin over his cheek-bones hung limply down, and was partly concealed by the sticky, wet tufts of hair that drooped.

“Nothing particular. I only wanted to see you. To-morrow I am to fight a duel with Nikoläiev, and I was loath to go home. But nothing matters now. Au revoir. You see—I had nobody else to talk to and my heart is heavy.”

Nasanski closed his eyes, and his features made a still more painful impression. It was evident that he had, by a really abnormal effort of will, tried to recover consciousness, and now, when he opened his eyes, a spark of keen understanding was at last visible in his glance.

“Well, well, I’ll tell you what we’ll do——” Nasanski turned on his side by an effort and raised himself on his elbow. “But first give me—out of the cupboard, you know—— No, let the apples be—there should be a few peppermint drops—thanks,

my friend. I'll tell you what we'll do—— Faugh, how disgusting! Take me out into the fresh air. Here it's intolerable. Always the same hideous hallucinations. Come with me; we'll get a boat, then we can chat. Will you?"

With a stern face, and an expression of utter loathing on his countenance, he drained glass after glass. Romashov observed Nasanski's ashy complexion gradually assume a deeper hue, and his beautiful blue eyes regain life and brilliancy.

When they reached the street they took a fly and drove to the river flowing past the very outskirts of the town, which there swells out to a dam, on one side of which stood a mill driven by turbines, an enormous red building belonging to a Jew. On the other shore stood a few bathing-houses, and there, too, boats might be hired. Romashov sat by the oars, and Nasanski assumed a half-recumbent position in the stern.

The river was very broad here, the stream weak, the banks low and overgrown with long, juicy grass that hung down over the water, and out of it rose tall green reeds and masses of big, white water-lilies.

Romashov related the particulars of his fight with Nikoläiev. Nasanski listened abstractedly and gazed down at the river, which in lazy, sluggish eddies flowed away like molten glass in the wake of the boat.

"Tell me candidly, Romashov, have you any fear?" asked Nasanski, in a low voice.

"Of the duel? No, I'm not afraid of that," replied Romashov irritably, but he became abruptly silent, whilst, in the flash of a second, he saw himself standing face to face with Nikoläiev, and with hypnotized eyes gazing at the black, threatening muzzle of his revolver. "No, no," added Romashov hastily, "I will not lie and boast that I'm not afraid. On the contrary, I think it terrible; but I also know that I shall not behave like a coward, and that I shall never apologize."

Nasanski dipped the tips of his fingers in the softly rippling water, warm with the evening glow, and said slowly, in a weak voice often interrupted by coughing:

“Ah, my friend, my dear Romashov, why will you do this thing? Only think if what you say is true, and you are not a coward. Why not then show your moral courage in a still higher degree by refusing to fight this duel?”

“He has insulted me, struck me—on the face,” replied Romashov, with newly kindled, burning indignation.

“Well, admitting that,” resumed Nasanski gently, with his tender, sorrowful eyes fixed on Romashov, “what does that signify? Time heals all wounds; everything in the world is buried and disappears, even the recollection of this scandal. You yourself will in time forget both your hatred and your sufferings; but you’ll never forget a man you have killed. He will stand ever at your side, at the head of your bed, at your dinner-table, when you are alone, and when you are amidst the bustle of the world. Empty-heads, idiots, pretentious imitators and parrots will, of course, at all times solemnly assure you that a murder in the course of a duel is no murder. What madmen! No, a murder is, and always will be, a murder. And the most horrible thing about it is not in death and suffering, in pools of blood or in corpses, but inasmuch as it deprives a human being of the joys of life. Oh, how priceless is life!” exclaimed Nasanski suddenly, in a high voice and with tears in his eyes. “Who do you suppose believes in the reality of an existence after this one? Not you, or I, or any other man of sound reason. Therefore death is feared by all. Only half-demented, ecstatic barbarians or ‘the foolish in the Lord’ allow themselves to be deluded into the notion that they will be greeted on the other side of the grave, in the garden of Paradise, by the beatific hymns of celestial eunuchs. Moreover, we have those who, silently despising such old wives’ fables and puerilities, cross the threshold of death. Others again picture the empire of the grave as a cold, dark, bare room. No, my friend, there is no such future state. In death there is neither cold, nor darkness, nor space, nor even fear—nothing but absolute annihilation.”

Romashov shipped his oars, and it was only by observing the green shore gently

stealing by that one could tell that the boat was moving onwards.

“Yes—annihilation,” Romashov repeated slowly, in a dreamy tone.

“But why cudgel your brains over this? Gaze instead at the living landscape around you. How exquisite is life!” shouted Nasanski, with a powerful and eloquent gesture. “Oh, thou beauty of the Godhead—thou infinite beauty! Look at this blue sky, this calm and silent water, and you will tremble with joy and rapture. Look at yon water-mill far in the distance, softly moving its sails. Look at the fresh verdure of the bank and the mischievous play of the sunbeams on the water. How wonderfully lovely and peaceful is all this!” Nasanski suddenly buried his face in his hands and burst out weeping; but he recovered his self-possession immediately, and, without any shame for his tears, he went on to say, while looking at Romashov with moist, glistening eyes:

“No, even if I were to fall under the railway train, and were left lying on the line with broken and bleeding limbs, and any one were to ask me if life were beautiful, I should none the less, and even by summoning my last remains of strength, answer enthusiastically, ‘Ah, yes, even now life is glorious.’ How much joy does not sight alone give us, and so, too, music, the scent of flowers, and woman’s love? And then the human understanding: thought which alone is our life’s golden sun—the eternal source of noble pleasure and imperishable bliss. Yurochka—pardon me calling you so, my friend”—Nasanski held out his trembling hand to Romashov as though entreating forgiveness—“suppose you were shut up in prison, and you were doomed all your life to stare at crumbling bricks of the wall of your cell—no, let us suppose that in your prison dungeon there never penetrated a ray of light or a sound from the outer world. Well, what more? What would that be in comparison with all the mysterious terrors of death? Yet if thought, memory, imagination, the spirit’s faculty of creation remained, you would not only be able to live, but even find moments of enthusiasm and the joy of life.”

“Yes, life is priceless,” exclaimed Romashov, interrupting him.

“It’s magnificent,” Nasanski went on to say hotly, “yet people wish two rational creatures to kill each other for a woman’s sake, or to re-establish their so-called honour! But who is it then he kills?—this miserable living clod of earth that arrogates to himself the proud name of man? Is it himself or his neighbour? No, he kills the gracious warmth and lifegiving sun, the bright sky, and all nature with its infinite beauty and charm. He kills that which never, never, never will return. Oh, what madmen!”

Nasanski ceased, shook his head sorrowfully, and collapsed. The boat glided into the reeds. Romashov again took the oars. High, hard, green stalks bowed slowly and gravely, gently scraping the boat’s gunwale. Amid the tall rushes there was shade and coolness.

“What shall I do?” asked Romashov, scowling and angry. “Shall I enter the reserves? Where shall I go?”

Nasanski looked at him with a gentle smile.

“Listen, Romashov, and look me straight in the face—that’s right. No, don’t turn away, look at me, and answer on your honour and conscience. Do you really think that you are now serving any good, useful, and reasonable purposes? I know you much better than all the rest—yes, I know your inmost soul, and I know you do not think so.”

“No,” replied Romashov, in a firm voice, “you are right. But what will become of me?”

“Well, be calm. Only look at our officers. Oh, I’m not talking now of the fops of the Emperor’s lifeguards who dance at the Court balls, talk French, and are kept by their parents or by their more or less lawful wives. No, I’m thinking of ourselves—poor officers in the line who, nevertheless, constitute the very ‘pick’ of the irresistible and glorious Russian Army. What are we? Well, mere fag-ends—le beau reste, despised

pariahs; at best the sons of poor, poverty-stricken infantry Captains, ruined in body and soul, but for, by far, the most part consisting of collegians, seminarists, etc., who have failed. Look, for instance, at our regiment. What are they who remain for any time in the service? Poor devils burdened with large families, veritable beggars ready for every villainy and cruelty—ah, even for murder—and are not even ashamed of abstracting the poor soldier's scanty pay so that, at any rate, cabbage soup may not be lacking on their table at home. Such an individual is commanded to shoot. Whom? And for what? It is all the same to him. He only knows that at home there are hungry mouths, dirty, scrofulous, rickety children, and with dull countenance he splutters, like another woodpecker, his eternal, unvarying answer, 'My oath.' And if there's a spark of ability or talent in any one, it is extinguished in schnapps. Seventy-five per cent. of our officers are diseased through vice. If any one in the regiment happens to scrape through his entrance examination for the Staff College—which, by the way, hardly happens with us once in five years—he is pursued by hatred. The most servile and fawning individuals, or those who have managed to obtain a little patronage, as a rule, get into the police or gendarmes. Should they have in their veins a few drops of noble blood, they may perhaps get a circuit-judgeship in the country. Let us suppose that a man of education, fine feeling, and heart is forced to remain in the regiment. What do you suppose is his fate? To him the service is an intolerable yoke and a perpetual source of humiliation, suffering, and self-contempt. Every one tries to procure an occupation of another sort which soon entirely engrosses him. One is seized with a mania for collecting; another watches impatiently for the evening so that he may, with great trouble and waste of time, embroider small crosses and other gewgaws for an absolutely unnecessary ornamental mat. A third fills his life by the help of a little metal saw, and produces at last an exquisite, perforated frame for his own portrait. And the thought of all this absurd and worthless work secretly occupies their minds during the insufferable hours of drill. Cards, drinking-bouts, disgusting swagger about the

favours women have bestowed on them—all this I might be able to pass over in silence. The most repulsive thing, however, is the cruel eagerness, conspicuous in so many officers, to gain a name as martinets and brutes to their men, as, for instance, Osadchi and Company, who with impunity knock out the teeth and eyes of their young recruits. Perhaps you are not aware that Artschakovski so maltreated his servant in my presence that it was all I could do to help the victim away alive. Blood splashed over the floor and walls. Well, how do you think the affair ended? You shall hear. The soldier complained to the Captain of his company; the latter sent him with a sealed order to the pay-sergeant, who, in strict obedience to his superior's orders, further belaboured with his fists the soldier's swollen and bleeding face for the space of half an hour. The same soldier complained twice at the General Inspection, but without redress."

Nasanski stopped and began nervously rubbing his temples with the palm of his hand.

"Wait," he went on to say. "Ah, how one's thoughts fly! Isn't it an unpleasant sensation to know that our thoughts lead us, and not we our thoughts? Well, to resume what we were talking about. Among our senior remaining officers we have also other types, for instance, Captain Plavski. On his petroleum stove he cooks his own beastly food, goes about in rags, and, out of his monthly forty-eight roubles twelve times a year, he puts twenty-five in the bank, where he has a sum of 2,000 roubles on deposit, which he lends to his brother officers at an outrageously usurious rate of interest. And you think, perhaps, that this is innate or inherited greed? Certainly not; it is only a means of filling up the soul-destroying hours of garrison service. Then we have Captain Stelikovski, a strong, able, talented man. Of what does his life consist? Oh, in seducing young, inexperienced peasant girls. Finally, our famous oddity, Lieutenant-Colonel 'Brehm.' A good-natured, kindly ass—a thoroughly good fellow, who has but one interest in life—the care of his animals. What to him signify the service, the colours, the parades, censures of his superiors,

or the honour of the warrior? Less than nothing."

"'Brehm' is a fine fellow. I like him," interrupted Romashov.

"He certainly is that, my friend," Nasanski admitted in a weary tone, "and yet," he went on to say with a lowering countenance, "if you knew what I once saw at the manœuvres. After a night march we were directly afterwards to advance to attack. Both officers and men were utterly done up. 'Brehm' was in command, and ordered the buglers to sound the charge, but the latter, goodness knows why, signalled the reserve to advance. 'Brehm' repeated his order once, twice, thrice, but in vain; the result was the same. Then our excellent, kind-hearted 'Brehm' gallops up to the unsuspecting bugler, and bangs his fist, with all his force, against the bell of the trumpet. I saw with my own eyes the trumpeter spitting out blood and broken teeth."

"Oh, my God!" groaned Romashov in disgust.

"Yes, they are all alike, even the best and most tender-hearted among them. At home they are splendid fathers of families and excellent husbands; but as soon as they approach the barracks they become low-minded, cowardly, and idiotic barbarians. You ask me why this is, and I answer: Because nobody can find a grain of sense in what is called military service. You know how all children like to play at war. Well, the human race has had its childhood—a time of incessant and bloody war; but war was not then one of the scourges of mankind, but a continued, savage, exultant national feast to which daring bands of youths marched forth, meeting victory or death with joy and pleasure. The bravest, strongest, and most cunning was chosen as leader, and so long as success attended his banner, he was almost accorded divine worship, until at last he was killed by his subjects, in order to make room for a luckier and more powerful rival. Mankind, however, grew in age and wisdom; people got weary of the former rowdy, bloody games, and became more serious, thoughtful, and cautious. The old Vikings of song and saga were designated and treated as pirates. The soldier no longer regarded war as a bloody but enjoyable

occupation, and he had often to be dragged to the enemy with a noose round his neck. The former terrifying, ruthless, adored atamens have been changed into cowardly, cautious chinóvniks,[21] who get along painfully enough on never adequate pay. Their courage is inspired by drink. Military discipline still exists, but it is based on threats and dread, and undermined by a dull, mutual hatred. To make a long story short, the whilom fine, proud ‘pheasants’ are of faded hue and look ruffled. Only one more parallel resembling the foregoing can I adduce from universal history, to wit, monasticism. The legend of its origin is touching and beautiful, its mission was peaceful, benevolent, and civilizing, and its existence most certainly an historic necessity. But centuries pass away, and what do we see now? Hundreds of thousands of impostors, idle, licentious, and impudent, who are hated and despised even by those who think they need their religious aid. And all this abomination is carefully hidden under a close veil of tinsel and finery, and foolish, empty ceremonies, in all ages the charlatan’s conditio sine quâ non. Is not this comparison of mine between the monastic orders and the military caste logical? Here the cassock and the censer; there the gold-laced uniform and the clank of arms. Here bigotry, hypocritical humility, sighs, and sugary, sanctimonious, unmeaning phrases; there the same odious affectations, although of another kind—swaggering manners, bold, and scornful looks—‘God help the man who dares to insult me!’—padded shoulders, cock-a-hoop defiance. Both the former and the latter class live like parasites on society, and are profoundly conscious of that fact, but fear—especially for their bellies’ sake—to publish it. And both remind one of certain little blood-sucking animals which eat their way most obstinately into the surface of a foreign body in proportion as it is decomposed.”

Nasanski stopped and spat with withering contempt.

“Go on, go on,” exclaimed Romashov eagerly.

“But other times are coming, indeed have come. Yes, tremendous surprises and

changes are about to take place. You remember my saying on one occasion that for a thousand years there has existed a genius of humanity that seldom reveals itself, but whose laws are as inexorable as they are ruthless; but the wiser men become, so much more deeply do they penetrate the spirit of those laws. And I am convinced that, sooner or later, everything in this world must be brought into equilibrium in accordance with these immutable laws. Justice will then be dispensed. The longer and more cruel the slavery has been, so much more terrible will be the day of reckoning for tyrants. The greater the violence, injustice, and brutality, so much more bloody will be the retribution. Oh, I am firmly convinced that the day will dawn when we 'superior officers,' we 'almighty swells,' darlings of the women, drones and brainless swaggerers, will have our ears boxed with impunity in streets and lanes, in vestibules and corridors, when women will turn their backs on us in contempt, and when our own affectionate soldiers will cease to obey us. And all this will happen, not because we have brutally ill-treated men deprived of every possibility of self-defence; not because we have, for the 'honour' of the uniform, insulted women; not because we have committed, when in a state of intoxication, scandalous acts in public-houses and public places; and not even because we, the privileged lick-spittles of the State, have, in innumerable battlefields and in pretty nearly every country, covered our standards with shame, and been driven by our own soldiers out of the maize-fields in which we had taken shelter. Well, of course, we shall also be punished for that. No, our most monstrous and unpardonable sin consists in our being blind and deaf to everything. For long, long periods past—and, naturally, far away from our polluted garrisons—people have discerned the dawn of a new life resplendent with light and freedom. Far-seeing, high-minded, and noble spirits, free from prejudices and human fear, have arisen to sow among the nations burning words of liberation and enlightenment. These heroes remind one of the last scene in a melodrama, when the dark castles and prison towers of tyranny fall down and are buried, in order, as it were, by magic, to be succeeded by freedom's dazzling

light and hailed by exultant throngs. We alone—crass idiots, irredeemable victims of pride and blindness—still stick up our tail-feathers, like angry turkey-cocks, and yell in savage wrath, ‘What? Where? Silence! Obey! Shoot!’ etc., etc. And it’s just this turkey-cock’s contempt for the fight for freedom by awakening humanity that shall never, never be forgiven us.”

The boat glided gently over the calm, open, mirroring surface of the river, which was garlanded round by the tall, dark green, motionless reeds. The little vessel was, as it were, hidden from the whole world. Over it hovered, now and then uttering a scream, the white gulls, occasionally so closely that, as they almost brushed Romashov with the tips of their wings, they made him feel the breeze arising from their strong, swift flights. Nasanski lay on his back in the stern of the boat and kept staring, for a long time, at the bright sky, where a few golden clouds sailing gently by had already begun to change to rose colour.

Romashov said in a shy tone:

“Are you tired? Oh, keep on talking.”

It seemed as if Nasanski continued to think and dream aloud when he once more picked up the threads of his monologue.

“Yes, a new, glorious, and wonderful time is at hand. I venture to say this, for I myself have lived a good deal in the world, read, seen, experienced, and suffered much. When I was a schoolboy, the old crows and jackdaws croaked into our ears: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself, and know that gentleness, obedience, and the fear of God are man’s fairest adornments.’ Then came certain strong, honest, fanatical men who said: ‘Come and join us, and we’ll throw ourselves into the abyss so that the coming race shall live in light and freedom.’ But I never understood a word of this. Who do you suppose is going to show me, in a convincing way, in what manner I am linked to this ‘neighbour’ of mine—damn him! who, you know, may be a miserable slave, a Hottentot, a leper, or an idiot? Of all the holy legends there is

none which I hate and despise with my whole soul so much as that of John the Almoner.[22] The leper says: ‘I am shivering with cold; lie beside me in my bed and warm my body with thy limbs. Lay thy lips close to my fetid mouth and breathe on me!’ Oh, how disgusting! How I hate this victim of leprosy, and, for the matter of that, also all other similar choice examples of my ‘neighbour.’ Can any reasonable being tell me why I should crush my head so that the generation in the year 3200 may attain a higher standard of happiness? Be quiet! I, too, once upon a time, sympathized with the silly, babyish cackle about ‘the world-soul,’ ‘man’s sacred duty,’ etc. But even if these high-falutin phrases did find a place then in my brain, they never forced their way into my heart. Do you follow me, Romashov?”

Romashov looked at Nasanski with a mixture of gratitude and shame.

“I understand you fully. When I come to ‘send in my checks’ and die, then the universe dies with me. That’s what you meant, eh?”

“Exactly, but listen further. Love of humanity is burnt out and has vanished from the heart of man. In its stead shall come a new creed, a new view of life that shall last to the world’s end; and this view of life consists in the individual’s love for himself, for his own powerful intelligence and the infinite riches of his feelings and perceptions. Think, Romashov, just this way and in no other. Who is nearer and dearer to me than myself? No one. You, and none other, are the Tsar and autocrat of your own soul, its pride and ornament. You are the god of all that lives. To you alone belongs all that you see, hear, and feel. Take what you want and do what you please. Fear nobody and nothing, for there is no one in the whole universe above you or can even be your rival. Ah, a time will come when the fixed belief in one’s own Ego will cast its blessed beams over mankind as did once the fiery tongues of the Holy Ghost over the Apostles’ heads. Then there will be no longer slaves and masters; no maimed or cripples; no malice, no vices, no pity, no hate. Men will be gods. How shall I dare to deceive, insult, or ill-treat another man, in whom I see and feel my fellow, who, like

myself, is a god? Then, and then only, shall life be rich and beautiful. Over the whole habitable portion of our earth shall tall, airy, lovely buildings be raised. Nothing vulgar, common, low, and impure shall any longer torture the eye. Our daily life shall become a pleasurable toil, an enfranchised science, a wonderful music, an everlasting merry-making. Love, free and sovereign, shall become the world's religion. No longer shall it be forced in shame to hide its countenance; no longer shall it be coupled with sin, disgrace, and darkness. And our own bodies shall glow with health, strength, and beauty, and go clad in bright, shimmering robes. Just as certainly as I believe in an eternal sky above me," shouted Nasanski, "so do I just as firmly believe in this paradisaical life to come."

Romashov, agitated and no longer master of himself, whispered with white lips:

"Nasanski, these are dreams, fancies."

Nasanski's smile was silent and compassionate.

"Yes," he at last uttered with a laugh still lingering in his voice, "you may perhaps be right. A professor of Dogmatic Theology or Classical Philology would, with arms and legs extended and head bent on one side in profound thought, say something like this: 'This is merely an outburst of the most unbridled Individualism.' But, my dear fellow, luckily the thing does not depend on more or less categorical phrases and comminations fulminated in a loud voice, but on the fact that there is nothing in the world more real, practical and irrefutable than these so-called 'fancies,' which are certainly only the property of some few people. These fancies will some day more strongly and completely weld together the whole of mankind to a complete homogeneous body. But let us forget now that we are warriors. We are merely defenceless starar. Suppose we go up the street; there we see right before us a wonderful, merry-looking, two-headed monster[23] that attacks all who come within its reach, no matter who they be. It has not yet touched me, but the mere thought that this brute might ill-treat me, or insult a woman I loved, or deprive me of my liberty

is enough to make me mad. I cannot overpower this creature by myself, but beside me walks another man filled with the same thirst for vengeance as I, and I say to him: ‘Come, shall we go and kill the monster, so that he may not be able to dig his claws into any one!’ You understand that all I have just been telling you is only a drastic simile, a hyperbole; but the truth is that I see, in this two-headed monster that which holds my soul captive, limits my individual freedom, and robs me of my manhood. And when that day dawns, then no more lamb-like love for one’s neighbour, but the divine love to one’s own Ego will be preached among men. Then, too, the double-headed monster’s reign will be over.”

Nasanski stopped. This violent outburst had evidently been too much for his nerves. After a few minutes, he went on in a hollow voice:

“My dear Georgi Alexievich, there rushes past us incessantly a brawling stream of divinely inspired, lofty, flaming thoughts and new and imperishable ideas which are to crush and bury for ever the bulwarks and golden idols of tyranny and darkness. We, however, keep on stamping in our old stalls and neighing: ‘Ah, you poor jades, you ought to have a taste of the whip!’—And once more I say: This will never be forgiven us.”

Nasanski got up, wrapped his cloak round him with a slight shiver, and remarked in a weary voice:

“I’m cold—let’s go home.”

Romashov rowed out of the rushes. The sun was setting behind the roofs of the distant town, the dark outlines of which were sharply defined against the red evening sky. Here and there the sunrays were reflected by a gleaming window-pane. The greater part of the river’s surface was as even as a mirror, and faded away in bright, sportive colours; but behind the boat the water was already dark, opaque, and curled by little light waves.

Romashov suddenly exclaimed, as if he were answering his own thoughts:

“You are right. I’ll enter the reserves. I do not yet know how I shall do it, but I had thought of it before.”

Nasanski shivered with the cold and wrapped his cloak more closely round him.

“Come, come,” replied he in a melancholy and tender tone. “There’s a certain inward light in you, Georgi Alexievich; I don’t know what to call it properly; but in this bear-pit it will soon go out. Yes, they would spit at it and put it out. Then get away from here! Don’t be afraid to struggle for your existence. Don’t fear life—the warm, wonderful life that’s so rich in changes. Let’s suppose you cannot hold yourself up; that you sink deep—deep; that you become a victim to crime and poverty. What then? I tell you that the life of a beggar or vagrant is tenfold richer than Captain Sliva’s and those of his kidney. You wander round the world here and there, from village to village, from town to town. You make acquaintance with quaint, careless, homeless, humorous specimens of humanity. You see and hear, suffer and enjoy; you sleep on the dewy grass; you shiver with cold in the frosty hours of the morning. But you are as free as a bird; you’re afraid of no one, and you worship life with all your soul. Oh, how little men understand after all! What does it matter whether you eat vobla[24] or saddle of buck venison with truffles; if you drink vodka or champagne; whether you die in a police-cell or under a canopy? All this is the veriest trifle. I often stand and watch funeral processions. There lies, overshadowed by enormous plumes, in its silver-mounted coffin, a rotting ape accompanied to the grave by a number of other apes, bedizened, behind and before, with orders, stars, keys, and other worthless finery. And afterwards all those visits and announcements! No, my friend, in all the world there is only one thing consistent and worth possessing, viz, an emancipated spirit with imaginative, creative force, and a cheerful temperament. One can have truffles or do without them. All that sort of thing is a matter of luck; it does not signify anything. A common guard, provided he is not an absolute beast, might in six months be trained to act as Tsar, and play his part admirably; but a well-fattened, sluggish, and stupid

ape, that throws himself into his carriage with his big belly in the air, will never succeed in grasping what liberty is, will never feel the bliss of inspiration, or shed sweet tears of enthusiasm.

“Travel, Romashov. Go away from here. I advise you to do so, for I myself have tasted freedom, and if I crept into my dirty cage again, whose fault was it? But enough of this. Dive boldly into life. It will not deceive you. Life resembles a huge building with thousands of rooms in which you will find light, joy, singing, wonderful pictures, handsome and talented men and women, games and frolic, dancing, love, and all that is great and mighty in art. Of this castle you have hitherto seen only a dark, narrow, cold, and raw cupboard, full of scourings and spiders’ webs, and yet you hesitate to leave it.”

Romashov made fast the boat and helped Nasanski to land. It was already dusk when they reached Nasanski’s abode. Romashov helped him to bed and spread the cloak and counterpane over him.

Nasanski trembled so much from his chill that his teeth chattered. He rolled himself up like a ball, bored his head right into his pillow, and whimpered helplessly as a child.

“Oh, how frightened I am of my room! What dreams! What dreams!”

“Perhaps you would like me to stay with you?” said Romashov.

“No, no; that’s not necessary. But get me, please, some bromide and a little—vodka. I have no money.”

Romashov sat by him till eleven. Nasanski’s fits of ague gradually subsided. Suddenly he opened his great eyes gleaming with fever, and uttered with some difficulty, but in a determined, abrupt tone:

“Go, now—good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” replied Romashov sadly. He wanted to say, “Good-bye, my teacher,”

but was ashamed of the phrase, and he merely added with an attempt at joking:

“Why did you merely say ‘good-bye’? Why not say do svidánia?”[25]

Nasanski burst into a weird, senseless laugh.

“Why not do svishvezia?”[26] he screamed in a wild, mad voice.

Romashov felt that his body was shaken by violent shudders.

XXII

ON approaching his abode, Romashov noticed, to his astonishment, that a faint gleam of light poured from the dark window of his room. “What can that be?” he thought, not without a certain uneasiness, whilst he involuntarily quickened his steps. “Perhaps it is my seconds waiting to communicate to me the conditions of the duel?” In the hall he ran into Hainán, but he did not recognize him immediately in the dark, and being startled, cried angrily:

“What the devil——! Oh, it’s you, Hainán—and who’s in there?”

In spite of the darkness, Romashov realized that Hainán was doing his usual dance.

“It’s a lady, your Honour. She’s sitting in there.”

Romashov opened the door. The lamp, the kerosene of which had long come to an end, was still flickering feebly and was just ready to go out. On the bed was seated a female figure, the outlines of which could scarcely be distinguished in the half-dark room.

“Shurochka!”—Romashov, who for a second was unable to breathe, slowly approached the bed on tip-toe—“Shurochka, you here?”

“S-sh; sit down,” she replied in a rapid whisper. “Put out the lamp.”

Romashov blew sharply into the chimney of the lamp. The little flickering, blue flame went out, and the room was at once dark and silent, but, in the next moment, the alarum on the table went off loudly. Romashov sat down by Alexandra Petrovna,

but could not distinguish her features. A curious feeling of pain, nervousness, and faintness of heart took possession of him. He was unable to speak.

“Who is on the other side of that wall?” asked Shurochka. “Can we be overheard?”

“No, there’s no one there, only old furniture. My landlord is a joiner. One can speak out loud.”

But both spoke, all the same, in a low voice, and those shyly uttered words acquired, in the darkness, something in addition awful, disquieting, treacherously stealthy. Romashov sat so close to Shurochka that he almost touched her dress. There was a buzzing in his ears, and the blood throbbed in his veins with dull, heavy beats.

“Why, oh, why have you done this?” she asked quietly, but in a passionately reproachful tone. Shurochka laid her hand on his knee. Romashov felt through the cloth this light touch of her feverishly burning finger-tips. He drew a deep breath, his eyes closed, and big black ovals, the sides of which sparkled with a dazzling, bluish gleam, took shape and ran into each other before his eyes, reminding him of the legend of the wonderful lakes. “Did you forget that I told you to keep your self-control when you met him? No, no—I don’t reproach you. You did not do it on purpose, I know that; but in that moment, when the wild beast within you was aroused, you had not even one thought of me. There was nothing to stay your arm. You never loved me.”

“I love you,” said Romashov softly, as with a shy movement he put his trembling fingers on her hand. Shurochka withdrew her hand, though not hastily, but at once and slowly, as though she were afraid of hurting him.

“I know that neither you nor he mixed my name up with this scandal; but I can tell you that all this chivalry has been wasted. There’s not a house in the town where they are not gossiping about it.”

“Forgive me; I could not control myself. I was blinded, beside myself with jealousy,” stammered Romashov.

Shurochka laughed for a while to herself. At last she answered him:

“You talk about ‘jealousy.’ Did you really think that my husband, after his fight with you, was high-minded enough to deny himself the pleasure of telling me where you had come from when you returned to the mess? He also told me one or two things about Nasanski.”

“Forgive me,” repeated Romashov. “It’s true I was there—but I did nothing to blush for in your presence. Pardon me.”

Shurochka suddenly raised her voice. Her voice acquired an energetic, almost severe accent, when she answered him.

“Listen, Georgi Alexievich, the minutes are precious. I waited here nearly half an hour for you. Let us, therefore, talk briefly and to the point. You know what Volodya is to me—I don’t love him, but, for his sake, I killed a part of my soul. I cherish greater ambition than he does. Twice he has failed to pass for the Staff College. This caused me far greater sorrow and disappointment than it did him. All this idea of trying to get on the Staff is mine, only mine. I have literally dragged him, whipped him on, crammed lessons into him, gone over them with him, filed and sharpened him, screwed up his pride and ambition, and cheered him in hours of apathy and depression. I live only for this, and I cannot even bear the thought of these hopes of mine being blighted. Whatever the cost, Volodya must pass his examination.”

Romashov sat with his head in his hands. Suddenly he felt Shurochka softly and caressingly drawing her fingers through his hair. Sorrowful and bewildered, he said to her:

“What can I do?”

She laid her arm round his neck and drew his head to her bosom. She was not wearing a corset, and Romashov felt her soft, elastic bosom pressed against his cheek, and inhaled the delicious, aromatic perfume that came from her young,

absolutely healthy body. When she spoke he felt in his hair her irregular, nervous breathing.

“You remember, that evening—at the picnic? I told you then the whole truth: I did not love him; but think, now, only think, three years—three whole long years of the most arduous, repulsive work—of fancies, dreams, hopes. You know how I hate and despise this wretched little provincial hole, the odious set of officers. I always wanted to be dressed expensively and elegantly. I love power, flattery—slaves. And then comes this regimental scandal, this stupid fight between two drunken, irresponsible men accidentally brought together. Then all is over—all my dreams and hopes turned to ashes. Isn’t this dreadful? I have never been a mother; but I think I can imagine what it would be if I had a son—a son petted, idolized, even madly worshipped. He represents, so to speak, an incarnation or embodiment of my life’s dreams, sorrows, tears, sleepless nights, and then, suddenly, occurs a senseless accident. My little son is sitting playing at the window; the nurse turns away for a few minutes, and the child falls out on to the pavement. My dear, my sorrow and indignation can only be compared to this mother’s despair. But I am not blaming you.”

Romashov was sitting in a very cramped and uncomfortable position, and he was afraid that his heavy head might cause Shurochka pain or discomfort. But he had, however, for hours been used to sitting without moving, and, in a sort of intoxication, listen to the quick and regular beatings of his heart.

“Do you hear what I say?” she asked, stooping down to him.

“Yes, yes—talk, talk. You know I’ll do all you wish. Oh, if I could only——”

“No, no; but only listen till I have finished. If you kill him or if they prevent him from sitting for the examination, then it is all, all over. That very day I shall cast him off as a worthless thing, and go my own way—where? No matter where. To St. Petersburg, Odessa, Kiev. Don’t imagine this is one of those common, untrue,

‘penny-novelette’ phrases. Cheap effects I despise, and I will spare you them. But I know I am young, intelligent, and well-educated. I am not pretty, but I know the art of catching men far better than all those famous charmers who, at our official balls, receive the prize for beauty in the form of an elegant card-tray or something between a musical-box and an alarum. I can stand in the background; I can, by coldness and contempt, be bitter to myself and others. But I can flame up into a consuming passion and burn like a firework.”

Romashov glanced towards the window. His eyes had now begun to be used to the darkness, and he could distinguish the outlines of the framework of the window.

“Don’t talk like that, please. It pains me so; but, tell me, do you wish me to avoid the duel, and send him an apology? Tell me.”

Shurochka did not reply at once. The clock again made its monotonous, metallic voice heard, and filled every corner of the dark room with its infernal din. At last Shurochka answered as softly as if she were talking to herself in thought, and with an expression in her voice which Romashov was not in a condition to interpret.

“I knew you would offer to do this.”

“I do not feel afraid,” he exclaimed in a stern but soft tone.

“No, no, no,” she said hastily in an eager, beseeching whisper. “You misunderstood me, you do not understand me. Come nearer to me. Come and sit as you did just now. Come!”

She threw both her arms round his neck, and whispered to him tender words, tickling his face with her soft hair, and flooding his cheeks with her hot breath.

“You quite misunderstood me. I meant something quite different, but I am ashamed to tell you all. You are so good, so pure-hearted. I, alas! am the opposite, and, therefore, it’s so difficult for me to mention it.”

“No, no. Tell me everything. I love you.”

“Listen to me,” she began, and Romashov guessed what she would say before she could utter the words. “If you refuse to fight with him, how much shame and persecution, how many sufferings will be your lot. No, no, this must not be done. Oh, my God, at this moment I will not lie to you, dear. I have already weighed everything carefully. Suppose you refuse the duel. In that case my husband will certainly be rehabilitated; but, you understand, after a duel that ends in reconciliation, there is always something left—how shall I put it?—something covered by a certain obscurity, and which, therefore, leaves room for malice and slander. Do you understand me now?” she added with melancholy tenderness, pressing, at the same time, a light kiss on his brow.

“Yes, but go on.”

“The consequence, of course, is that they would never allow my husband even to present himself for a fresh examination. The reputation of an officer on the Staff must be unblemished. On the other hand, if a duel actually takes place, it will put you both in a dignified, heroic light. Men who can conduct themselves fittingly in front of the muzzle of a revolver—very much will be forgiven them in this world. Besides—after the duel—you can, if you like, offer an apology; but that I leave to your own discretion.”

Tightly clasped in each other’s arms, they continued their conversation in a whisper, but Romashov felt as if something mysterious, unclean, and nauseous had crept in between him and Shurochka, and he felt a freezing chill at heart. Again he tried to tear himself away from her arms, but she would not let him go. In his effort to hide from her the nervous excitement he was in, he exclaimed in a rough tone:

“For Heaven’s sake, put an end to this! Say what you want, and I’ll agree to everything.”

Then she put her mouth so close to his that her words affected him like hot, thrilling kisses.

“The duel must take place, but neither of you will run any risk. Don’t misunderstand me, I implore you, and don’t condemn me. Like all women, I loathe cowards, but, for my sake, you must do this. No, Georgi, don’t ask me if my husband—for the matter of that, he already knows all.”

Now at last Romashov managed to release himself from the tight grip of her soft, strong arms. He stood straight up before her, and answered in a curt, rough voice:

“That’s all right. It shall be as you wish! I consent.”

Shurochka also rose. Romashov could not see in the dark room that she was putting her hair straight, but he felt or guessed it.

“Are you going now?” he asked.

“Good-bye,” she replied in a faint voice, “and kiss me now for the last time.”

Romashov’s heart was shaken by pity and love. Groping in the darkness, he caught her head in his hands, and began kissing her eyes and cheeks, which were wet with big, silent tears. This took away his self-control.

“Don’t cry like that, Sascha, my darling,” he implored in a sad and tender tone.

Suddenly throwing her arms round his neck, she pressed herself tightly to him by a strong, passionate movement, and, without ceasing her kisses, she whispered the words in short, broken sentences. She was breathing heavily and trembling all over.

“I can’t part from you like this. We shall never see each other again. Some presentiment tells me that, so at this only moment we must not fear anything in the world. Let us be happy!”

And at that moment the pair, the room, the entire world, were filled with an ineffable bliss—stupefying, suffocating, consuming. For the space of a second Romashov fancied he saw, as it were by miracle, Shurochka’s eyes shining on him with an expression of mad joy. Her lips sought his.

. . . . . .

“May I accompany you home?” asked Romashov, as he escorted her to the street.

“No, my darling, don’t. I have not the least idea how long I’ve been with you. What is the time?”

“I don’t know. I have not a watch.”

She stood lingering there, leaning against the gate. A powerful scent arose from the earth in the warm, languishing summer night. It was still dark, but, notwithstanding the darkness, Romashov could clearly distinguish Shurochka’s features, motionless and pale as a marble statue’s.

“Good-bye, my darling,” she uttered at last in a weary voice. “Good-bye.” They embraced each other, but their lips were cold and lifeless. Shurochka departed quickly and was swallowed up by the dark night.

Romashov remained a while listening till the last faint sounds of her light steps could no longer be caught, and then returned to his room. A feeling of utter, yet pleasant, weariness took possession of him. He had hardly undressed before he fell asleep. And the last impression left on his mind was a faint, delicious odour of perfume proceeding from his pillow—the scent from Shurochka’s hair and her fair young body.

XXIII

June 2, 18—. Z.

To his Excellency the Colonel and Commander of the—th Infantry Regiment from Ditz, Staff-Captain of the same regiment.

Report.

Herewith allow me respectfully to report to your Excellency that the duel between Lieutenant Nikoläiev and Sub-lieutenant Romashov took place to-day, according to the conditions settled by you on the 1st inst.

The two adversaries met at 5.55 a.m. in the wood called “Oakwood,” situated three and a quarter versts beyond the town. The duel was decided in the space of one minute ten seconds, including the time for placing the parties and giving the signal. The places taken by the duellists were determined by lot. When the command “Forward” was given the fight began. As the two officers approached each other, a shot from Lieutenant Nikoläiev struck Sub-lieutenant Romashov high on the right side. After this Lieutenant Nikoläiev stopped to await his adversary’s bullet, but, after the lapse of half a minute, it was evident that Sub-lieutenant Romashov was not in a condition to return the shot, by reason of which Sub-lieutenant Romashov’s seconds declared the duel was ended, as to which other witnesses were agreed. Sub-lieutenant Romashov, on being carried to his carriage, fell into a deep swoon, and died in five minutes through internal hæmorrhage.

The seconds on Lieutenant Nikoläiev’s side were the undersigned and Lieutenant Vasin; on Sub-lieutenant Romashov’s, Lieutenants Biek-Agamalov and Viätkin. The further arrangements for the duel were, by general agreement, made by me.

A certificate from Dr. Znoiko is enclosed herein.

Ditz, Staff-Captain.

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FOOTNOTES:

[1] The Lezghins are among the medley of mountain tribes living in Daghestan and part of the Terek province. These mountaineers of the Eastern Caucasus are nearly all Sun’i Mohammedans.

[2] One of Russia’s bravest and greatest generals in the war with Napoleon, 1812.

[3] Roman Catholic priests are so called in Lithuania and Poland.

[4] Schtoss is a sort of Russian hazard.

[5] Yuri = George.

[6] Roubashka (blouse).

[7] The official newspaper of the Russian Army.

[8] Professional floor-polisher.

[9] A town and “government” in East Russia.

[10] Corresponds to the Swedish smörgåsbord, and consists of a number of cold dishes and delicacies.

[11] A national dish in Russia, consisting of a sort of buckwheat porridge baked in the oven in fire-proof earthen vessels, which are put on the table.

[12] In the time of Nicholas, sons of soldiers quartered or garrisoned in certain districts. They were liable to be called on to serve.

[13] An old Slavonic character (l'schiza), only occurring in the Russian Bible and Ritual.

[14] Nickname for Little Russians on account of their curious habit of cutting and fashioning their hair into a tuft (khokhol) on the crown.

[15] An affectionate diminutive of George.

[16] Sliva is the Russian for plum.

[17] Arshin = 2·33 feet.

[18] Pet name for Alexandra.

[19] A light jacket worn in the hot weather.

[20] The name given to Ivan the Terrible's lifeguards and executioners.

[21] Chinóvnik, Russian word for official.

[22] Ivan Milostivni, one of the innumerable saints of the Greek Church.

[23] The allusion is to the double eagle in the arms of Russia.

[24] Vobla is a kind of fish of the size of Prussian carp, and is caught in the Volga.

[25] Au revoir.

[26] Untranslatable pun on the two last syllables of svidánia; Dania means Denmark, Schvezia, Sweden.

Typographical errors corrected by the etext transcriber: Agamalov-Biek=> Biek-Agamalov=> {pg 9} Nikolaiev=> Nikoläiev {pg 37} Vladimir Yefimovisch=> Vladimir Yefimovich {pg 51} Nikkoläiev=> Nikoläiev {pg 61} Nasanski stuck his hands in his pocket=> Nasanski stuck his hands in his pockets {pg 70} they call me Koval=> they call me Kovál {pg 228} Yuri Alekseich,=> Yuri Alexeich, {pg 267} by the name mysterious "benefactor"=> by the same mysterious "benefactor" {pg 295} non-commisioned=> non-commissioned {pg 362}

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