

ON THE WAY

In the room which the innkeeper, the Cossack Semión Tchistoplui, called "The Traveller,"—meaning thereby, "reserved exclusively for travellers,"—at a big, unpainted table, sat a tall and broad-shouldered man of about forty years of age. With his elbows on the table and his head resting on his hands, he slept. A fragment of a tallow candle, stuck in a pomade jar, illumined his fair hair, his thick, broad nose, his sunburnt cheeks, and the beetling brows that hung over his closed eyes.... Taken one by one, all his features—his nose, his cheeks, his eyebrows—were as rude and heavy as the furniture in "The Traveller" taken together they produced an effect of singular harmony and beauty. Such, indeed, is often the character of the Russian face; the bigger, the sharper the individual features, the softer and more benevolent the whole. The sleeper was dressed as one of good class, in a threadbare jacket bound with new wide braid, a plush waistcoat, and loose black trousers, vanishing in big boots.

On a bench which stretched the whole way round the room slept a girl some eight years of age. She lay upon a foxskin overcoat, and wore a brown dress and long black stockings. Her face was pale, her hair fair, her shoulders narrow, her body slight and frail; but her nose ended in just such an ugly lump as the man's. She slept soundly, and did not seem to feel that the crescent comb which had fallen from her hair was cutting into her cheek.

"The Traveller" had a holiday air. The atmosphere smelt of newly-washed floors; there were no rags on the line which stretched diagonally across the room; and in the ikon corner, casting a red reflection upon the image of St. George the Victory-Bringer, burned a lamp. With a severe and cautious gradation from the divine to the earthly, there stretched from each side of the image row of gaudily-painted pictures. In the dim light thrown from the lamp and candle-end these pictures seemed to form a continuous belt covered with black patches; but when the tiled stove, wishing to sing in accord with the weather, drew in the blast with a howl, and the logs, as if angered, burst into ruddy flames and roared with rage, rosy patches quivered along the walls; and above the head of the sleeping man might be seen first the faces of seraphim, then the Shah Nasr Edin, and finally a greasy, sunburnt boy, with staring eyes, whispering something into the ear of a girl with a singularly blunt and indifferent face.

The storm howled outside. Something wild and angry, but deeply miserable, whirled round the inn with the fury of a beast, and strove to burst its way in. It banged against the doors, it beat on the windows and roof, it tore the walls, it threatened, it implored, it quieted down, and then with the joyous howl of triumphant treachery it rushed up the stove pipe; but here the logs burst into flame, and the fire, like a chained hound, rose up in rage to meet its enemy. There was a sobbing, a hissing, and an angry roar. In all this might be distinguished both irritated weariness and unsatisfied hate, and the angered impotence of one accustomed to victory.

Enchanted by the wild, inhuman music, "The Traveller" seemed numbed into immobility for ever. But the door creaked on its hinges, and into the inn came the potboy in a new calico shirt. He walked with a limp, twitched his sleepy eyes, snuffed the candle with his fingers, and went out. The bells of the village church of Rogatchi, three hundred yards away, began to strike twelve. It was midnight. The storm played with the sounds as with snowflakes, it chased them to infinite distances, it cut some short and stretched some into long undulating notes; and it smothered others altogether in the universal tumult. But suddenly a chime resounded so loudly through the room that it might have been rung under the window. The girl on the foxskin

overcoat started and raised her head. For a moment she gazed vacantly at the black window, then turned her eyes upon Nasr Edin, on whose face the firelight gleamed, and finally looked at the sleeping man.

"Papa!" she cried.

But her father did not move. The girl peevishly twitched her eyebrows, and lay down again with her legs bent under her. A loud yawn sounded outside the door. Again the hinges squeaked, and indistinct voices were heard. Someone entered, shook the snow from his coat, and stamped his feet heavily.

"Who is it?" drawled a female voice.

"Mademoiselle Ilováisky," answered a bass.

Again the door creaked. The storm tore into the cabin and howled. Someone, no doubt the limping boy, went to the door of "The Traveller," coughed respectfully, and raised the latch.

"Come in, please," said the female voice. "It is all quite clean, honey!"

The door flew open. On the threshold appeared a bearded muzhik, dressed in a coachman's caftan, covered with snow from head to foot. He stooped under the weight of a heavy portmanteau. Behind him entered a little female figure, not half his height, faceless and handless, rolled into a shapeless bundle, and covered also with snow. Both coachman and bundle smelt of damp. The candle-flame trembled.

"What nonsense!" cried the bundle angrily. "Of course we can go on! It is only twelve versts more, chiefly wood. There is no fear of our losing the way."

"Lose our way or not, it's all the same ... the horses won't go an inch farther," answered the coachman. "Lord bless you, miss.... As if I had done it on purpose!"

"Heaven knows where you've landed me!..."

"Hush! there's someone asleep. You may go!"

The coachman shook the caked snow from his shoulders, set down the portmanteau, snuffled, and went out. And the little girl, watching, saw two tiny hands creeping out of the middle of the bundle, stretching upward, and undoing the network of shawls, handkerchiefs, and scarfs. First on the floor fell a heavy shawl, then a hood, and after it a white knitted muffler. Having freed its head, the bundle removed its cloak, and shrivelled suddenly into half its former size. Now it appeared in a long, grey ulster, with immense buttons and yawning pockets. From one pocket it drew a paper parcel. From the other came a bunch of keys, which the bundle put down so incautiously that the sleeping man started and opened his eyes. For a moment he looked around him vacantly, as if not realising where he was, then shook his head, walked to the corner of the room, and sat down. The bundle took off its ulster, again reduced itself by half, drew off its shoes, and also sat down.

It no longer resembled a bundle. It was a woman, a tiny, fragile brunette of some twenty years of age, thin as a serpent, with a long pale face, and curly hair. Her nose was long and sharp, her chin long and sharp, her eyelashes long; and thanks to a general sharpness the expression of her face was stinging. Dressed in a tight-fitting black gown, with lace on the neck and sleeves, with sharp elbows and long, rosy fingers, she called to mind portraits of English ladies of the middle of the century. The serious, self-centred expression of her face served only to increase the resemblance.

The brunette looked around the room, glanced sidelong at the man and girl, and, shrugging her shoulders, went over and sat at the window. The dark windows trembled in the damp west wind. Outside great flakes of snow, flashing white, darted against the glass, clung to it for a second, and were whirled away by the storm. The wild music grew louder.

There was a long silence. At last the little girl rose suddenly, and, angrily ringing out every word, exclaimed:

"Lord! Lord! How unhappy I am! The most miserable being in the world!"

The man rose, and with a guilty air, ill-suited to his gigantic stature and long beard, went to the bench.

"You're not sleeping, dearie? What do you want?" He spoke in the voice of a man who is excusing himself.

"I don't want anything! My shoulder hurts! You are a wicked man, father, and God will punish you. Wait! You'll see how he'll punish you!"

"I know it's painful, darling ... but what can I do?" He spoke in the tone employed by husbands when they make excuses to their angry wives. "If your shoulder hurts it is the long journey that is guilty. To-morrow it will be over, then we shall rest, and the pain will stop." ...

"To-morrow! To-morrow!... Every day you say to-morrow! We shall go on for another twenty days!"

"Listen, friend, I give you my word of honour that this is the last day. I never tell you untruths. If the storm delayed us, that is not my fault."

"I can bear it no longer! I cannot! I cannot!"

Sasha pulled in her leg sharply, and filled the room with a disagreeable whining cry. Her father waved his arm, and looked absent-mindedly at the brunette. The brunette shrugged her shoulders, and walked irresolutely towards Sasha.

"Tell me, dear," she said, "why are you crying? It is very nasty to have a sore shoulder ... but what can be done?"

"The fact is, mademoiselle," said the man apologetically, "we have had no sleep for two nights, and drove here in a villainous cart. No wonder she is ill and unhappy. A drunken driver ... the luggage stolen ... all the time in a snowstorm ... but what's the good of crying?... I, too, am tired out with sleeping in a sitting position, so tired that I feel almost drunk. Listen, Sasha ... even as they are things are bad enough ... yet you must cry!"

He turned his head away, waved his arm, and sat down.

"Of course, you mustn't cry!" said the brunette. "Only babies cry. If you are ill, dearie, you must undress and go to sleep.... Come, let me undress you!"

With the girl undressed and comforted, silence again took possession of the room. The brunette sat at the window, and looked questioningly at the wall, the ikon, and the stove. Apparently things around seemed very strange to her, the room, the girl with her fat nose and boy's short nightgown, and the girl's father. That strange man sat in the corner, looking vacantly about him like a drunken man, and nibbling his face with his hands. He kept silence, blinked his eyes; and judging from his guilty figure no one would expect that he would be the first to break the silence.

Yet it was he who began. He smoothed his trousers, coughed, laughed, and said:

"A comedy, I swear to God!.. I look around, and can't believe my eyes. Why did destiny bring us to this accursed inn P What did she mean to express by it? But life sometimes makes such a salto mortale, that you look and can't believe your eyes. Are you going far, miss?"

"Not very far," answered the brunette. "I was going from home, about twenty versts away, to a farm of ours where my father and brother are staying. I am Mademoiselle Ilováisky, and the farm is Ilováisk. It is twelve versts from this. What disagreeable weather!"

"It could hardly be worse."

The lame pot-boy entered the room, and stuck a fresh candle end in the pomade jar.

"Get the samovar!" said the man.

"Nobody drinks tea at this hour," grinned the boy. "It is a sin before Mass."

"Don't you mind ... it is not you that'll burn in hell, but we...."

While they drank their tea the conversation continued. Mdlle. Ilováisky learned that the stranger's name was Grigóri Petróvitch Likharyóff, that he was a brother of Likharyóff, the Marshal of the Nobility in the neighbouring district, that he had himself once been a landed proprietor, but had gone through everything. And in turn Likharyóff learned that his companion was Márya Mikháilovna Ilováisky, that her father had a large estate, and that all the management fell upon her shoulders, as both father and brother were improvident, looked at life through their fingers, and thought of little but greyhounds....

"My father and brother are quite alone on the farm," said Mdlle. Ilováisky, moving her fingers (she had a habit in conversation of moving her fingers before her stinging face, and after every phrase, licking her lips with a pointed tongue); "they are the most helpless creatures on the face of the earth, and can't lift a finger to help themselves. My father is muddle-headed, and my brother every evening tired off his feet. Imagine!... who is to get them food after the Fast? Mother is dead, and our servants cannot lay a cloth without my supervision. They will be without proper food, while I spend all night here. It is very funny!"

Mdlle. Ilováisky shrugged her shoulders, sipped her tea, and said:

"There are certain holidays which have a peculiar smell. Easter, Trinity, and Christinas each has its own smell. Even atheists love these holidays. My brother, for instance, says there is no God, but at Easter he is the first to run off to the morning service." Likharyóff lifted his eyes, turned them on his companion and laughed.

"They say that there is no God," continued Mdlle. Ilováisky, also laughing, "but why then, be so good as to tell me, do all celebrated writers, scholars, and clever men generally, believe at the close of their lives?"

"The man who in youth has not learnt to believe does not believe in old age, be he a thousand times a writer."

Judged by his cough, Likharyóff had a bass voice, but now either from fear of speaking too loud, or from a needless bashfulness, he spoke in a tenor. After a moment's silence, he sighed and continued:

"This is how I understand it. Faith is a quality of the soul. It is the same as talent ... it is congenital. As far as I can judge from my own case, from those whom I have met in life, from all that I see around me, this congenital faith is inherent in all Russians to an astonishing degree.... May I have another cup? ... Russian life presents itself as a continuous series of faiths and infatuations, but unbelief or negation it has not—if I may so express it—even smelt. That a Russian does not believe in God is merely a way of saying that he believes in something else."

Likharyóff took from Mdlle. Ilováisky another cup of tea, gulped down half of it at once, and continued: "Let me tell you about myself. In my soul Nature planted exceptional capacity for belief. Half my life have I lived an atheist and a Nihilist, yet never was there a single moment when I did not believe. Natural gifts display themselves generally in early childhood, and my capacity for faith showed itself at a time when I could walk upright underneath the table. My mother used to make us children eat a lot, and when she gave us our meals, she had a habit of saying, 'Eat, children; there's nothing on earth like soup!' I believed this; I ate soup ten times a day, swallowed it like a shark to the point of vomiting and disgust. My nurse used to tell me fairy tales, and I believed in ghosts, in fairies, in wood-demons, in every kind of monster.

I remember well! I used to steal corrosive sublimate from father's room, sprinkle it on gingerbread, and leave it in the attic, so that the ghosts might eat it and die. But when I learned to read and to understand what I read, my beliefs got beyond description. I even ran away to America, I joined a gang of robbers, I tried to enter a monastery, I hired boys to torture me for Christ's sake. When I ran away to America I did not go alone, but took with me just such another fool, and I was glad when we froze nearly to death, and when I was flogged. When I ran away to join the robbers, I returned every time with a broken skin. Most untranquil childhood! But when I was sent to school, and learned that the earth goes round the sun, and that white light so far from being white is composed of seven primary colours, my head went round entirely. At home everything seemed hideous, my mother, in the name of Elijah, denying lightning conductors, my father indifferent to the truths I preached. My new enlightenment inspired me! Like a madman I rushed about the house; I preached my truths to the stable boys, I was driven to despair by ignorance, I flamed with hatred against all who saw in white light only white.... But this is nonsense.... Serious, so to speak, manly infatuations began with me only at college.... Have you completed a university course?"

"At Novotcherkask—in the Don Institute."

"But that is not a university course. You can hardly know what this science is. All sciences, whatever they may be, have only one and the same passport, without which they are meaningless—an aspiration to truth! Every one of them—even your wretched pharmacology—has its end, not in profit, not in convenience and advantage to life, but in truth. It is astonishing! When you begin the study of any science you are captivated from the first. I tell you, there is nothing more seductive and gracious, nothing so seizes and overwhelms the human soul, as the beginning of a science. In the first five or six lectures you are exalted by the very brightest hopes—you seem already the master of eternal truth.... Well, I gave myself to science passionately, as to a woman loved. I was its slave, and, except it, would recognise no other sun. Day and night, night and day, without unbending my back, I studied. I learnt off formulas by heart; I ruined myself on books; I wept when I saw with my own eyes others exploiting science for personal aims. ... But I got over my infatuation soon.

The fact is, every science has a beginning, but it has no end—it is like a recurring decimal. Zoology discovered thirty-five thousand species of insects; chemistry counts sixty elementary substances. If, as time goes by, you add to these

figures ten ciphers, you will be just as far from the end as now, for all contemporary scientific research consists in the multiplication of figures.... This I began to understand when I myself discovered the thirty-five-thousand-and-first species, and gained no satisfaction. But I had no disillusion to outlive, for a new faith immediately appeared. I thrust myself into Nihilism with its proclamations, its hideous deeds, its tricks of all sorts. I went down to the people; I served as factory-hand; I greased the axles of railway carriages; I turned myself into a bargee. It was while thus wandering all over the face of Russia that I first saw Russian life. I became an impassioned admirer of that life. I loved the Russian people to distraction; I loved and trusted in its God, in its language, in its creations.... And so on eternally.... In my time I have been a Slavophile, and bored Aksakoff with my letters; and an Ukrainophile, and an archaeologist, and a collector of specimens of popular creative art ... I have been earned away by ideas, by men, by events, by places.... I have been carried away unceasingly.... Five years ago I embodied as the negation of property; my latest faith was non-resistance to evil."

Sasha sighed gustily and moved. Likharyóff rose and went over to her.

"Will you have some tea, darling?" he asked tenderly

"Drink it yourself!" answered Sasha.

"You have lived a varied life," said Márya Mikháilovna. "You have something to remember."

"Yes, yes; it is all very genial when you sit at the tea-table and gossip with a good companion; but you do not ask me what has all this gaiety cast me. With what have I paid for the diversity of my life? You must remember, in the first place, that I did not believe like a German Doctor of Philosophy. I did not live as a hermit, but my every faith bent me as a bow, and tore my body to pieces. Judge for yourself! Once I was as rich as my brother: now I am a beggar. Into this whirlpool of infatuation I cast my own estate, the property of my wife, the money of many others. I am forty-two to-day, with old age staring me in the face, and I am homeless as a dog that has lost his master by night. In my whole life I have never known repose. My soul was in constant torment; I suffered even from my hopes.... I have worn myself out with heavy unregulated work; I have suffered deprivation; five times I have been in prison. I have wandered through Archangel and Tobolsk ... the very memory sickens me. I lived, but in the vortex never felt the process of life. Will you believe it, I never noticed how my wife loved me—when my children were born. What more can I tell you? To all who loved me I brought misfortune.... My mother has mourned for me now fifteen years, and my own brothers, who through me have been made to blush, who have been made to bend their backs, whose hearts have been sickened, whose money has been wasted, have grown at last to hate me like poison."

Likharyóff rose and again sat down.

"If I were only unhappy I should be thankful to God," he continued, looking at Mdlle. Ilováisky. "But my personal unhappiness fades away when I remember how often in my infatuations I was ridiculous, far from the truth, unjust, cruel, dangerous! How often with my whole soul have I hated and despised those whom I ought to have loved, and loved those whom I ought to have hated! To-day, I believe; I fall down on my face and worship: to-morrow, like a coward, I flee from the gods and friends of yesterday, and silently swallow some scoundrel! God alone knows how many times I have wept with shame for my infatuations! Never in my life have I consciously lied or committed a wrong, yet my conscience is unclean! I cannot even boast that my hands are unstained with blood, for before my own eyes my wife faded to death—worn out by my improvidence. My own wife!... Listen; there are now in fashion two

opposing opinions of woman. One class measures her skull to prove that she is lower than man, to determine her defects, to justify their own animality. The other would employ all their strength in lifting woman to their own level—that is to say, force her to learn by heart thirty-five thousand species of insects, to talk and write the same nonsense as they themselves talk and write." Likharyóff's face darkened.

"But I tell you that woman always was and always will be the slave of man!" he said in a bass voice, thumping his fist upon the table. "She is wax—tender, plastic wax—from which man can mould what he will. Lord in heaven! Yet out of some trumpery infatuation for manhood she cuts her hair, forsakes her family, dies in a foreign land.... Of all the ideas to which she sacrifices herself not one is feminine!... Devoted, unthinking slave! Skulls I have never measured; but this I say from bitter, grievous experience: The proudest, the most independent women—once I had succeeded in communicating to them my inspiration, came after me, unreasoning, asking no questions, obeying my every wish. Of a nun I made a Nihilist, who, as I afterwards learned, killed a gendarme. My wife never forsook me in all my wanderings, and like a weathercock changed her faith as I changed my infatuations." With excitement Likharyóff jumped up, and walked up and down the room.

"Noble, exalted slavery!" he exclaimed, gesticulating. "In this, in this alone, is hidden the true significance of woman's life.... Out of all the vile nonsense which accumulated in my head during my relations with women, one thing, as water from a filter, has come out pure, and that is neither ideas, nor philosophy, nor clever phrases, but this extraordinary submissiveness to fate, this uncommon benevolence, this all-merciful kindness."

Likharyóff clenched his fists, concentrated his eyes upon a single point, and, as if tasting every word, filtered through his clenched teeth:

"This magnanimous endurance, faith to the grave, the poetry of the heart. It is in this ... yes, it is in this that the meaning of life is found, in this un murmuring martyrdom, in the tears that soften stone, in the infinite all-forgiving love, which sweeps into the chaos of life in lightness and warmth...."

Márya Mikháilovna rose slowly, took a step towards Likharyóff, and set her eyes piercingly upon his face. By the tears which sparkled on his eyelashes, by the trembling, passionate voice, by the flushed cheeks, she saw at a glance that women were not the accidental theme of his conversation. No, they were the object of his new infatuation, or, as he had put it, of his new belief. For the first time in her life she saw before her a man in the ecstasy of a burning, prophetic faith. Gesticulating—rolling his eyes, he seemed insane and ecstatic; but in the fire of his eyes, in the torrent of his words, in all the movements of his gigantic body, she saw only such beauty, that, herself not knowing what she did, she stood silently before him as if rooted to the ground, and looked with rapture into his face.

"Take my mother, for example!" he said, with an imploring look, stretching out his arms to her. "I poisoned her life, I disgraced in her eyes the race of Likharyóff, I brought her only such evil as is brought by the bitterest foe, and ... what? My brothers give her odd kopecks for wafers and collections, and she, violating her religious feeling, hoards up those kopecks, and sends them secretly to me! Such deeds as this educate and ennoble the soul more than all your theories, subtle phrases, thirty-five thousand species!... But I might give you a thousand instances! Take your own case! Outside storm and darkness, yet through storm and darkness and cold, you drive, fearless, to your father and brother, that their holidays may be warmed by your caresses, although they, it may well be, have forgotten your existence. But wait! The day will come when you will learn to love a man, and you will go after him to the North Pole.... You would go!"

"Yes ... if I loved him."

"You see!" rejoiced Likharyóff, stamping his feet. "Oh, God, how happy I am to have met you here! ... Such has always been my good fortune ... everywhere I meet with kind acquaintances. Not a day passes that I do not meet some man for whom I would give my own soul! In this world there are many more good people than evil! Already you and I have spoken frankly and out of the heart, as if we had known one another a thousand years. It is possible for a man to live his own life, to keep silent for ten years, to be reticent with his own wife and friends, and then some day suddenly he meets a cadet in a railway carriage, and reveals to him his whole soul. ... You ... I have the honour to see you for the first time, but I have confessed myself as I never did before. Why?"

Likharyóff rubbed his hands and smiled gaily. Then he walked up and down the room and talked again of women. The church bell chimed for the morning service.

"Heavens!" wept Sasha. "He won't let me sleep with his talk!"

"Akh, yes!" stammered Likharyóff. "Forgive me, darling. Sleep, sleep.... In addition to her, I have two boys," he whispered. "They live with their uncle, but she cannot bear to be a day without her father.... Suffers, grumbles, but sticks to me as a fly to honey. ... But I have been talking nonsense, mademoiselle, and have prevented you also from sleeping. Shall I make your bed?"

Without waiting for an answer, he shook out the wet cloak, and stretched it on the bench with the fur on top, picked up the scattered mufflers and shawls, and rolled the ulster into a pillow—all this silently, with an expression of servile adoration, as though he were dealing not with women's rags, but with fragments of holy vessels. His whole figure seemed to express guilt and confusion, as if in the presence of such a tiny being he were ashamed of his height and strength....

When Mdlle. Ilováisky had lain down he extinguished the candle, and sat on a stool near the stove....

"Yes," he whispered, smoking a thick cigarette, and puffing the smoke into the stove. "Nature has set in every Russian an enquiring mind, a tendency to speculation, and extraordinary capacity for belief; but all these are broken into dust against our improvidence, indolence, and fantastic triviality...."

Márya Mikháilovna looked in astonishment into the darkness, but she could see only the red spot on the ikon, and the quivering glare from the stove on Likharyóff's face. The darkness, the clang of the church bells, the roar of the storm, the limping boy, peevish Sasha and unhappy Likharyóff—all these mingled, fused in one great impression, and the whole of God's world seemed to her fantastic, full of mystery and magical forces. The words of Likharyóff resounded in her ears, and human life seemed to her a lovely, poetical fairy-tale, to which there was no end.

The great impression grew and grew, until it absorbed all consciousness and was transformed into a sweet sleep. Mdlle. Ilováisky slept. But in sleep she continued to see the lamp, and the thick nose with the red light dancing upon it. She was awakened by a cry.

"Papa, dear," tenderly implored a child's voice. "Let us go back to uncle's! There is a Christmas tree. Stepa and Kolya are there!"

"What can I do, darling?" reasoned a soft, male bass. "Try and understand me...."

And to the child's crying was added the man's. The cry of this double misery breaking through the howl of the storm, touched upon the ears of the girl with such

soft, human music, that she could not withstand the emotion, and wept also. And she listened as the great black shadow walked across the room, lifted up the fallen shawl and wrapped it round her feet.

Awakened again by a strange roar, she sprang up and looked around her. Through the windows, covered half-way up in snow, gleamed the blue dawn. The room itself was full of a grey twilight, through which she could see the stove, the sleeping girl, and Nasr Edin. The lamp and stove had both gone out. Through the wide-opened door of the room could be seen the public hall of the inn with its tables and benches. A man with a blunt, gipsy face and staring eyes stood in the middle of the room in a pool of melted snow, and held up a stick with a red star on the top. Around him was a throng of boys, immovable as statues, and covered with snow. The light of the star, piercing through its red paper covering, flushed their wet faces. The crowd roared in discord, and out of their roar Mdle. Ilováisky understood only one quatrain:—

"Hey, boy, bold and fearless,
Take a knife sharp and shiny.
Come, kill and kill the Jew,
The sorrowing son ..."

At the counter stood Likharyóff, looking with emotion at the singers, and tramping his feet in time. Seeing Márya Mikháilovna he smiled broadly, and entered the room. She also smiled.

"Congratulations!" he said. "I see you have slept well."

Mdle. Ilováisky looked at him silently, and continued to smile.

After last night's conversation he seemed to her no monger tall and broad-shouldered, but a little man. A big steamer seems small to those who have crossed the ocean.

"It is time for me to go," she said. "I must get ready. Tell me, where are you going to?"

"I? First to Klinushka station, thence to Siergievo, and from Siergievo a drive of forty versts to the coalmines of a certain General Shashkovsky. My brothers have got me a place as manager.... I will dig coal."

"Allow me ... I know these mines. Shashkovsky is my uncle. But ... why are you going there?" asked Márya Mikháilovna in surprise.

"As manager. I am to manage the mines."

"I don't understand." She shrugged her shoulders. "You say you are going to these mines. Do you know what that means? Do you know that it is all bare steppe, that there is not a soul near ... that the tedium is such that you could not live there a single day? The coal is bad, nobody buys it, and my uncle is a maniac, a despot, a bankrupt.... He will not even pay your salary."

"It is the same," said Likharyóff indifferently. "Even for the mines, thanks!"

Mdle. Ilováisky again shrugged her shoulders, and walked up and down the room in agitation. "I cannot understand, I cannot understand," she said, moving her fingers before her face. "This is inconceivable ... it is madness. Surely you must realise that this ... it is worse than exile. It is a grave for a living man. Akh, heavens!" she said passionately, approaching Likharyóff and moving her fingers before his smiling face. Her upper lip trembled, and her stinging face grew pale.

"Imagine it, a bare steppe ... and solitude. Not a soul to say a word to ... and you ... infatuated with women! Mines and women!"

Mdlle. Ilováisky seemed ashamed of her warmth, and, turning away from Likharyóff, went over to the window.

"No ... no ... you cannot go there!" she said, rubbing her finger down the window-pane. Not only through her head, but through her whole body ran a feeling that here behind her stood an unhappy, forsaken, perishing man. But he, as if unconscious of his misery, as if he had not wept the night before, looked at her and smiled good-humouredly. It would have been better if he had continued to cry. For a few minutes in agitation she walked up and down the room, and then stopped in the corner and began to think. Likharyóff said something, but she did not hear him. Turning her back to him, she took a credit note from her purse, smoothed it in her hand, and then, looking at him, blushed and thrust it into her pocket.

Outside the inn resounded the coachman's voice. Silently, with a severe, concentrated expression, Mdlle. Ilováisky began to put on her wraps. Likharyóff rolled her up in them, and chattered gaily. But every word caused her intolerable pain. It is not pleasant to listen to the jests of the wretched or dying.

When the transformation of a living woman into a formless bundle was complete, Mdlle. Ilováisky, looked for the last time around "The Traveller," stood silent a moment, and then went out slowly. Likharyóff escorted her.

Outside, God alone knows why, the storm still raged. Great clouds of big, soft snowflakes restlessly whirled over the ground, finding no abiding place. Horses, sledge, trees, the bull tethered to the post—all were white, and seemed made of down.

"Well, God bless you!" stammered Likharyóff, as he helped Márya Mikháilovna into the sledge. "Don't think ill of me!"

Mdlle. Ilováisky said nothing. When the sledge started and began to circle round a great snowdrift, she looked at Likharyóff as if she wished to say something. Likharyóff ran up to the sledge, but she said not a word, and only gazed at him through her long eyelashes to which the snowflakes already clung.

Whether it be that his sensitive mind read this glance aright, or whether, as it may have been, that his imagination led him astray, it suddenly struck him that but a little more and this girl would have forgiven him his age, his failures, his misfortunes, and followed him, neither questioning nor reasoning, to the ends of the earth. For a long time he stood as if rooted to the spot, and gazed at the track left by the sledge-runners. The snowflakes settled swiftly on his hair, his beard, his shoulders. But soon the traces of the sledge-runners vanished, and he, covered with snow, began to resemble a white boulder, his eyes all the time continuing to search for something through the clouds of snow.