

FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY

The Village of Stepanchikovo

AND ITS INHABITANTS



Translated by Ignat Avsey

The Village of Stepanchikovo and Its Inhabitants, Fyodor Dostoevsky

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The Village of Stepanchikovo (also known in English as The Friend of the Family) was first published in 1859. The novella relates how Sergey Aleksandrovich (the point of view character) is summoned from St. Petersburg to the estate of his uncle, Colonel Yegor Ilich Rostanev, and finds that a middle-aged charlatan named Foma Fomich Opiskin has swindled the nobles around him into believing that he is a virtuous mentor, despite his aggressive, selfish and spiteful behaviour. The Village of Stepanchikovo offers a fascinating insight into the genesis and workings of Dostoyevsky's later novels, such as The Idiot and The Brothers Karamazov.

Contents

PART I

Chapter I

Chapter II

Chapter III

Chapter IV

Chapter V

Chapter VI

Chapter VII

Chapter VIII

Chapter IX

Chapter X

Chapter XI

Chapter XII

PART II

Chapter I

Chapter II

Chapter III

Chapter IV

Chapter V

Chapter VI

PART I

Chapter I

Introduction

WHEN my uncle, Colonel Yegor Ilyitch Rostanev, left the army, he settled down in Stepantchikovo, which came to him by inheritance, and went on steadily living in it, as though he had been all his life a regular country gentleman who had never left his estates. There are natures that are perfectly satisfied with everyone and can get used to everything; such was precisely the disposition of the retired colonel.

It is hard to imagine a man more peaceable and ready to agree to anything. If by some caprice he had been gravely asked to carry some one for a couple of miles on his shoulders he would perhaps have done so. He was so good-natured that he was sometimes ready to give away everything at the first asking, and to share almost his last shirt with anyone who coveted it.

He was of heroic proportions; tall and well made, with ruddy cheeks, with teeth white as ivory, with a long brown moustache, with a loud ringing voice, and with a frank hearty

laugh; he spoke rapidly and jerkily. He was at the time of my story about forty and had spent his life, almost from his sixteenth year, in the Hussars. He had married very young and was passionately fond of his wife; but she died, leaving in his heart a noble memory that nothing could efface.

When he inherited Stepantchikovo, which increased his fortune to six hundred serfs, he left the army, and, as I have said already, settled in the country together with his children, Ilyusha, a boy of eight, whose birth had cost his mother's life, and Sashenka, a girl of fifteen, who had been brought up at a boarding-school in Moscow. But my uncle's house soon became a regular Noah's Ark. This was how it happened.

Just at the time when he came into the property and retired from the army, his mother, who had, sixteen years before, married a certain General Krahotkin, was left a widow. At the time of her second marriage my uncle was only a cornet, and yet he, too, was thinking of getting married. His mother had for a long time refused her blessing, had shed bitter tears, had reproached him with egoism, with ingratitude, with disrespect.

She had proved to him that his estates, amounting to only two hundred and fifty serfs, were, as it was, barely sufficient for the maintenance of his family (that is, for the, maintenance of his mamma, with all her retinue of toadies, pug-dogs, Pomeranians, Chinese cats and so on). And, in the midst of these reproaches, protests and shrill upbraidings, she all at once quite unexpectedly got married herself before her son, though she was forty-two years of age.

Even in this, however, she found an excuse for blaming my poor uncle, declaring that she was getting married solely to secure in

her old age the refuge denied her by the undutiful egoist, her son, who was contemplating the unpardonable insolence of making a home of his own.

I never could find out what really induced a man apparently so reasonable as the deceased General Krahotkin to marry a widow of forty-two. It must be supposed that he suspected she had money. Other people thought that he only wanted a nurse, as he had already had a foretaste of the swarm of diseases which assailed him in his old age. One thing is certain, the general never had the faintest respect for his wife at any time during his married life, and he ridiculed her sarcastically at every favourable opportunity.

He was a strange person. Half educated and extremely shrewd, he had a lively contempt for all and everyone; he had no principles of any sort; laughed at everything and everybody, and in his old age, through the infirmities that were the consequence of his irregular and immoral life, he became spiteful, irritable and merciless. He had been a successful officer; yet he had been forced, through "an unpleasant incident", to resign his commission, losing his pension and only just escaping prosecution.

This had completely soured his temper. Left almost without means, with no fortune but a hundred ruined serfs, he folded his hands and never during the remaining twelve years of his life troubled himself to inquire what he was living on and who was supporting him. At the same time he insisted on having all the comforts of life, kept his carriage and refused to curtail his expenses.

Soon after his marriage he lost the use of his legs and spent the last ten years of his life in an invalid chair wheeled about by two seven-foot flunkeys, who never heard anything from him but abuse of the most varied kind. The carriage, the flunkeys and the invalid chair were paid for by the undutiful son, who sent his mother his last farthing, mortgaged and re-mortgaged his estate, denied himself necessaries, and incurred debts almost impossible for him to pay in his circumstances at the time; and yet the charge of being an egoist and an undutiful son was persistently laid at his door.

But my uncle's character was such that at last he quite believed himself that he was an egoist, and therefore, to punish himself and to avoid being an egoist, he kept sending them more and more money. His mother stood in awe of her husband; but what pleased her most was that he was a general, and that through him she was "Madame la Générale".

She had her own apartments in the house, where, during the whole period of her husband's semi-existence, she reigned in a society made up of toadies, lapdogs, and the gossips of the town. She was an important person in her little town. Gossip, invitations to stand godmother at christenings and to give the bride away at weddings, a halfpenny rubber, and the respect shown her in all sorts of ways as the wife of a general fully made up to her for the drawbacks of her home life.

All the magpies of the town came to her with their reports, the first place everywhere was always hers — in fact, she got out of her position all she could get out of it. The general did not meddle in all that; but before people he laughed mercilessly at his wife, asked himself, for instance, such questions as why he had married "such a dowdy", and nobody dared contradict him.

Little by little all his acquaintances left him, and at the same time society was essential to him; he loved chatting, arguing; he liked to have a listener always sitting beside him. He was a free-thinker and atheist of the old school, and so liked to hold forth on lofty subjects.

But the listeners of the town of N-had no partiality for lofty subjects, and they became fewer and fewer. They tried to get up a game of whist in the household; but as a rule the game ended in outbreaks on the part of the general, which so terrified his wife and her companions that they put up candles before the ikons, had a service sung, divined the future with beans and with cards, distributed rolls among the prisoners, and looked forward in a tremor to the after-dinner hour when they would have to take a hand at whist again and at every mistake to endure shouts, screams, oaths and almost blows.

The general did not stand on ceremony with anybody when something was not to his taste; he screamed like a peasant woman, swore like a coachman, sometimes tore up the cards, threw them about the floor, drove away his partners, and even shed tears of anger and vexation — and for no more than a knave's having been played instead of a nine. At last, as his eyesight was failing, they had to get him a reader; it was then that Foma Fomitch Opiskin appeared on the scene.

I must confess I announce this new personage with a certain solemnity. There is no denying that he is one of the principal characters in my story. How far he has a claim on the attention of the reader I will not explain; the reader can answer that question more suitably and more readily himself.

Foma Fomitch entered General Krahotkin's household as a paid companion — neither more nor less. Where he turned up from is shrouded in the mists of obscurity. I have, however, made special researches and have found out something of the past circumstances of this remarkable man. He was said in the first place to have been sometime and somewhere in the government service, and somewhere or other to have suffered, I need hardly say, "for a good cause". It was said, too, that at some time he had been engaged in literary pursuits in Moscow.

There is nothing surprising in that; Foma Fomitch's crass ignorance would, of course, be no hindrance to him in a literary career. But all that is known for certain is that he did not succeed in anything, and that at last he was forced to enter the general's service in the capacity of reader and martyr.

There was no ignominy which he had not to endure in return for eating the general's bread. It is true that in later years, when on the general's death he found himself a person of importance and consequence, he more than once assured us all that his consenting to be treated as a buffoon was an act of magnanimous self-sacrifice on the altar of friendship; that the general had been his benefactor; that the deceased had been a great man misunderstood, who only to him, Foma, had confided the inmost secrets of his soul; that in fact, if he, Foma, had actually at the general's urgent desire played the part of various wild beasts and posed in grotesque attitudes, this had been solely in order to entertain and distract a suffering friend shattered by disease.

But Foma Fomitch's assurances and explanations on this score can only be accepted with considerable hesitation; and yet this same Foma Fomitch, even at the time when he was a buffoon,

was playing a very different part in the ladies' apartments of the general's house. How he managed this, it is difficult for anyone not a specialist in such matters to conceive. The general's lady cherished a sort of mysterious reverence for him — why?

There is no telling. By degrees he acquired over the whole feminine half of the general's household a marvellous influence, to some extent comparable to the influence exercised by the Ivan Yakovlevitches and such-like seers and prophets, who are visited in madhouses by certain ladies who devote themselves to the study of their ravings. He read aloud to them works of spiritual edification; held forth with eloquent tears on the Christian virtues; told stories of his life and his heroic doings; went to mass, and even to matins; at times foretold the future; had a peculiar faculty for interpreting dreams, and was a great hand at throwing blame on his neighbours.

The general had a notion of what was going on in the back rooms, and tyrannised over his dependent more mercilessly than ever. But Foma's martyrdom only increased his prestige in the eyes of Madame la Générale and the other females of the household.

At last everything was transformed. The general died. His death was rather original. The former free-thinker and atheist became terror-stricken beyond all belief. He shed tears, repented, had ikons put up, sent for priests. Services were sung, and extreme unction was administered. The poor fellow screamed that he did not want to die, and even asked Foma Fomitch's forgiveness with tears.

This latter circumstance was an asset of some value to Foma Fomitch later on. Just before the parting of the general's soul from the general's body, however, the following incident took place. The daughter of Madame la Générale by her first marriage, my maiden aunt, Praskovya Ilyinitchna, who always lived in the general's house, and was one of his favourite victims, quite indispensable to him during the ten years that he was bedridden, always at his beck and call, and with her meek and simple-hearted mildness the one person who could satisfy him, went up to his bedside shedding bitter tears, and would have smoothed the pillow under the head of the sufferer; but the sufferer still had strength to clutch at her hair and pull it violently three times, almost foaming at the mouth with spite.

Ten minutes later he died. They had sent word to the colonel, though Madame la Générale had declared that she did not want to see him and would sooner die than set eyes on him at such a moment. There was a magnificent funeral at the expense, of course, of the undutiful son on whom the widowed mother did not wish to set her eyes.

In the ruined property of Knyazevka, which belonged to several different owners and in which the general had his hundred serfs, there stands a mausoleum of white marble, diversified with laudatory inscriptions to the glory of the intellect, talents, nobility of soul, orders of merit and rank of the deceased. Foma Fomitch took a prominent part in the composition of these eulogies.

Madame la Générale persisted for a long time in keeping up her dignity and refusing to forgive her disobedient son. Sobbing and making a great outcry, surrounded by her crowd of toadies and pug-dogs, she kept declaring that she would sooner live on

dry bread and I need hardly say “soak it in her tears”, that she would sooner go stick in hand to beg alms under the windows than yield to the request of her “disobedient” son that she should come and live with him at Stepantchikovo, and that she would never, never set foot within his house! As a rule the word foot in this connection is uttered with peculiar effect by ladies. Madame la Generale’s utterance of the word was masterly, artistic. . . .

In short, the amount of eloquence that was expended was incredible. It must be observed that at the very time of these shrill protests they were by degrees packing up to move to Stepantchikovo. The colonel knocked up all his horses driving almost every day thirty miles from Stepantchikovo to the town, and it was not till a fortnight after the general’s funeral that he received permission to appear before the eyes of his aggrieved parent. Foma Fomitch was employed as go-between.

During the whole of that fortnight he was reproaching the disobedient son and putting him to shame for his “inhuman” conduct, reducing him to genuine tears, almost to despair. It is from this time that the incomprehensible, inhumanly despotic domination of Foma Fomitch over my poor uncle dates. Foma perceived the kind of man he had to deal with, and felt at once that his days of playing the buffoon were over, and that in the wilds even Foma might pass for a nobleman. And he certainly made up for lost time.

“What will you feel like,” said Foma, “if your own mother, the authoress, so to speak, of your days, should take a stick and, leaning on it with trembling hands wasted with hunger, should actually begin to beg for alms under people’s windows? Would it not be monstrous, considering her rank as a general’s lady

and the virtues of her character? What would you feel like if she should suddenly come, by mistake, of course — but you know it might happen — and should stretch out her hand under your windows, while you, her own son, are perhaps at that very moment nestling in a feather bed, and ... in fact, in luxury? It's awful, awful! But what is most awful of all — allow me to speak candidly, Colonel — what is most awful of all is the fact that you are standing before me now like an unfeel-

ing post, with your mouth open and your eyes blinking, so that it is a positive disgrace, while you ought to be ready at the mere thought of such a thing to tear your hair out by the roots and to shed streams — what am I saying? — rivers, lakes, seas, oceans of tears. ...”

In short, Foma in his excessive warmth grew almost incoherent. But such was the invariable outcome of his eloquence. It ended, of course, in Madame la Générale together with her female dependents and lapdogs, with Foma Fomitch and with Mademoiselle Perepelitsyn, her chief favourite, at last honouring Stepanchikovo by her presence. She said that she would merely make the experiment of living at her son's till she had tested his dutifulness.

You can imagine the colonel's position while his dutifulness was being tested! At first, as a widow recently bereaved, Madame la Générale thought it her duty two or three times a week to be overcome by despair at the thought of her general, never to return; and punctually on each occasion the colonel for some unknown reason came in for a wiggling. Sometimes, especially if visitors were present, Madame la Générale would send for her grandchildren, little Ilyusha and fifteen-year-old Sashenka, and making them sit down beside her would fix upon them a

prolonged, melancholy, anguished gaze, as upon children ruined in the hands of such a father; she would heave deep, painful sighs, and finally melt into mute mysterious tears, for at least a full hour. Woe betide the colonel if he failed to grasp the significance of those tears!

And, poor fellow, he hardly ever succeeded in grasping their significance, and in the simplicity of his heart almost always put in an appearance at such tearful moments, and whether he liked it or not came in for a severe heckling. But his filial respect in no way decreased and reached at last an extreme limit. In short, both Madame la Générale and Foma Fomitch were fully conscious that the storm which had for so many years menaced them in the presence of General Krahotkin had passed away and would never return. Madame la Générale used at times to fall on her sofa in a swoon. A great fuss and commotion arose. The colonel was crushed, and trembled like a leaf.

“Cruel son!” Madame la Générale would shriek as she came to. “You have lacerated my inmost being . . . mes entrailles, mes entrailles!”

“But how have I lacerated your inmost being, mamma?” the colonel would protest timidly.

“You have lacerated it, lacerated it I He justifies himself, too. He is rude. Cruel son! I am dying! ...”

The colonel was, of course, annihilated. But it somehow happened that Madame la Générale always revived again. Half an hour later he would be taking someone by the button-hole and saying —

“Oh, well, my dear fellow, you see she is a grattede dame, the wife of a general. She is the kindest-hearted old lady: she is accustomed to all this refined . . . She is on a different level

from a blockhead like me! Now she is angry with me. No doubt I am to blame. My dear fellow, I don't know yet what I've done, but no doubt it's my fault. ...”

It would happen that Mademoiselle Perepelitsyn, an old maid in a shawl, with no eyebrows, with little rapacious eyes, with lips thin as a thread, with hands washed in cucumber water, and with a spite against the whole universe, would feel it her duty to read the colonel a lecture.

“It's all through your being undutiful, sir; it's all through your being an egoist, sir; through your wounding your mamma, sir — she's not used to such treatment. She's a general's lady, and you are only a colonel, sir.”

“That is Mademoiselle Perepelitsyn, my dear fellow,” the colonel would observe to his listener; “an excellent lady, she stands up for my mother like a rock! A very rare person! < You mustn't imagine that she is in a menial position; she is the daughter of a major herself! Yes, indeed.”

. But, of course, this was only the prelude. The great lady who could carry out such a variety of performances in her turn trembled like a mouse in the presence of her former dependent. Foma Fomitch had completely bewitched her.

She could not make enough of him and she saw with his eyes and heard with his ears. A cousin of mine, also a retired hussar, a man still young, though he had been an incredible spendthrift, told me bluntly and simply that it was his firm conviction, after staying for a time at my uncle's, that Madame la Générale was on terms of improper intimacy with Foma

Fomitch. I need hardly say that at the time I rejected this supposition with indignation as too coarse and simple.

No, it was something different, and that something different I cannot explain without first explaining to the reader the character of Foma Fomitch as I understood it later.

Imagine the most insignificant, the most cowardly creature, an outcast from society, of no service to anyone, utterly useless, utterly disgusting, but incredibly vain, though entirely destitute of any talent by which he might have justified his morbidly sensitive vanity. I hasten to add that Foma Fomitch was the incarnation of unbounded vanity, but that at the same time it was a special kind of vanity — that is, the vanity found in a complete nonentity, and, as is usual in such cases, a vanity mortified and oppressed by grievous failures in the past; a vanity that has begun rankling long, long ago, and ever since has given off envy and venom, at every encounter, at every success of anyone else.

I need hardly say that all this was seasoned with the most unseemly touchiness, the most insane suspiciousness. It may be asked, how is one to account for such vanity? How does it arise, in spite of complete insignificance, in pitiful creatures who are forced by their social position to know their place?

How answer such a question? Who knows, perhaps, there are exceptions, of whom my hero is one? He certainly is an exception to the rule, as will be explained later. But allow me to ask: are you certain that those who are completely resigned to be your buffoons, your parasites and your toadies, and consider it an honour and a happiness to be so, are you certain that they are quite devoid of vanity and envy? What of the slander and

backbiting and tale-bearing and mysterious whisperings in back corners, somewhere aside and at your table?

Who knows, perhaps, in some of these degraded victims of fate, your fools and buffoons, vanity far from being dispelled by humiliation is even aggravated by that very humiliation, by being a fool and buffoon, by eating the bread of dependence and being for ever forced to submission and self-suppression? Who knows, maybe, this ugly exaggerated vanity is only a false fundamentally depraved sense of personal dignity, first outraged, perhaps, in childhood by oppression, poverty, filth, spat upon, perhaps, in the person of the future outcast's parents before his eyes?

But I have said that Foma Fomitch was also an exception to the general rule; that is true. He had at one time been a literary man slighted and unrecognised, and literature is capable of ruining men very different from Foma Fomitch — I mean, of course, when it is not crowned with success. I don't know, but it may be assumed that Foma Fomitch had been unsuccessful before entering on a literary career; possibly in some other calling, too, he had received more kicks than halfpence, or possibly something worse.

About that, however, I cannot say; but I made inquiries later on, and I know for certain that Foma Fomitch composed, at some time in Moscow, a romance very much like those that were published every year by dozens in the 'thirties, after the style of *The Deliverance of Moscow*, *The Chieftains of the Tempest*, *Sons of Love*, or the Russians in novels which in their day afforded an agreeable butt for the wit of Baron, Brambeus. That was, of course, long ago; but the serpent of literary vanity

sometimes leaves a deep and incurable sting, especially in insignificant and dull-witted persons.

Foma Fomitch had been disappointed from his first step in a literary career, and it was then that he was finally enrolled in the vast army of the disappointed, from which all the crazy saints, hermits and wandering pilgrims come later on. I think that his monstrous boastfulness, his thirst for praise and distinction, for admiration and homage, dates from the same period. Even when he was a buffoon he got together a group of idiots to do homage to him.

Somewhere and somehow to stand first, to be an oracle, to swagger and give himself airs — that was his most urgent craving! As others did not praise him he began to praise himself. I have myself in my uncle's house at Stepantchikovo heard Foma's sayings after he had become the absolute monarch and oracle of the household. "I am not in my proper place among you," he would say sometimes with mysterious impressiveness. "I am not in my proper place here. I will look round, I will settle you all, I will show you, I will direct you, and then good-bye; to Moscow to edit a review! Thirty thousand people will assemble every month to hear my lectures. My name will be famous at last, and then — woe to my enemies."

But while waiting to become famous the genius insisted upon immediate recognition in substantial form. It is always pleasant to receive payment in advance, and in this case it was particularly so. I know that he seriously assured my uncle that some great work lay before him, Foma, in the future — a work for which he had been summoned into the world, and to the accomplishment of this work he was urged by some sort of person with wings, who visited him at night, or something of

that kind. This great work was to write a book full of profound wisdom in the soul-saving line, which would set the whole world agog and stagger all Russia. And when all Russia was staggered, he, Foma, disdainingly glory, would retire into a monastery, and in the catacombs of Kiev would pray day and night for the happiness of the Fatherland. All this imposed upon my uncle.

Well, now imagine what this Foma, who had been all his life oppressed and crushed, perhaps actually beaten too, who was vain and secretly lascivious, who had been disappointed in his literary ambitions, who had played the buffoon for a crust of bread, who was at heart a despot in spite of all his previous abjectness and impotence, who was a braggart, and insolent when successful, might become when he suddenly found himself in the haven he had reached after so many ups and downs, honoured and glorified, humoured and flattered, thanks to a patroness who was an idiot and a patron who was imposed upon and ready to agree to anything.

I must, of course, explain my uncle's character more fully, or Foma Fomitch's success cannot be understood. But for the moment I will say that Foma was a complete illustration of the saying, "Let him sit down to the table and he will put his feet on it."

He paid us out for his past! A base soul escaping from oppression becomes an oppressor. Foma had been oppressed, and he had at once a craving to oppress others; he had been the victim of whims and caprices and now he imposed his own whims and caprices on others. He had been the butt of others, and now he surrounded himself with creatures whom he could turn into derision. His boasting was ridiculous; the airs he gave

himself were incredible; nothing was good enough for him; his tyranny was beyond all bounds, and it reached such a pitch that simple-hearted people who had not witnessed his manoeuvres, but only heard queer stories about him, looked upon all this as a miracle, as the work of the devil, crossed themselves and spat.

I was speaking of my uncle. Without explaining his remarkable character (I repeat) it is, of course, impossible to understand Foma Fomitch's insolent domination in another man's house; it is impossible to understand the metamorphosis of the cringing dependent into the great man. Besides being kind-hearted in the extreme, my uncle was a man of the most refined delicacy in spite of a somewhat rough exterior, of the greatest generosity and of proved courage. I boldly say of "courage"; nothing could have prevented him from fulfilling an obligation, from doing his duty — in such cases no obstacle would have dismayed him.

His soul was as pure as a child's. He was a perfect child at forty, open-hearted in the extreme, always good-humoured, imagining everybody an angel, blaming himself for other people's shortcomings, and exaggerating the good qualities of others, even pre-supposing them where they could not possibly exist. He was one of those very generous and pure-hearted men who are positively ashamed to assume any harm of another, are always in haste to endow their neighbours with every virtue, rejoice at other people's success, and in that way always live in an ideal world, and when anything goes wrong always blame themselves first.

To sacrifice themselves in the interests of others is their natural vocation. Some people would have called him cowardly, weak-

willed and feeble. Of course he was weak, and indeed he was of too soft a disposition; but it was not from lack of will, but from the fear of wounding, of behaving cruelly, from excess of respect for others and for mankind in general. He was, however, weak-willed and cowardly only when nothing was at stake but his own interests, which he completely disregarded, and for this he was continually an object of derision, and often with the very people for whom he was sacrificing his own advantage. He never believed, however, that he had enemies; he had them, indeed, but he somehow failed to observe them.

He dreaded fuss and disturbance in the house like fire, and immediately gave way to anyone and submitted to anything. He gave in through a sort of shy good nature, from a sort of shy delicacy. "So be it," he would say, quickly brushing aside all reproaches for his indulgence and weakness; "so be it . . . that everyone may be happy and contented!"

I need hardly say that he was ready to submit to every honourable influence. What is more, an adroit rogue might have gained complete control over him, and even have lured him on to do wrong, of course misrepresenting the wrong action as a right one. My uncle very readily put faith in other people, and was often far from right in doing so. When, after many sufferings, he brought himself at last to believe that the man who deceived him was dishonest, he always blamed himself first — and sometimes blamed himself only.

Now imagine, suddenly queening it in his quiet home, a capricious, doting, idiot woman — inseparable from another idiot, her idol — a woman who had only feared her general, and was now afraid of nothing, and impelled by a craving to make up to herself for what she had suffered in the past; and

this idiot woman my uncle thought it his duty to revere, simply because she was his mother. They began with proving to my uncle at once that he was coarse, impatient, ignorant and selfish to the utmost degree.

The remarkable thing is that the idiotic old lady herself believed in what she professed. And I believe that Foma Fomitch did also, at least to some extent. They persuaded my uncle, too, that Foma had been sent from heaven by Divine Providence for the salvation of his soul and the subduing of his unbridled passions; that he was haughty, proud of his wealth, and quite capable of reproaching Foma Fomitch for eating his bread. My poor uncle was very soon convinced of the depth of his degradation, was ready to tear his hair and to beg forgiveness. . . .

“It’s all my own fault, brother,” he would say sometimes to one of the people he used to talk to. “It’s all my fault I One ought to be doubly delicate with a man who is under obligations to one. . . . I mean that I . . . Under obligations, indeed! I am talking nonsense again! He is not under obligations to me at all: on the contrary, it is I who am under an obligation to him for living with me! And here I have reproached him for eating my bread! . . . Not that I did reproach him, but it seems I made some slip of the tongue — I often do make such slips. . . . And, after all, the man has suffered, he has done great things; for ten years in spite of insulting treatment he was tending his sick friend! And then his learning. . . . He’s a writer! A highly educated man! A very lofty character; in short . . .”

The conception of the highly educated and unfortunate Foma ignominiously treated by the cruel and capricious general rent my uncle’s heart with compassion and indignation. All Foma’s

peculiarities, all his ignoble doings my uncle at once ascribed to his sufferings, the humiliations he had endured in the past, and the bitterness left by them. ...

He at once decided in his soft and generous heart that one could not be so exacting with a man who had suffered as with an ordinary person; that one must not only forgive him, but more than that, one must, by gentle treatment, heal his wounds, restore him and reconcile him with humanity.

Setting this object before him he was completely fired by it, and lost all power of perceiving that his new friend was a lascivious and capricious animal, an egoist, a sluggard, a lazy drone — and nothing more. He put implicit faith in Foma's genius and learning. I forgot to mention that my uncle had the most naive and disinterested reverence for the words "learning" and "literature", though he had himself never studied anything. This was one of his chief and most guileless peculiarities.

"He is writing," he would whisper, walking on tiptoe, though he was two rooms away from Foma's study. "I don't know precisely what he is writing," he added, with a proud and mysterious air, "but no doubt he is brewing something, brother. ... I mean in the best sense, of course; it would be clear to some people, but to you and me, brother, it would be just a jumble that ... I fancy he is writing of productive forces of some sort — he said so himself. I suppose that has something to do with politics. Yes, his name will be famous! Then we shall be famous through him. He told me that himself, brother. ..."

I know for a fact that my uncle was forced by Foma's orders to shave off his beautiful fair whiskers. Foma considered that these whiskers made my uncle look like a Frenchman, and that

wearing them showed a lack of patriotism. Little by little Foma began meddling in the management of the estate, and giving sage counsels on the subject. These sage counsels were terrible. The peasants soon saw the position and understood who was their real master, and scratched their heads uneasily. Later on I overheard Foma talking to the peasants; I must confess I listened.

Foma had told us before that he was fond of talking to intelligent Russian peasants. So one day he went to the threshing floor: after talking to the peasants about the farm-work, though he could not tell oats from wheat, after sweetly dwelling on the sacred obligations of the peasant to his master, after touching lightly on electricity and the division of labour, subjects of which I need hardly say he knew nothing, after explaining to his listeners how the earth went round the sun, and being at last quite touched by his own eloquence — he began talking about the ministers.

I understood. Pushkin used to tell a story of a father who impressed upon his little boy of four that he, his papa, was so brave “that the Tsar loves Papa. . . .” So evidently this papa needed this listener of four years old! And the peasants always listened to Foma Fomitch with cringing respect.

“And did you get a large salary from royalty, little father?” a grey-headed old man called Arhip Korotky asked suddenly from the crowd of peasants, with the evident intention of being flattering; but the question struck Foma Fomitch as familiar, and he could not endure familiarity.

“And what business is that of yours, you lout?” he answered, looking contemptuously at the poor peasant. “Why are you thrusting forward your pug-face? Do you want me to spit in it?” Foma Fomitch always talked in that tone to the “intelligent Russian peasant”.

“You are our father,” another peasant interposed; “you know we are ignorant people. You may be a major or a colonel or even your Excellency, we don’t know how we ought to speak to you.”

“You lout!” repeated Foma Fomitch, mollified however. “There are salaries and salaries, you blockhead! One will get nothing, though he is a general — because he does nothing to deserve it, he is of no service to the Tsar.

But I got twenty thousand when I was serving in the Ministry, and I did not take it, I served for the honour of it. I had plenty of money of my own. I gave my salary to the cause of public enlightenment, and to aid those whose homes have been burnt in Kazan.”

“I say! So it was you who rebuilt Kazan, little father?” the amazed peasant went on.

The peasants wondered at Foma Fomitch as a rule.

“Oh, well, I had my share in it,” Foma answered, with a show of reluctance, as though vexed with himself for deigning to converse on such a subject with such a person.

His conversations with my uncle were of a different stamp.

“What were you in the past?” Foma would say, for instance, lolling after an ample dinner in an easy-chair, while a servant stood behind him brandishing a fresh lime branch to keep off

the flies. “What were you like before I came? But now I have dropped into your soul a spark of that heavenly fire which is glowing there now. Did I drop a spark of heavenly fire into your soul or not? Answer. Did I drop a spark or did I not?”

Foma Fomitch, indeed, could not himself have said why he asked such a question. But my uncle’s silence and confusion at once spurred him on. He who had been so patient and downtrodden in the past now exploded like gunpowder at the slightest provocation. My uncle’s silence seemed to him insulting, and he now insisted on an answer.

“Answer: is the spark glowing in you or not?”

My uncle hesitated, shrank into himself, and did not know what line to take.

“Allow me to observe that I am waiting,” said Foma in an aggrieved voice.

“Metis, ripondez done, Yegorushka,” put in Madame la Generale, shrugging her shoulders.

“I am asking you, is that spark burning within you or not?”

Foma repeated condescendingly, taking a sweetmeat out of a bonbon box, which always stood on a table before him by Madame la Generale’s orders.

“I really don’t know, Foma,” my uncle answered at last with despair in his eyes. “Something of the sort, no doubt. . . . You really had better not ask or I am sure to say something wrong. . . .”

“Oh, very well! So you look upon me as so insignificant as not to deserve an answer — that’s what you meant to say. But so be it; let me be a nonentity.”

“Oh, no, Foma, God bless you! Why, when did I imply that?”

“Yes, that’s just what you did mean to say.”

“I swear I didn’t.”

“Oh, very well, then, I lie. So then you charge me with trying to pick a quarrel on purpose; it’s another insult added to all the past, but I will put up with this, too. ...”

“Mais, mon fils!” cried Madame la Générale in alarm.

“Foma Fomitch! Mamma!” exclaimed my uncle in despair.

“Upon my word it’s not my fault. Perhaps I may have let slip such a thing without knowing it. . . . You mustn’t mind me, Foma; I am stupid, you know; I feel I am stupid myself; I feel there is something amiss with me. ... I know, Foma, I know! You need not say anything,” he went on, waving his hand. “I have lived forty years, and until now, until I knew you, I thought I was all right . . . like everyone else. And I didn’t notice before that I was as sinful as a goat, an egoist of the worst description, and I’ve done such a lot of mischief that it is a wonder the world puts up with me.”

“Yes, you certainly are an egoist,” observed Foma, with conviction.

“Well, I realise myself that I am an egoist now! Yes, that’s the end of it! I’ll correct myself and be better!”

“God grant you may!” concluded Foma Fomitch, and sighing piously he got up from his arm-chair to go to his room for an after-dinner nap. Foma Fomitch always dozed after dinner.

To conclude this Chapter, may I be allowed to say something about my personal relations with my uncle, and to explain how I came to be face to face with Foma Fomitch, and with no thought or suspicion suddenly found myself in a vortex of the

most important incidents that had ever happened in the blessed village of Stepantchikovo? With this I intend to conclude my introduction and to proceed straight with my story.

In my childhood, when I was left an orphan and alone in the world, my uncle took the place of a father to me; educated me at his expense, and did for me more than many a father does for his own child. From the first day he took me into his house I grew warmly attached to him. I was ten years old at the time, and I remember that we got on capitally, and thoroughly understood each other. We spun tops together, and together stole her cap from a very disagreeable old lady, who was a relation of both of us.

I promptly tied the cap to the tail of a paper kite and sent it flying to the clouds. Many years afterwards I saw something of my uncle for a short time in Petersburg, where I was finishing my studies at his expense. During that time I became attached to him with all the warmth of youth: something generous, mild, truthful, light-hearted and naive to the utmost degree struck me in his character and attracted everyone.

When I left the university I spent some time in Petersburg with nothing to do for the time, and, as is often the case with callow youths, was convinced that in a very short time I should do much that was very interesting and even great. I did not want to leave Petersburg. I wrote to my uncle at rather rare intervals and only when I wanted money, which he never refused me. Meanwhile, I heard from a house serf of my uncle's, who came to Petersburg on some business or other, that marvellous things were taking place at Stepantchikovo.

These first rumours interested and surprised me. I began writing to my uncle more regularly. He always answered me somewhat obscurely and strangely, and in every letter seemed trying to talk of nothing but learned subjects, expressing great expectations of me in the future in a literary and scientific line, and pride in my future achievements.

At last, after a rather long silence, I received a surprising letter from him, utterly unlike all his previous letters. It was full of such strange hints, such rambling and contradictory statements that at first I could make nothing of it. All that one could see was that the writer was in great perturbation. One thing was clear in the letter: my uncle gravely, earnestly, almost imploringly urged me as soon as possible to marry his former ward, the daughter of a very poor provincial government clerk, called Yezhevikin.

This girl had received an excellent education at a school in Moscow at my uncle's expense, and was now the governess of his children. He wrote that she was unhappy, that I might make her happy, that I should, in fact, be doing a noble action. He appealed to the generosity of my heart, and promised to give her a dowry. Of the dowry, however, he spoke somewhat mysteriously, timidly, and he concluded the letter by beseeching me to keep all this a dead secret.

This letter made such an impression on me that my head began to go round. And, indeed, what raw young man would not have been affected by such a proposition, if only on its romantic side? Besides, I had heard that this young governess was extremely pretty. Yet I did not know what to decide, though I wrote to my uncle that I would set off for Stepantchikovo immediately. My uncle had sent me the money

for the journey with the letter. Nevertheless, I lingered another three weeks in Petersburg, hesitating and somewhat uneasy.

All at once I happened to meet an old comrade of my uncle's, who had stayed at Stepantchikovo on his way back from the Caucasus to Petersburg. He was an elderly and judicious person, an inveterate bachelor.

He told me with indignation about Foma Fomitch, and thereupon informed me of one circumstance of which I had no idea till then: namely, that Foma Fomitch and Madame la Générale had taken up a notion, and were set upon the idea of marrying my uncle to a very strange lady, not in her first youth and scarcely more than halfwitted, with an extraordinary history, and almost half a million of dowry; that Madame la Générale had nearly succeeded in convincing this lady that they were relations, and so alluring her into the house; that my uncle, of course, was in despair, but would probably end by marrying the half million of dowry; and that, finally, these two wiseacres, Madame la Générale and Foma Fomitch, were making a terrible onslaught on the poor defenceless governess, and were doing their utmost to turn her out of the house, apparently afraid that my uncle might fall in love with her, or perhaps knowing that he was already in love with her.

These last words impressed me. However, to all my further questions as to whether my uncle really was or was not in love with her, my informant either could not or would not give me an exact answer, and indeed he told his whole story briefly, as it were reluctantly, and noticeably avoided detailed explanations. I thought it over; the news was so strangely contradictory of my uncle's letter and his proposition! . . .

But it was useless to delay. I decided to go to Stepantchikovo, hoping not only to comfort my uncle and bring him to reason, but even to save him; that is, if possible, to turn Foma out, to prevent the hateful marriage with the old maid, and finally — as I had come to the conclusion that my uncle's love was only a spiteful invention of Foma's — to rejoice the unhappy but of course interesting young lady by the offer of my hand, and so on and so on.

By degrees I so worked myself up that, being young and having nothing to do, I passed from hesitation to the opposite extreme; I began burning with the desire to perform all sorts of great and wonderful deeds as quickly as possible.

I even fancied that I was displaying extraordinary generosity by nobly sacrificing myself to secure the happiness of a charming and innocent creature; in fact, I remember that I was exceedingly well satisfied with myself during the whole of my journey. It was July, the sun was shining brightly, all around me stretched a vast expanse of fields full of unripe corn. ... I had so long sat bottled up in Petersburg that I felt as though I were only now looking at God's world!

Chapter II

MR. BAHTCHEYEV

I WAS approaching my destination. Driving through the little town of B-, from which I had only eight miles farther to Stepantchikovo, I was obliged to stop at the blacksmith's near the town gate, as the tyre of the front wheel of my chaise broke. To repair it in some way well enough to stand the remaining eight miles was a job that should not take very long,

and so I made up my mind not to go elsewhere, but to remain at the blacksmith's while he set it right.

As I got out of the chaise I saw a stout gentleman who, like me, had been compelled to stop to have his carriage repaired. He had been standing a whole hour in the insufferable heat, shouting and swearing, and with fretful impatience urging on the blacksmiths who were busy about his fine carriage. At first sight this angry gentleman struck me as extremely peevish. He was about five-and-forty, of middle height, very stout, and pockmarked; his stoutness, his double chin and his puffy, pendant cheeks testified to the blissful existence of a landowner. There was something feminine about his whole figure which at once caught the eye. He was dressed in loose, comfortable, neat clothes which were, however, quite unfashionable.

I cannot imagine why he was annoyed with me, since he saw me for the first time in his life, and had not yet spoken a single word to me. I noticed the fact from the extraordinarily furious looks he turned upon me as soon as I got out of the carriage. Yet I felt a great inclination to make his acquaintance. From the chatter of his servants, I gathered that he had just come from Stepantchikovo, from my uncle's, and so it was an opportunity for making full inquiries about many things.

I was just taking off my cap and trying as agreeably as possible to observe how unpleasant these delays on the road sometimes were; but the fat gentleman, as it were reluctantly, scanned me from head to boots with a displeased and ill-humoured stare, muttered something to himself and turned heavily his full back view to me. This aspect of his person,

however interesting to the observer, held out no hopes of agreeable conversation.

“Grishka! Don’t grumble to yourself! I’ll thrash you! ..,” he shouted suddenly to his valet, as though he had not heard what I said about delays on the journey.

This Grishka was a grey-headed, old-fashioned servant dressed in a long-skirted coat and wearing very long grey whiskers. Judging from certain signs, he too was in a very bad humour, and was grumbling morosely to himself. An explanation immediately followed between the master and the servant.

“You’ll thrash me! Bawl a little louder!” muttered Grishka, as though to himself, but so loudly that everybody heard it; and with indignation he turned away to adjust something in the carriage.

“What? What did you say? ‘Bawl a little louder. . . So you are pleased to be impudent!” shouted the fat man, turning purple.

“What on earth are you nagging at me for? One can’t say a word!”

“Why nag at you? Do you hear that? He grumbles at me and I am not to nag at him!”

“Why, what should I grumble at?”

“What should you grumble at . . . you’re grumbling, right enough! I know what you are grumbling about; my having come away from the dinner — that’s what it is.”

“What’s that to me! You can have no dinner at all for all I care. I am not grumbling at you; I simply said a word to the blacksmiths.”

“The blacksmiths. . . . Why grumble at the blacksmiths?”

“I did not grumble at them, I grumbled at the carriage.”

“And why grumble at the carriage?”

“What did it break down for? It mustn’t do it again.”

“The carriage. ... No, you are grumbling at me, and not at the carriage. It’s his own fault and he swears at other people!”

“Why on earth do you keep on at me, sir? Leave off, please!”

“Why have you been sitting like an owl all the way, not saying a word to me, eh? You are ready enough to talk at other times!”

“A fly was buzzing round my mouth, that’s why I didn’t talk and sat like an owl. Why, am I to tell you fairy tales, or what? Take Malanya the storyteller with you if you are fond of fairy tales.”

The fat man opened his mouth to reply, but apparently could think of nothing and held his peace. The servant, proud of his skill in argument and his influence over his master displayed before witnesses, turned to the workmen with redoubled dignity and began showing them something.

My efforts to make acquaintance were fruitless, and my own awkwardness did not help matters. I was assisted, however, by an unexpected incident. A sleepy, unwashed and unkempt countenance suddenly peeped out of the window of a closed carriage which had stood from time immemorial without wheels in the blacksmith’s yard, daily though vainly expecting to be repaired. At the appearance of this countenance there was a general outburst of laughter from the workmen.

The joke was that the man peeping out of the dismantled carriage was locked in and could not get out. Having fallen asleep in it drunk, he was now vainly begging for freedom; at

last he began begging someone to run for his tool. All this immensely entertained the spectators.

There are persons who derive peculiar delight and entertainment from strange things. The antics of a drunken peasant, a man stumbling and falling down in the street, a wrangle between two women and other such incidents arouse at times in some people the most good-humoured and unaccountable delight. The fat gentleman belonged precisely to that class. Little by little his countenance from being sullen and menacing began to look pleased and good-humoured, and at last brightened up completely.

“Why, that’s Vassilyev, isn’t it?” he asked with interest. “How did he get here?”

“Yes, it is Vassilyev, sir!” was shouted on all sides.

“He’s been on the spree, sir,” added one of the workmen, a tall, lean, elderly man with a pedantically severe expression “of face, who seemed disposed to take the lead; “he’s been on the spree, sir. It’s three days since he left his master, and he’s lying hidden here; he’s come and planted himself upon us! Here he is asking for a chisel. Why, what do you want a chisel for now, you addle-pate? He wants to pawn his last tool.”

“Ech, Arhipushka! Money’s like a bird, it flies up and flies away again! Let me out, for God’s sake,” Vassilyev entreated in a thin cracked voice, poking his head out of the carriage.

“You stay where you are, you idol; you are lucky to be there!” Arhip answered sternly. “You have been drunk since the day before yesterday; you were hauled out of the street at daybreak this morning. You must thank God we hid you, we

told Matvey Ilyitch that you were ill, that you had a convenient attack of colic.”

There was a second burst of laughter.

“But where is the chisel?”

“Why, our Zuey has got it! How he keeps on about it! A drinking man, if ever there was one, Stepan Alexyevitch.”

“He-he-he! Ah, the scoundrel! So that’s how you work in the town; you pawn your tools!” wheezed the fat man, spluttering with glee, quite pleased and suddenly becoming extraordinarily good-humoured. “And yet it would be hard to find such a carpenter even in Moscow, but this is how he always recommends himself, the ruffian,” he added, quite unexpectedly turning to me. “Let him out, Arhip, perhaps he wants something.”

The gentleman was obeyed. The nail with which they had fastened up the carriage door, chiefly in order to amuse themselves at Vassilyev’s expense when he should wake up, was taken out, and Vassilyev made his appearance in the light of day, muddy, dishevelled and ragged. He blinked at the sunshine, sneezed and gave a lurch; and then putting up his hand to screen his eyes, he looked round.

“What a lot of people, what a lot of people,” he said, shaking his head, “and all, seemingly, so . . . ober/” he drawled, with a sort of mournful pensiveness as though reproaching himself. “Well, good-morning, brothers, good-day.”

Again there was a burst of laughter.

“Good-morning! Why, sec how much of the day is gone, you heedless fellow!”

“Go it, old man!”

“As we say, have your fling, if it don’t last long.”

“He-he-he! he has a ready tongue!” cried the fat man, roiling with laughter and again glancing genially at me. “Aren’t you ashamed, Vassilyev?”

“It’s sorrow drives me to it! Stepan Alexyevitch, sir, it’s sorrow,” Vassilyev answered gravely, with a wave of his hand, evidently glad of another opportunity to mention his sorrow.

“What sorrow, you booby?”

“A trouble such as was never heard of before. We are being made over to Foma Fomitch.”

“Whom? When?” cried the fat man, all of a flutter.

I, too, took a step forward; quite unexpectedly, the question concerned me too.

“Why, all the people of Kapitonovko. Our master, the colonel — God give him health — wants to give up all our Kapitonovko, his property, to Foma Fomitch. Full seventy souls he is handing over to him. ‘It’s for you, Foma,’ says he. ‘Here, now, you’ve nothing of your own, one may say; you are not much of a landowner; all you have to keep you are two smelts in Lake Ladoga — that’s all the serfs your father left you. For your parent,’ “ Vassilyev went on, with a sort of spiteful satisfaction, putting touches of venom into his story in all that related to Foma Fomitch—” ‘for your parent was a gentleman of ancient lineage, though from no one knows where, and no one knows who he was; he too, like you, lived with the gentry, was allowed to be in the kitchen as a charity. But now when I make over Kapitonovko to you, you will be a landowner too, and a gentleman of ancient lineage, and will have serfs of your own. You can lie on the stove and be idle as a gentle-,,,,,, * >>

man. . . .

But Stepan Alexyevitch was no longer listening. The effect produced on him by Vassilyev's half-drunken story was extraordinary. The fat man was so angry that he turned positively purple; his double chin was quivering, his little eyes grew bloodshot. I thought he would have a stroke on the spot.

"That's the last straw!" he said, gasping. "That low brute, Foma, the parasite, a landowner! Tfoo! Go to perdition! Damn it all! Hey, you make haste and finish! Home!"

"Allow me to ask you," I said, stepping forward uncertainly, "you were pleased to mention the name of Foma Fomitch just now; I believe his surname, if I am not mistaken, is Opiskin. Well, you see, I should like ... in short, I have a special reason for being interested in that personage, and I should be very glad to know, on my own account, how far one may believe the words of this good man that his master, Yegor Ilyitch Rostanev, means to make Foma Fomitch a present of one of his villages. That interests me extremely, and I . . ."

"Allow me to ask you," the fat man broke in, "on what grounds are you interested in that personage, as you style him; though to my mind 'that damned low brute' is what he ought to be called, and not a personage. A fine sort of personage, the scurvy knave! He's a simple disgrace, not a personage!"

I explained that so far I was in complete ignorance in regard to this person, but that Yegor Ilyitch Rostanev was my uncle, and that I myself was Sergey Alexandrovitch So-and-so.

"The learned gentleman? My dear fellow! they are expecting you impatiently," cried the fat man, genuinely delighted. "Why,

I have just come from them myself, from Stepantchikovo; I went away from dinner, I got up from the pudding, I couldn't sit it out with Foma! I quarrelled with them all there on account of that damned Foma. . . . Here's a meeting! You must excuse me, my dear fellow. I am Stepan Alexyevitch Bahtcheyev, and I remember you that high. . . . Well, who would have thought it! ... But allow me."

And the fat man advanced to kiss me.

After the first minutes of excitement, I at once proceeded to question him: the opportunity was an excellent one.

"But who is this Foma?" I asked. "How is it he has gained the upper hand of the whole house? Why don't they kick him out of the yard? I must confess ..."

"Kick him out? You must be mad. Why, Yegor Ilyitch tiptoes before him! Why, once Foma laid it down that Thursday was Wednesday, and so everyone in the house counted Thursday Wednesday. 'I won't have it Thursday, let it be Wednesday!' So there were two Wednesdays in one week. Do you suppose I am making it up? I am not exaggerating the least little bit. Why, my dear fellow, it's simply beyond all belief."

"I have heard that, but I must confess ..."

"I confess and I confess! The way the man keeps on! What is there to confess? No, you had better ask me what sort of jungle I have come out of. The mother of Yegor Ilyitch, I mean of the colonel, though a very worthy lady and a general's widow too, in my opinion is in her dotage; why, that damned Foma is the very apple of her eye. She is the cause of it all; it was she brought him into the house. He has talked her silly, she hasn't a word to say for herself now, though she is called her Excellency — she skipped into marriage with General Krahotkin at fifty!

As for Yegor Ilyitch's sister, Praskovya Ilyinitchna, who is an old maid of forty, I don't care to speak of her. It's oh dear, and oh my, and cackling like a hen. I am sick of her — bless her! The only thing about her is that she is of the female sex; and so I must respect her for no cause or reason, simply because she is of the female sex! Tfool It's not the thing for me to speak of her, she's your aunt.

Alexandra Yegorovna, the colonel's daughter, though she is only a little girl — just in her sixteenth year — to my thinking is the cleverest of the lot; she doesn't respect Foma; it was fun to see her. A sweep young lady, and that's the fact! And why should she respect him? Why, Foma was a buffoon waiting on the late General Krahotkin. Why, he used to imitate all sorts of beasts to entertain the general!

And it seems that in old days Jack was the man; but nowadays Jack is the master, and now the colonel, your uncle, treats this retired buffoon as though he were his own father. He has set him up in a frame, the rascal, and bows down at the feet of the man who is sponging upon him. Tfoo!”

“Poverty is not a vice, however . . . and I must confess . . . allow me to ask you, is he handsome, clever?”

“Foma? A perfect picture!” answered Bahtcheyev, with an extraordinary quiver of spite in his voice. (My questions seemed to irritate him, and he began to look at me suspiciously.) “A perfect picture! Do you hear, good people: he makes him out a beauty!

Why, he is like a lot of brute beasts in one, if you want to know the whole truth, my good man. Though that wouldn't matter if

he had wit; if only he had wit, the rogue — why, then I would be ready to do violence to my feelings and agree, maybe, for the sake of wit; but, you see, there's no trace of wit about him whatever! He has cast a spell on them all; he is a regular alchemist! Tfoo! I am tired of talking. One ought to curse them and say no more about it. You have upset me with your talk, my good sir! Hey, you! Are you ready or not?"

"Raven still wants shoeing," Grishka answered gloomily.

"Raven. I'll let you have a raven! . . . > Yes, sir, I could tell you a story that would simply make you gape with wonder, so that you would stay with your mouth open till the Second Coming. Why, I used to feel a respect for him myself.

Would you believe it? I confess it with shame, I frankly confess it, I was a fool. Why, he took me in too. He's a know-all. He knows the ins and outs of everything, he's studied all the sciences. He gave me some drops; you see, my good sir, I am a sick man, a poor creature. You may not believe it, but I am an invalid. And those drops of his almost turned me inside out. You just keep quiet and listen; go yourself and you will be amazed.

Why, he will make the colonel shed tears of blood; the colonel will shed tears of blood through him, but then it will be too late. You know, the whole neighbourhood all around has dropped his acquaintance owing to this accursed Foma. No one can come to the place without being insulted by him. I don't count; even officials of high rank he doesn't spare. He lectures every one. He sets up for a teacher of morality, the scoundrel. 'I am a wise man,' says he; 'I am cleverer than all of you, you must listen to no one but me, I am a learned man.' Well, what

of it? Because he is learned, must he persecute people who are not? . . .

And when he begins in his learned language, he goes hammering on ta-ta-ta! Ta-ta-ta! I'll tell you his tongue is such a one to wag that if you cut it off and throw it on the dungheap it will go on wagging there till a crow picks it up. He is as conceited and puffed out as a mouse in a sack of grain. He is trying to climb so high that he will overreach himself. Why, here, for instance, he has j taken it into his head to teach the house serfs French.

You can believe it or not, as you like. It will be a benefit to him, he says. To a lout, to a servant! Tfoo! A shameless fellow, damn him, that is what he is. What does a clodhopper want ' with French, I ask you? And indeed what do the likes of us want with French? For gallivanting with young ladies in the mazurka or dancing attendance on other men's wives? Profligacy, that's what it is, I tell you! But to my thinking, when one has drunk a bottle of vodka one can talk in any language.

So that is all the respect I have for your French language! I dare say you can chatter away in French: Ta-ta-ta, the tabby has married the torn," Bahtcheyev said, looking at me in scornful indignation. "Are you a learned man, my good sir — eh? Have you gone in for some learned line?"

"Well ... I am somewhat interested ..."

"I suppose you have studied all the sciences, too?"

"Quite so, that is, no ... I must own I am more interested now in observing ... I have been staying in Petersburg, but now I am hurrying to my uncle's."

“And who is the attraction at your uncle’s? You had better have stayed where you were, since you had somewhere to stay. No, my good sir, I can tell you, you won’t make much way by being learned, and no uncle will be of any use to you; you’ll get caught in a trap! Why, I got quite thin, staying twenty-four hours with them. Would you believe that I got thin, staying with them? No, I see you don’t believe it. Oh, well, you needn’t believe it if you don’t want to, bless you.”

“No, really I quite believe it, only I still don’t understand,” I answered, more and more bewildered.

“I believe it, but I don’t believe you! You learned gentlemen are all fond of cutting capers! All you care about is hopping about on one leg and showing off! I am not fond of learned people, my good sir; they give me the spleen! I have come across your Petersburgers — a worthless lot! They are all Freemasons; they spread infidelity in all directions; they are afraid of a drop of vodka, as though it would bite them — Tfoo! You have put me out of temper, sir, and I don’t want to tell you anything! After all, I have not been engaged to tell you stories, and I am tired of talking. One doesn’t pitch into everybody, sir, and indeed it’s a sin to do it. . . . Only your learned gentleman at your uncle’s has driven the footman Vidoplyasov almost out of his wits. Vidoplyasov has gone crazy all through Foma Fomitch. . .

“As for that fellow Vidoplyasov,” put in Grishka, who had till then been following the conversation with severe decorum, “I’d give him a flogging. If I came across him, I’d thrash the German nonsense out of him. I’d give him more than you could get into two hundred.”

“Be quiet!” shouted his master. “Hold your tongue; no one’s talking to you.”

“Vidoplyasov,” I said, utterly nonplussed and not knowing what to say. “Vidoplyasov, what a queer name!”

“Why is it queer? There you are again. Ugh, you learned gentlemen, you learned gentlemen!”

I lost patience.

“Excuse me,” I said, “but why are you so cross with me? What have I done? I must own I have been listening to you for half an hour, and I still don’t know what it is all about. ...”

“What are you offended about, sir?” answered the fat man.

“There is no need for you to take offence! I am speaking to you for your good. You mustn’t mind my being such a grumbler and shouting at my servant just now. Though he is the most natural rascal, my Grishka, I like him for it, the scoundrel.

A feeling heart has been the ruin of me — I tell you frankly; and Foma is to blame for it all. He’ll be the ruin of me, I’ll take my oath of that. Here, thanks to him, I have been baking in the sun for two hours. I should have liked to have gone to the priest’s while these fools were dawdling about over their job. The priest here is a very nice fellow. But he has so upset me, Foma has, that it has even put me off seeing the priest. What a set they all are! There isn’t a decent tavern here.

I tell you they are all scoundrels, every one of them. And it would be a different thing if he were some great man in the service,” Bahtcheyev went on, going back again to Foma Fomitch, whom he seemed unable to shake off, “it would be pardonable perhaps for a man of rank; but as it is he has no rank at all; I know for a fact that he hasn’t.

He says he has suffered in the cause of justice in the year forty something that never was, so we have to bow down to him for that! If the least thing is not to his liking — up he jumps and begins squealing: ‘They are insulting me, they are insulting my poverty, they have no respect for me.’ You daren’t sit down to table without Foma, and yet he keeps them waiting. ‘I have been slighted,’ he’d say; ‘I am a poor wanderer, black bread is good enough for me.’

As soon as they sit down he turns up, our fiddle strikes up again, ‘Why did you sit down to table without me? So no respect is shown me in anything.’ In fact your soul is not your own. I held my peace for a long time, sir, he imagined that I was going to fawn upon him, like a lapdog on its hind legs begging; ‘Here, boy, here’s a bit, eat it up.’ No, my lad, you run in the shafts, while I sit in the cart.

I served in the same regiment with Yegor Ilyitch, you know; I took my discharge with the rank of a Junker, while he came to his estate last year, a retired colonel. I said to him, ‘Ale, you will be your own undoing, don’t be too soft with Foma! You’ll regret it.’ ‘No,’ he would say, ‘he is a most excellent person’ (meaning Foma), ‘he is a friend to me; he is teaching me a higher standard of life.’ Well, thought I, there is no fighting against a higher standard; if he has set out to teach a higher standard of life, then it is all up.

What do you suppose he made a to-do about to-day? To-morrow is the day of Elijah the Prophet” (Mr. Bahtcheyev crossed himself), “the patron saint of your uncle’s son Ilyusha. I was thinking to spend the day with them and to dine there, and had ordered a plaything from Petersburg, a German on springs, kissing the hand of his betrothed, while she wiped away a tear

with her handkerchief — a magnificent thing! (I shan't give it now, no, thank you; it's lying there in my carriage and the German's nose is smashed off; I am taking it back.) Yegor Ilyitch himself would not have been disinclined to enjoy himself and be festive on such a day, but Foma won't have it.

As much as to say: 'Why are you beginning to make such a fuss over Ilyusha? So now you are taking no notice of me.' Eh? What do you say to a goose like that? He is jealous of a boy of eight over his nameday! 'Look here,' he says, 'it is my nameday too.' But you know it will be St. Ilya's, not St. Foma's. 'No,' he says, 'that is my nameday too!' I looked on and put up with it. And what do you think?

Now they are walking about on tiptoe, whispering, uncertain what to do — to reckon Ilya's day as the nameday or not, to congratulate him or not. If they don't congratulate him he may be offended, if they do he may take it for scoffing. Tfoo, what a plague! We sat down to dinner. . . . But are you listening, my good sir?"

"Most certainly I am; I am listening with peculiar gratification, in fact, because through you I have now learned . . . and ... I must say ..."

"To be sure, with peculiar gratification! I know your peculiar gratification. . . . You are not jeering at me, talking about your gratification?"

"Upon my word, how could I be jeering? On the contrary. And indeed you express yourself with such originality that I am tempted to note down your words."

"What's that, sir, noting down?" asked Mr. Bahtcheyev, looking at me with suspicion and speaking with some alarm.

“Though perhaps I shall not note them down. . . . I didn’t mean anything.”

“No doubt you are trying to flatter me?”

“Flatter you, what do you mean?” I asked with surprise.

“Why, yes. Here you are flattering me now; I am telling you everything like a fool, and later on you will go and write a sketch of me somewhere.”

I made haste at once to assure Mr. Bahtcheyev that I was not that sort of person, but he still looked at me suspiciously.

“Not that sort of person! Who can tell what you are? Perhaps better still. Foma there threatened to write an account of me and to send it to be published.”

“Allow me to ask,” I interrupted, partly from a desire to change the conversation. “Is it true that my uncle wants to get married?”

“What if he does? That would not matter. Get married if you have a mind to, that’s no harm; but something else is,” added Mr. Bahtcheyev meditatively. “H’m! that question, my good sir, I cannot answer fully.

There are a lot of females mixed up in the business now, like flies in jam; and you know there is no making out which wants to be married. And as a friend I don’t mind telling you, sir, I don’t like woman! It’s only talk that she is a human being, but in reality she is simply a disgrace and a danger to the soul’s salvation. But that your uncle is in love like a Siberian cat, that I can tell you for a fact. I’ll say no more about that now, sir, you will see for yourself; but what’s bad is that the business drags on.

If you are going to get married, get married; but he is afraid to tell Foma and afraid to tell the old lady, she will be squealing all over the place and begin kicking up a rumpus. She takes Foma's part: 'Foma Fomitch will be hurt,' she'd say, 'if a new mistress comes into the house, for then he won't be able to stay two hours in it.' The bride will chuck him out by the scruff of his neck, if she is not a fool, and in one way or another will make such an upset that he won't be able to find a place anywhere in the neighbourhood.

So now he is at his pranks, and he and the mamma are trying to foist a queer sort of bride on him. . . . But why did you interrupt me, sir? I wanted to tell you what was most important, and you interrupted me! I am older than you are, and it is not the right thing to interrupt an old man."

I apologised.

"You needn't apologise! I wanted to put before you, as a learned man, how he insulted me to-day. Come, tell me what you think of it, if you are a good-hearted man. We sat down to dinner; well, he fairly bit my head off at dinner, I can tell you! I saw from the very beginning; he sat there as cross as, two sticks, as though nothing were to his liking. He'd have been glad to drown me in a spoonful of water, the viper! He is a man of such vanity that his skin's not big enough for him. So he took it into his head to pick a quarrel with me, to teach me a higher standard.

Asked me to tell him why I was so fat! The man kept pestering me, why was I fat and not thin? What do you think of that question? Tell me, my good sir. Do you see anything witty in it? I answered him very reasonably: 'That's as God has ordained, Foma Fomitch. One man's fat and one man's thin; and no

mortal can go against the decrees of Divine Providence.’ That was sensible, wasn’t it? What do you say? ‘No,’ said he; ‘you have five hundred serfs, you live at your ease and do nothing for your country; you ought to be in the service, but you sit at home and play your concertina’ — and it is true when I am depressed I am fond of playing on the concertina.

I answered very reasonably again: ‘How should I go into the service, Foma Fomitch? What uniform could I pinch my corpulence into? If I pinched myself in and put on a uniform, and sneezed unwarily — all the buttons would fly off, and what’s more, maybe before my superiors, and, God forbid! they might take it for a practical joke, and what then?’ Well, tell me, what was there funny in that? But there, there was such a roar at my expense, such a ha-ha-ha and he-he-he. . . .

The fact is he has no sense of decency, I tell you, and he even thought fit to slander me in the French dialect: ‘cochon/ he called me. Well I know what cochon means. ‘Ah, you damned philosopher,’ I thought. ‘Do you suppose I’m going to give in to you?’ I bore it as long as I could, but I couldn’t stand it.

I got up from the table, and before all the honourable company I blurted out in his face: ‘I have done you an injustice, Foma Fomitch, my kind benefactor.’ I said, ‘I thought that you were a well-bred man, and you turn out to be just as great a hog as any one of us.’ I said that and I left the table, left the pudding — they were just handing the pudding round. ‘Bother you ana your pudding!’ I thought. ...”

“Excuse me,” I said, listening to Mr. Bahtcheyev’s whole story; “I am ready, of course, to agree with you completely. The point

is, that so far I know nothing positive. . . . But I have got ideas of my own on the subject, you see.”

“What ideas, my good sir?” Mr. Bahtcheyev asked mistrustfully.

“You see,” I began, hesitating a little, “it is perhaps not the moment, but I am ready to tell it. This is what I think: perhaps we are both mistaken about Foma Fomitch, perhaps under these oddities lies hidden a peculiar, perhaps a gifted nature, who knows? Perhaps it is a nature that has been wounded, crushed by sufferings, avenging itself, so to speak, on all humanity.

I have heard that in the past he was something like a buffoon; perhaps that humiliated him, mortified him, overwhelmed him. . . . Do you understand: a man of noble nature . . . perception . . . and to play the part of a buffoon! . . . And so he has become mistrustful of all mankind and . . . and perhaps if he could be reconciled to humanity . . . that is, to his fellows, perhaps he would turn out a rare nature, perhaps even a very remarkable one and . . . and . . . you know there must be something in the man. There is a reason, of course, for everyone doing homage to him.”

I was conscious myself that I was maundering horribly. I might have been forgiven in consideration of my youth. But Mr. Bahtcheyev did not forgive me. He looked gravely and sternly into my face and suddenly turned crimson as a turkey cock. “Do you mean that Foma’s a remarkable man?” he asked abruptly.

“Listen, I scarcely myself believe a word of what I said just now. It was merely by way of a guess. . . .”

“Allow me, sir, to be so inquisitive as to ask: have you studied philosophy?”

“In what sense?” I asked in perplexity.

“No, in no particular sense; you answer me straight out, apart from any sense, sir: have you studied philosophy or not?”

“I must own I am intending to study it, but ...”

“There it is!” shouted Mr. Bahtcheyev, giving full rein to his indignation. “Before you opened your mouth, sir, I guessed that you were a philosopher! There is no deceiving me! No, thank you! I can scent out a philosopher two miles off! You can go and kiss your Foma Fomitch. A remarkable man, indeed! Tfoo! confound it all! I thought you” were a man of good intentions too, while you . . . Here!” he shouted to the coachman, who had already clambered on the box of the carriage, which by now had been put in order. “Home!”

With difficulty I succeeded somehow in soothing him; somehow or other he was mollified at last; but it was a long time before he could bring himself to lay aside his wrath and look on me with favour. Meantime he got into the carriage, assisted by Grishka and Arhip, the man who had reproved Vassilyev.

“Allow me to ask you,” I said, going up to the carriage. “Are you never coming again to my uncle’s?”

“To your uncle’s? Curse the fellow who has told you that! Do you think that I am a consistent man, that I shall keep it up? That’s just my trouble, that I am not a man, but a rag. Before a week’s past, I shall fly round there again. And why? There it is, I don’t know myself why, but I shall go; I shall fight with Foma again. That’s just my trouble, sir! The Lord has sent that Foma to chastise me for my sins. I have as much will as an

old woman, there is no consistency in me, I am a first-class coward, my good sir. ...”

We parted friends, however; he even invited me to dine with him.

“You come, sir, you come, we will dine together; I have got some vodka brought on foot from Kiev, and my cook has been in Paris. He serves such fricassees, he makes such pasties, that you can only lick your fingers and bow down to him, the rascal. A man of culture! Only it is a long time since I thrashed him, he is getting spoilt with me. ... It is a good thing you reminded me. ...

Do come. I’d invite you to come to-day, only somehow I am out of sorts, down in the mouth — in fact, quite knocked up. I am a sick man, you know, a poor creature. Maybe you won’t believe it. . . . Well, good-bye, sir, it is time for me to set sail. And your little trap yonder is ready. And tell Foma he had better not come across me; I should give him such a sentimental greeting that he . . .”

But his last words were out of hearing; the carriage, drawn by four strong horses, vanished in clouds of dust. My chaise too was ready; I got into it and we at once drove through the little town. “Of course this gentleman is exaggerating,” I thought; “he is too angry and cannot be impartial. But, again, all that he said about uncle was very remarkable. So that makes two people in the same story, that uncle is in love with that young lady. . . . H’m! Shall I get married or not?” This time I meditated in earnest.

Chapter III

MY UNCLE

I MUST own I was actually a little daunted. My romantic dreams suddenly seemed to me extremely queer, even rather stupid as soon as I reached Stepantchikovo. That was about five o'clock in the afternoon. The road ran by the manor house. I saw again after long absence the immense garden in which some happy days of my childhood had been passed, and which I had often seen afterwards in my dreams, in the dormi-

tones of the various schools which undertook my education. I jumped out of the carriage and walked across the garden to the house. I very much wanted to arrive unannounced, to inquire for my uncle, to fetch him out and to talk to him first of all. And so I did. Passing down the avenue of lime trees hundreds of years old, I went up on to the veranda, from which one passed by a glass door into the inner rooms. The veranda was surrounded by flower-beds and adorned with pots of expensive flowers. Here I met one of the natives, old Gavrila, who had at one time looked after me and was now the honoured valet of my uncle.

The old fellow was wearing spectacles, and was holding in his hand a manuscript book which he was reading with great attention. I had seen him three years before in Petersburg, where he had come with my uncle, and so he recognised me at once. With exclamations of joy he fell to kissing my hand, and as he did so the spectacles fell off his nose on to the floor. Such devotion on the part of the old man touched me very much. But disturbed by my recent conversation with Mr. Bahtcheyev, I looked first at the suspicious manuscript book which had been in Gavrila's hands.

“What’s this, Gavril? Surely they have not begun teaching you French too?” I asked the old man.

“They are teaching me in my old age, like a starling, sir,” Gavril answered mournfully.

“Does Foma himself teach you?”

“Yes, sir; a very clever man he must be.”

“Not a doubt that he is clever! Does he teach you by conversations?”

“By a copy-book, sir.”

“Is that what you have in your hands? Ah! French words in Russian letters, a sharp dodge! You give in to such a blockhead, such an arrant fool, aren’t you ashamed, Gavril?” I cried, instantly forgetting my lofty theories about Foma Fomitch for which I had caught it so hotly from Mr. Bahtcheyev.

“How can he be a fool, sir?” answered the old man, “if he manages our betters as he does.”

“H’m, perhaps you are right, Gavril,” I muttered, pulled up by this remark. “Take me to my uncle.”

“My falcon! But I can’t show myself, I dare not, I have begun to be afraid even of him. I sit here in my misery and step behind the flower-beds when he is pleased to come out.”

“But why are you afraid?”

“I didn’t know my lesson this morning, Foma Fomitch made me go down on my knees, but I didn’t stay on my knees. I am too old, Sergey Alexandrovitch, for them to play such tricks with me. The master was pleased to be vexed at my disobeying Foma Fomitch, ‘he takes trouble about your education, old

grey-beard,' said he; 'he wants to teach you the pronunciation.' So here I am walking to and fro repeating the vocabulary. Foma Fomitch promised to examine me again this evening."

It seemed to me that there was something obscure about this. "There must be something connected with French," I thought, "which the old man cannot explain."

"One question, Gavril: what sort of man is he? Good-looking, tall?"

"Foma Fomitch? No, sir, he's an ugly little scrub of a man."

"H'm! Wait a bit, Gavril, perhaps it can be all set right; in fact I can promise you it certainly will be set right. But . . . where is my uncle?"

"He is behind the stables seeing some peasants. The old men have come from Kapitonovko to pay their respects to him. They had heard that they were being made over to Foma Fomitch. They want to beg not to be."

"But why behind the stables?"

"They are frightened, sir. ..."

I did, in fact, find my uncle behind the stables. There he was, standing before a group of peasants who were bowing down to the ground and earnestly entreating him. Uncle was explaining something to them with warmth. I went up and called to him. He turned round and we rushed into each other's arms.

He was extremely glad to see me; his delight was almost ecstatic. He hugged me, pressed my hands, as though his own son had returned to him after escaping some mortal danger, as though by my arrival I had rescued him from some mortal

danger and brought with me the solution of all his perplexities, as well as joy and lifelong happiness for him and all whom he loved. Uncle would not have consented to be happy alone.

After the first outburst of delight, he got into such a fuss that at last he was quite flustered and bewildered. He showered questions upon me, wanted to take me at once to see his family. We were just going, but my uncle turned back, wishing to present me first to the peasants of Kapitonovko. Then, I remember, he suddenly began talking, apropos of I don't know what, of some Mr. Korovkin, a remarkable man whom he had met three days before, on the high road, and whom he was very impatiently expecting to pay him a visit. Then he dropped Mr. Korovkin too and spoke of something else. I looked at him with enjoyment.

Answering his hurried questions, I told him that I did not want to go into the service, but to continue my studies. As soon as the subject of study was broached, my uncle at once knitted his brows and assumed an extraordinarily solemn air. Learning that of late I had been engaged on mineralogy, he raised his head and looked about him proudly, as though he had himself, alone and unaided, discovered the whole of that science and written all that was published about it. I have mentioned already that he cherished the most disinterested reverence for the word "science", the more disinterested that he himself had no scientific knowledge whatever.

"Ah, my boy, there are people in the world who know everything," he said to me once, his eyes sparkling with enthusiasm. "One sits among them, listens, and one knows one understands nothing of it all, and yet one loves it. And why? Because it is in the cause of reform, of enlightenment, of the

general welfare! That I do understand. Here I now travel by train, and my Ilyusha, perhaps, may fly through the air. . . . And then trade, manufactures — those channels, so to say . . . that is, I mean, turn it which way you will, it's of service. . . . It is of service, isn't it?"

But to return to our meeting.

"But wait a bit, wait a bit, my dear," lie began, speaking rapidly and rubbing his hands, "you will see a man! A rare man, I tell you, a learned man, a man of science; 'he will survive his century.' It's a good saying, isn't it, 'will survive his century'? Foma explained it to me. . . . Wait a little, I will introduce you to him."

"Are you speaking of Foma Fomitch, uncle?"

"No, no, my dear, I was speaking of Korovkin, though Foma too, he too . . . but I am simply talking of Korovkin just now," he added, for some unknown reason turning crimson, and seeming embarrassed as soon as Foma's name was mentioned.

"What sciences is he studying, uncle?"

"Science, my boy, science, science in general. I can't tell you which exactly, I only know that it is science. How he speaks about railways! And, you know," my uncle added in a half whisper, screwing up his right eye significantly, "just a little of the free-thinker. I noticed it, especially when he was speaking of marriage and the family . . . it's a pity I did not understand much of it myself (there was no time), I would have told you all about it in detail. And he is a man of the noblest qualities, too! I have invited him to visit me. I am expecting him from hour to hour."

Meanwhile the peasants were gazing at me with round eyes and open mouths as though at some marvel.

“Listen, uncle,” I interrupted him; “I believe I am hindering the peasants. No doubt they have come about something urgent. What do they want? I must own I suspect something, and I should be very glad to hear. ...”

Uncle suddenly seemed nervous and flustered.

“Oh, yes! I had forgotten. Here, you see . . . what is one to do with them? They have got a notion — and I should very much like to know who first started it — they have got a notion, that I am giving them away together with the whole of Kapitonovko — do you remember Kapitonovko? We used to drive out there in the evenings with dear Katya — the whole of Kapitonovko with the sixty-eight souls in it to Foma Fomitch. ‘Wo don’t want to leave you,’ they say, and that is all about it.”

“So it is not true, uncle, you are not giving him Kapitonovko,” I cried, almost rapturously.

“I never thought of it, it never entered my head! And from whom did you hear it? Once one drops a word, it is all over the place, And why do they so dislike Foma? Wait a little, Sergey, I will introduce you to him,” he added, glancing at me timidly, as though he were aware in me, too, of hostility towards Foma Fomitch. “He is a wonderful man, my boy.”

“We want no one but you, no one!” the peasants suddenly wailed in chorus. “You are our father, we are your children!”

“Listen, uncle,” I said. “I have not seen Foma Fomitch yet, but . . . you see ... I have heard something. I must confess that I met Mr. Bahtcheyev to-day. However, I have my own idea on that subject. Anyway, uncle, finish with the peasants and let them

go, and let us talk by ourselves without witnesses. I must own, that's what I have come for. ..."

"To be sure, to be sure," my uncle assented; "to be sure. We'll dismiss the peasants and then we can have a talk, you know, a friendly, affectionate, thorough talk. Come," he went on, speaking rapidly and addressing the peasants, "you can go now, my friends. And for the future come to me whenever there is need; straight to me, and come at any time."

"You are our father, we are your children! Do not give us to Foma Fomitch for our undoing! All we, poor people, are beseeching you!" the peasants shouted once more.

"See what fools! But I am not giving you away, I tell you."

"Or he'll never leave off teaching us, your honour. He does nothing but teach the fellows here, so they say."

"Why, you don't mean to say he is teaching you French?" I cried, almost in alarm.

"No, sir, so far God has had mercy on us!" answered one of the peasants, probably a great talker, a red-haired man with a huge bald patch on the back of his head, with a long, scanty, wedge-shaped beard, which moved as he talked as though it were a separate individual. "No, sir, so far God has had mercy on us."

"But what does he teach you?"

"Well, your honour, what he teaches us, in a manner of speaking, is buying a gold casket to keep a brass farthing in."

"How do you mean, a brass farthing?"

"Seryozha, you are mistaken, it's a slander!" cried my uncle, turning crimson and looking terribly embarrassed. "The fools

have misunderstood what was said to them. He merely . . . there was nothing about a brass farthing. There is no need for you to understand everything, and shout at the top of your voice,” my uncle continued, addressing the peasant reproachfully. “One wants to do you good and you don’t understand, and make an uproar!”

“Upon my word, uncle, teaching them French?”

“That’s for the sake of pronunciation, Seryozha, simply for the pronunciation,” said my uncle in an imploring voice. “He said himself that it was for the sake of the pronunciation. . . . Besides, something special happened in connection with this, which you know nothing about and so you cannot judge.

You must investigate first and then blame. . . . It is easy to find fault!”

“But what are you about?” I shouted, turning impetuously to the peasants again. “You ought to speak straight out. You should say, This won’t do, Foma Fomitch, this is how it ought to be!’ You have got a tongue, haven’t you?”

“Where is the mouse who will bell the cat, your honour? ‘I am teaching you, clodhoppers, cleanliness and order,’ he says. ‘Why is your shirt not clean?’ Why, one is always in a sweat, that’s why it isn’t clean! One can’t change every day. Cleanliness won’t save you and dirt won’t kill you.”

“And look here, the other day he came to the threshing floor,” began another peasant, a tall lean fellow all in patches and wearing wretched bark shoes, apparently one of those men who are always discontented about something and always have some vicious venomous word ready in reserve.

Till then he had been hidden behind the backs of the other peasants, had been listening in gloomy silence, and had kept all the time on his face an ambiguous, bitterly subtle smile. "He came to the threshing floor. 'Do you know, he said, 'how many miles it is to the sun?' Why, who can tell? Such learning is not for us but for the gentry." No, says he; 'you are a fool, a lout, you don't understand what is good for you; but I,' said he, 'am an astronomer! I know all God's planets.'"

"Well, and did he tell you how many miles it is to the sun?" my uncle put in, suddenly reviving and winking gaily at me, as though to say, "See what's coming!"

"Yes, he did tell us how many," the peasant answered reluctantly, not expecting such a question.

"Well, how many did he say, how many exactly?"

"Your honour must know best, we live in darkness."

"Oh, I know, my boy, but do you remember?"

"Why, he said it would be so many hundreds or thousands, it was a big number, he said. More than you could carry in three cartloads."

"Try and remember, brother! I dare say you thought it would be about a mile, that you could reach up to it with your hand. No, my boy; you see, the earth is like a round ball, do you understand?" my uncle went on, describing a sphere in the air with his hands.

The peasant smiled bitterly.

"Yes, like a ball, it hangs in the air of itself and moves round the sun. And the sun stands still, it only seems to you that it moves. There's a queer thing! And the man who discovered this was Captain Cook, a navigator . . . devil only knows who did discover

it,” he added in a half whisper, turning to me. “I know nothing about it myself, my boy. ... Do you know how far it is to the sun?”

“I do, uncle,” I answered, looking with surprise at all this scene. “But this is what I think: of course ignorance means slovenliness; but on the other hand ... to teach peasants astronomy ...”

“Just so, just so, slovenliness,” my uncle assented, delighted with my expression, which struck him as extremely apt. “A noble thought! Slovenliness precisely! That is what I have always said . . . that is, I never said so, but I felt it. Do you hear?” he cried to the peasants. “Ignorance is as bad as slovenliness, it’s as bad as dirt. That’s why Foma wanted to teach you. He wanted to teach you something good — that was all right.

That’s as good as serving one’s country — it’s as good as any official rank. So you see what science is! Well, that’s enough, that’s enough, my friends. Go, in God’s name; and I am glad, glad. . . . Don’t worry yourselves, I won’t forsake you.”
“Protect us, father!”

“Let us breathe freely!”

And the peasants plumped down at his feet.

“Come, come, that’s nonsense. Bow down to God and your Tsar, and not to me. . . . Come, go along, behave well, be deserving . . and all that. You know,” he said, turning suddenly to me as soon as the peasants had gone away, and beaming with pleasure, “the peasant loves a kind word, and a little present would do no harm. Shall I give them something, eh?”

What do you think? In honour of your arrival. . . . Shall I or not?"

"But you are a kind of Frol Silin, uncle, a benevolent person, I see."

"Oh, one can't help it, my boy, one can't help it; that's nothing. I have been meaning to give them a present for a long time," he said, as though excusing himself. "And as for your thinking it funny of me to give the peasants a lesson in science, I simply did that, my boy, in delight at seeing you, Seryozha. I simply wanted the peasants to hear how many miles it was to the sun and gape in wonder.

It's amusing to see them gape, my dear. . . . One seems to rejoice over them. Only, my boy, don't speak in the drawing-room of my having had an interview with the peasants, you know. I met them behind the stables on purpose that we should not be seen. It was impossible to have it there, my boy: it is a delicate business, and indeed they came in secret themselves. I did it more for their sake. . . ."

"Well, here I have come, uncle," I began, changing the conversation and anxious to get to the chief point as quickly as possible. "I must own your letter so surprised me that I . . ."

"My dear, not a word of that," my uncle interrupted, as though in alarm, positively dropping his voice. "Afterwards, afterwards, all that shall be explained. I have, perhaps, acted wrongly towards you, very wrongly, perhaps. . . ."

"Acted wrongly towards me, uncle?"

"Afterwards, afterwards, my dear, afterwards! It shall all be explained. But what a fine fellow you have grown! My dear

boy! How eager I have been to see you! I wanted to pour out my heart, so to speak . . . you are clever, you are my only hope . . . you and Korovkin. I must mention to you that they are all angry with you here. Mind, be careful, don't be rash."

"Angry with me?" I asked, looking at uncle in wonder, unable to understand how I could have angered people with whom I was as yet unacquainted. "Angry with me?"

"Yes, with you, my boy. It can't be helped! Foma Fomitch is a little . . . and . . . well . . . mother following his example. Be careful, respectful, don't contradict. The great thing is to be respectful. ..."

"To Foma Fomitch, do you mean, uncle?"

"It can't be helped, my dear; you see, I don't defend him. Certainly he has his faults, perhaps, and especially just now, at this particular moment. . . . Ah, Seryozha, dear, how it all worries me. And if only it could be settled comfortably, if only we could all be satisfied and happy! . . . But who has not faults? We are not perfect ourselves, are we?"

"Upon my word, uncle! Consider what he is doing. . . ."

"Oh, my dear! It's all trivial nonsense, nothing more! Here, for instance, let me tell you, he is angry with me, and what for, do you suppose? . . . Though perhaps it's my own fault. . . . I'd better tell you afterwards. ..."

"But, do you know, uncle, I have formed an idea of my own about it," I interrupted, in haste to give expression to my theory. Indeed, we both seemed nervous and hurried. "In the first place, he has been a buffoon; that has mortified him, rankled, outraged his ideal; and that has made his character embittered, morbid, resentful, so to say, against all humanity. .

. . . But if one could reconcile him with mankind, if one could bring him back to himself ...”

“Just so, just so,” cried my uncle, delighted; “that’s just it. A generous idea! And in fact it would be shameful, ungenerous of us to blame him! Just so! ... Oh, my dear, you understand me; you have brought me comfort! If only things could be set straight, somehow! Do you know, I am afraid to show myself. Here you have come, and I shall certainly catch it from them!’
“Uncle, if that is how it is . . .” I began, disconcerted by this confession.

“No-no-no! For nothing in the world,” he cried, clutching my hands. “You are my guest and I wish it!”

“Uncle, tell me at once,” I began insistently, “why did you send for me? What do you expect of me, and, above all, in what way have you been to blame towards me?”

“My dear, don’t ask. Afterwards, afterwards; all that shall be explained afterwards. I have been very much to blame, perhaps, but I wanted to act like an honest man, and . . . and . . . you shall marry her! You will marry her, if there is one grain of gentlemanly feeling in you,” he added, flushing all over with some sudden feeling and warmly and enthusiastically pressing my hand. “But enough, not another word, you will soon see for yourself. It will depend on you. . . . The great thing is that you should be liked, that you should make a good impression. Above all — don’t be nervous.”

“Come, listen, uncle. Whom have you got there? I must own I have been so little in society, that ...”

“That you are rather frightened,” put in my uncle, smiling. “Oh, that’s no matter. Cheer up, they are all our own people! The

great thing is to be bold and not afraid. I keep feeling anxious about you. Whom have we got there, you ask?

Yes, who is there. ... In the first place, my mother," he began hurriedly. "Do you remember mamma or not? The most kind-hearted, generous woman, no airs about her — that one can say; a little of the old school, perhaps, but that's all to the good. To be sure she sometimes takes fancies into her head, you know, will say one thing and another; she is vexed with me now, but it is my own fault, I know it is my own fault. And the fact is — you know she is what is called a grande dame, a general's lady . . . her husband was a most excellent man. To begin with, he was a general, a most cultivated man; he left no property, but he was covered with wounds — he was deserving of respect, in fact.

Then there's Miss Perepelitsyn; well, she ... I don't know ... of late she has been rather . . . her character is so . . . but one mustn't find fault with everyone. There, never mind her . . . you mustn't imagine she is in a menial position, she's a major's daughter herself, my boy, she is mother's confidante and favourite, my dear! Then there is my sister Praskovya Ilyinitchna.

Well, there is no need to say much about her, she is simple and good-natured, a bit fussy, but what a heart! The heart is the great thing. Though she is middle-aged, yet, do you know, I really believe that queer fellow Bahtcheyev is making up to her. He wants to make a match of it. But mind you don't say a word, it is a secret! Well, and who else is there? I won't tell you about the children, you will see for yourself. It's Ilyusha's nameday tomorrow. . . .

Why there, I was almost forgetting, we have had staying with us for the last month Ivan Ivanitch Mizintchikov, your second cousin, I believe; yes, of course, he is your second cousin! He has lately given up his commission; he was a lieutenant in the Hussars; still a young man. A noble soul! But, you know, he has got through his money.

I really can't think how he managed to get rid of it. Though indeed he had next to nothing, but anyway he got through it and ran into debt. . . . Now he is staying with me. I didn't know him at all till lately; he came and introduced himself. He is a dear fellow, good-humoured, quiet and respectful. No one gets a word out of him. He is always silent. Foma calls him in jest the 'silent stranger' — he doesn't mind; he isn't vexed. Foma's satisfied, he says Ivan's not very bright.

And Ivan never contradicts him, but always falls in with everything he says. H'm! he seems so crushed . . . but there, God bless him, you will see for yourself. There are guests from the town, Pavel Semyonitch Obnoskin and his mother; he's young but a man of superior mind, something mature, steadfast, you know . . . only I don't know how to express it; and what's more, of the highest principles; strict morals.

And lastly there is staying with us, you know, a lady called Tatyana Ivanovna; she, too, may be a distant relation. You don't know her. She is not quite young, that one mu[^]t own, but . . . she is not without attractions: she is rich enough to buy Stepantchikovo twice over, she has only lately come into her money, and has had a wretched time of it till now. Please, Seryozha, my boy, be careful; she is such a nervous invalid . . . something phan-tasmagorial in her character, you know.

Well, you are a gentleman, you will understand; she has had troubles, you know, one has to be doubly careful with a person who has had troubles! But you mustn't imagine anything, you know. Of course she has her weaknesses; sometimes she is in such a hurry, she speaks so fast, that she says the wrong thing. Not that she lies, don't imagine that ... it all comes, my boy, from a pure and noble heart, so to say. I mean, even if she does say something false, it's simply from excess of noble-heartedness, so to say — do you understand?"

I fancied that my uncle was horribly confused.

"Listen, uncle," I began, "I am so fond of you . . . forgive the direct question: are you going to marry someone here or not?"

"Why, from whom did you hear that?" he answered, blushing like a child. "You see, my dear . . . I'll tell you all about it; in the first place, I am not going to get married. Mamma, my sister to some extent, and most of all Foma Fomitch, whom mamma worships — and with good reason, with good reason, he has done a great deal for her — they all want me to marry that same Tatyana Ivanovna, as a sensible step for the benefit of all.

Of course they desire nothing but my good — I understand that, of course; but nothing will induce me to marry — I have made up my mind about that. In spite of that I have not succeeded in giving them a decided answer, I have not said yes, or no. It always happens like that with me, my boy.

They thought that I had consented and are insisting that tomorrow, in honour of the festive occasion, I should declare myself . . . and so there is such a flutter in preparation for tomorrow that I really don't know what line to take! And besides, Foma Fomitch, I don't know why, is vexed with me, and

mamma is too. I must say, my boy, I have simply been reckoning on you and on Korovkin. ... I wanted to pour out my troubles, so to say. ...”

“But how can Korovkin be of any use in this matter, uncle?”

“He will help, he will help, my dear — he is a wonderful man; in short, a man of learning! I build upon him as on a rock; a man who would conquer anything! How he speaks of domestic happiness!

I must own I have been reckoning on you too; I thought you might bring them to reason. Consider and judge . . . granted that I have been to blame, really to blame — I understand all that — I am not without feeling. But all the same I might be forgiven some day! Then how well we should get on together! Oh, my boy, how my Sashenka has grown up, she’ll be thinking of getting married directly! What a fine boy my Ilyusha has become! To-morrow is his nameday. But I am afraid for my Sashenka — that’s the trouble.”

“Uncle! Where is my portmanteau? I will change my things and make my appearance in a minute, and then ...”

“In the upper room, my boy, in the upper room. I gave orders beforehand that as soon as you arrived you should be taken straight up there, so that no one should see you. Yes, yes, change your things! That’s capital, capital, first-rate.

And meanwhile I will prepare them all a little. Well, good luck to us! You know, my boy, we must be diplomatic. One is forced to become a Talleyrand. But there, never mind. They are drinking tea there now. We have tea early. Foma Fomitch likes to have his tea as soon as he wakes up; it is better, you know.

Well, Til go in, then, and you make haste and follow me, don't leave me alone; it will be awkward for me, my boy, alone. . . .

But, stay! I have another favour to ask of you: don't cry out at me in there as you did out here just now — will you? If you want to make some criticism you can make it afterwards here when we are alone; till then hold yourself in and wait! You see, I have put my foot in it already with them. They are annoyed with me . . .”

“I say, uncle, from all that I have seen and heard it seems to me that you ...”

“That I am as soft as butter, eh? Don't mind speaking out!” he interrupted me quite unexpectedly. “There is no help for it, my boy. I know it myself. Well, so you will come? Come as quick as you can, please!”

Going upstairs, I hurriedly opened my portmanteau, remembering my uncle's instructions to come down as soon as possible. As I was dressing, I realised that I had so far learned scarcely anything I wanted to know, though I had been talking to my uncle for a full hour. That struck me. Only one thing was pretty clear to me: my uncle was still set upon my getting married; consequently, all rumours to the opposite, that is, that my uncle was in love with the same lady himself, were wide of the mark.

I remember that I was much agitated. Among other things the thought occurred to me that by my coming, and by my silence, I had almost made a promise, given my word, bound myself for ever. “It is easy,” I thought, “it is easy to say a word which will bind one, hand and foot, for ever.

And I have not yet seen my proposed bride!” And again: why this antagonism towards me on the part of the whole family? Why were they bound to take a hostile attitude to my coming as my uncle said they did? And what a strange part my uncle was playing here in his own house! What was the cause of his secretiveness? Why these worries and alarms? I must own that it all struck me suddenly as something quite senseless; and my romantic and heroic dreams took flight com-

pletely at the first contact with reality. Only now, after my conversation with my uncle, I suddenly realised all the incongruity and eccentricity of his proposition, and felt that no one but my uncle would have been capable of making such a proposal and in such circumstances. I realised, too, that I was something not unlike a fool for galloping here full speed at his first word, in high delight at his suggestion. I was dressing hurriedly, absorbed in my agitating doubts, so that I did not at first notice the man who was waiting on me.

“Will your honour wear the Adelaida-coloured tie or the one with the little checks on it?” the man asked suddenly, addressing me with exceptionally mawkish obsequiousness.

I glanced at him, and it seemed to me that he, too, was worthy of attention. He was a man still young, for a flunkey well dressed, quite as well as many a provincial dandy. The brown coat, the white breeches, the straw-coloured waistcoat, the patent-leather boots and the pink tie had evidently been selected with intention. All this was bound at once to attract attention to the young dandy’s refined taste.

The watch-chain was undoubtedly displayed with the same object. He was pale, even greenish in fact, and had a long

hooked nose, thin and remarkably white, as though it were made of china. The smile on his thin lips expressed melancholy, a refined melancholy, however. His large prominent eyes, which looked as though made of glass, had an extraordinarily stupid expression, and yet there was a gleam of refinement in them. His thin soft ears were stuffed up with cotton-wool — also a refinement. His long, scanty, flaxen hair was curled and pomaded. His hands were white, clean, and might have been washed in rose-water; his fingers ended in extremely long dandified pink nails.

All this indicated a spoilt and idle fop. He lisped and mispronounced the letter “r” in fashionable style, raised and dropped his eyes, sighed and gave himself incredibly affected airs. He smelt of scent. He was short, feeble and flabby-looking, and moved about with knees and haunches bent, probably thinking this the height of refinement — in fact he was saturated with refinement, subtlety and an extraordinary sense of his own dignity. This last characteristic displeased me, I don’t know why, and moved me to wrath.

“So that tie is Adelaida colour?” I asked, looking severely at the young valet.

“Yes, Adelaida,” he answered, with undisturbed refinement.

“And is there an Agrafena colour?”

“No, sir, there cannot be such a colour.”

“Why not?”

“Agrafena is not a polite name, sir.”

“Not polite! Why not?”

“Why, Adelaida, we all know, is a foreign name anyway, a ladylike name, but any low peasant woman can be called Agrafena.”

“Are you out of your mind?”

“No, sir, I am in my right mind, sir. Of course you are free to call me any sort of name, but many generals and even some counts in Moscow and Petersburg have been pleased with my conversation, sir.”

“And what’s your name?”

“Vidoplyasov.”

“Ah, so you are Vidoplyasov?”

“Just so, sir.”

“Well, wait a bit, my lad, and I will make your acquaintance.”

“It is something like Bedlam here,” I thought to myself as I went downstairs.

Chapter IV

AT TEA

TEA was being served in the room that gave on to the veranda where I had that afternoon met Gavriila. I was much perturbed by my uncle’s mysterious warnings in regard to the reception awaiting me. Youth is sometimes excessively vain, and youthful vanity is almost always cowardly.

And so it was extremely unpleasant for me when, immediately going in at the door and seeing the whole party round the tea-table, I stumbled over a rug, staggered and, recovering my balance, flew unexpectedly into the middle of the room.

As overwhelmed with confusion as though I had at one stroke lost my career, my honour and my good name, I stood without moving, turning as red as a crab and looking with a senseless

stare at the company. I mention this incident, in itself so trivial, only because of the effect it had on my state of mind during the whole of that day, and consequently my attitude to some of the personages of my story. I tried to bow, did not fully succeed, turned redder than ever, flew up to my uncle and clutched at his hand.

“How do you do, uncle,” I gasped out breathlessly, intending to say something quite different and much cleverer, but to my own surprise I said nothing but, “how do you do.”

“Glad to see you, glad to see you, my boy,” answered my uncle, distressed on my account. “You know, we have met already. Don’t be nervous, please,” he added in a whisper, “it’s a thing that may happen to anyone, and worse still, one sometimes falls flat! . . . And now, mother, let me introduce to you: this is our young man; he is a little overcome at the moment, but I am sure you will like him. My nephew, Sergey Alexandrovitch,” he added, addressing the company.

But before going on with my story, allow me, gentle reader, to introduce to you by name the company in which I suddenly found myself. This is essential to the orderly sequence of my narrative.

The party consisted of several ladies and two men besides my uncle and me. Foma Fomitch, whom I was so eager to see, and who — even then I felt it — was absolute monarch in the house, was not there; he was conspicuous by his absence, and seemed to have taken with him all brightness from the room. They all looked gloomy and worried. One could not help noticing it from the first glance; embarrassed and upset as I was at the moment, I yet discerned that my uncle, for instance, was

almost as upset as I was, though he was doing his utmost to conceal his anxiety under a show of ease.

Something was lying like a heavy weight on his heart. One of the two gentlemen in the room was a young man about five-and-twenty, who turned out to be the Obnoskin my uncle had spoken of that afternoon, praising his intelligence and high principles. I did not take to this gentleman at all, everything about him savoured of vulgar chic; his dress, in spite of its chic, was shabby and common; his face looked, somehow, shabby too.

His thin flaxen moustaches like a beetle's whiskers, and his unsuccessful wisps of beard, were evidently intended to show that he was a man of independent character and perhaps advanced ideas. He was continually screwing up his eyes, smiling with an affectation of malice; he threw himself into attitudes on his chair, and repeatedly stared at me through his eyeglass; but when I turned to him, he immediately dropped his eyeglass and seemed overcome with alarm. The other gentle-

man was young too, being about twenty-eight. He was my cousin, Mizintchikov. He certainly was extremely silent. He did not utter a single word at tea, and did not laugh when everyone else laughed; but I saw in him no sign of that "crushed" condition my uncle had detected; on the contrary, the look in his light brown eyes expressed resoluteness and a certain decision of character. Mizintchikov was dark and rather good-looking, with black hair; he was very correctly dressed — at my uncle's expense, as I learned later.

Of the ladies the one I noticed first of all from her spiteful anaemic face was Miss Perepelitsyn. She was sitting near

Madame la Generale — of whom I will give a special account later — not beside her, but deferentially a little behind; she was continually bending down and whispering something into the ear of her patroness. Two or three elderly lady companions were sitting absolutely mute in a row by the window, gazing open-eyed at Madame la Générale and waiting respectfully for their tea. My attention was attracted also by a fat, absolutely redundant lady, of about fifty, dressed very tastelessly and gaudily, wearing rouge,

I believe, though she had hardly any teeth except blackened and broken stumps; this fact did not, however, prevent her from mincing, screwing up her eyes, dressing in the height of fashion and almost making eyes. She was hung round with chains, and like Monsieur Obnoskin was continually turning her lorgnette on me. This was his mother. Praskovya Ilyinitchna, my meek aunt, was pouring out the tea. She obviously would have liked to embrace me after our long separation, and of course to have shed a few tears on the occasion, but she did not dare. Everything here was, it seemed, under rigorous control.

Near her was sitting a very pretty black-eyed girl of fifteen, who looked at me intently with childish curiosity — my cousin Sashenka. Finally, and perhaps most conspicuous of all, was a very strange lady, dressed richly and extremely youthfully, though she was far from being in her first youth and must have been at least five-and-thirty. Her face was very thin, pale, and withered, but extremely animated; a bright colour was constantly appearing in her pale cheeks, almost at every movement, at every flicker of feeling; she was in continual excitement, twisting and turning in her chair, and seemed unable to sit still for a minute.

She kept looking at me with a kind of greedy curiosity, and was continually bending down to whisper something into the ear of Sashenka, or of her neighbour on the other side, and immediately afterwards laughing in the most childish and simple-hearted way. But to my surprise her eccentricities seemed to pass unnoticed by the others, as though they had all agreed to pay no attention to them.

I guessed that this was Tatyana Ivanovna, the lady in whom, to use my uncle's expression, "there was something phantasmagorical", whom they were trying to force upon him as a bride, and whose favour almost everyone in the house was trying to court for the sake of her money. But I liked her eyes, blue and mild; and though there were already crow's-feet round the eyes, their expression was so simple-hearted, so merry and good-humoured, that it was particularly pleasant to meet them. Of Tatyana Ivanovna, one of the real "heroines" of my story, I shall speak more in detail later; her history was very remarkable. Five minutes after my entrance, a very pretty boy, my cousin Ilyusha, ran in from the garden, with his pockets full of knuckle-bones and a top in his hand.

He was followed by a graceful young girl, rather pale and weary-looking, but very pretty. She scanned the company with a searching, mistrustful, and even timid glance, looked intently at me, and sat down by Tatyana Ivanovna. I remember that I could not suppress a throb at my heart; I guessed that this was the governess. . . . I remember, too, that on her entrance my uncle stole a swift glance at me and flushed crimson, then he bent down, caught up Ilyusha in his arms, and brought him up to me to be kissed. I noticed, too, that Madame Obnoskin first stared at my uncle and then with a sarcastic smile turned her lorgnette on the governess.

My uncle was very much confused and, not knowing what to do, was on the point of calling to Sashenka to introduce her to me; but the girl merely rose from her seat and in silence, with grave dignity, dropped me a curtsy. I liked her doing this, however, for it suited her. At the same instant my kindly aunt, Praskovya Ilyinitchna, could hold out no longer and, abandoning the tea-tray, dashed up to embrace me; but before I had time to say a couple of words to her I heard the shrill voice of Miss Perepelitsyn hissing out that Praskovya Ilyinitchna seemed to have forgotten Madame la Generale. "Madame has asked for her tea, and you do not pour it out, and she is waiting." And Praskovya Ilyinitchna, leaving me, flew back in all haste to her duties. Madame la Generale, the most important person of the party, in whose presence all the others were on their best behaviour, was a lean spiteful old woman, dressed in mourning — spiteful, how-

ever, chiefly from old age and from the loss of her mental faculties which had never been over-brilliant); even in the past, she had been a nonsensical creature. Her rank as a general's wife had made her even stupider and more arrogant. When she was in a bad humour the house became a perfect hell.

She had two ways of displaying her ill humour. The first was a silent method, when the old lady would not open her lips for days together, but maintained an obstinate silence and pushed away or even sometimes flung on the floor everything that was put before her. The other method was the exact opposite — garrulous.

This would begin, as a rule, by my grandmother's — for she was my grandmother, of course — being plunged into a state of

extreme despondency, and expecting the end of the world and the failure of all her undertakings, foreseeing poverty and every possible trouble in the future, being carried away by her own presentiments, reckoning on her fingers the calamities that were coming, and reaching a climax of enthusiasm and intense excitement over the enumeration.

It always appeared, of course, that she had foreseen all this long before, and had said nothing only because she was forced to be silent "in this house". But if only she had been treated with respect, if only they had cared to listen to her earlier, then, etc. etc. In all this, the flock of lady companions and Miss Perepelitsyn promptly followed suit, and finally it was solemnly ratified by Foma Fomitch.

At the minute when I was presented to her she was in a horrible rage, and apparently it was taking the silent form, the most terrible. Everyone was watching her with apprehension. Only Tatyana Ivanovna, who was completely unconscious of it all, was in the best of spirits. My uncle purposely with a certain solemnity led me up to my grandmother; but the latter, making a wry face, pushed away her cup ill-humouredly.

"Is this that volti-geur?" she drawled through her teeth, addressing Miss Perepelitsyn.

This foolish question completely disconcerted me. I don't understand why she called me a voliigcur. But such questions were easy enough to her. Miss Perepelitsyn bent down and whispered something in her ear, but the old lady waved her off angrily. I remained standing with my mouth open and looked inquiringly at my uncle. They all looked at one another and Obnoskin even grinned, which I did not like at all.

“She sometimes talks at random, my boy,” my uncle, a little disconcerted himself, whispered in my ear; “but it means nothing, it’s just her goodness of heart. The heart is what one must look at.”

“Yes, the heart, the heart,” Tatyana Ivanovna’s bell-like voice rang out. She had not taken her eyes off me all this time, and seemed as though she could not sit still in her chair. I suppose the word “heart”, uttered in a whisper, had reached her ear.

But she did not go on, though she was evidently longing to express herself. Whether she was overcome with confusion or some other feeling, she suddenly subsided into silence, flushed extremely red, turned quickly to the governess and whispered something in her ear, and suddenly putting her handkerchief before her mouth and sinking back in her chair, began giggling as though she were in hysterics. I looked at them all in extreme amazement; but to my surprise, everyone was particularly grave and looked as though nothing exceptional had happened. I realised, of course, the kind of person Tatyana Ivanovna was. At last I was handed tea, and I recovered myself a little. I don’t know why, but I suddenly felt that it was my duty to begin a polite conversation with the ladies.

“It was true what you told me, uncle,” I began, “when you warned me that I might be a little abashed. I openly confess — why conceal it?” I went on, addressing Madame Obnoskin with a deprecating smile, “that I have hitherto had hardly any experience of ladies’ society. And just now when I made my entry so unsuccessfully, it seemed to me that my position in the middle of the room was very ridiculous and made me look rather a simpleton, didn’t it? Have you read *The Simpleton*?” I added, feeling more and more lost, blushing at my ingratiating

candour, and glaring at Monsieur Obnoskin, who was still looking me up and down with a grin on his face.

“Ju^t so, just so, just so!” my uncle cried suddenly with extreme animation, genuinely delighted that the conversation had been set going somehow and that I had recovered myself. “That’s no great matter, my boy, your talking of the likelihood of your being abashed. Well, you have been, and that’s the end of it. But when I first made my debut, I actually told a lie, my boy, would you believe that? Yes, really, Anfisa Petrovna, I assure you, it’s worth hearing. Just after I had become a Junker, I went to Moscow, and presented myself to a very important lady with a letter of introduction;

that is, she was a very haughty woman, but in reality very good-natured, in spite of what they said. I went in — I was shown up. The drawing-room was full of people, chiefly swells. I made my bow and sat down. At the second word, she asked me: ‘Have you estates in the country?’ And I hadn’t got as much as a hen — what was I to answer? I felt crushed to the earth.

Everyone was looking at me (I was only a young Junker!). Why not say: no, I have nothing; and that would have been the right thing because it was the truth. But I couldn’t face it! ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘a hundred and seventeen serfs,’ And why did I stick on that seventeen? If one must tell a lie, it is better to tell it with a round number, isn’t it? A minute later, through my letter of introduction, it appeared that I was as poor as a church mouse, and I had told a lie into the bargain! . . . Well, there was no help for it.

I took myself off as fast as I could, and never set foot in the place again. In those days I had nothing, you know. All I have

got now is three hundred serfs from Uncle Afanasy Matveyitch, and two hundred serfs with Kapitonovko, which came to me earlier from my grandmother Akulina Panfilovna, a total of more than five hundred serfs. That's capital! But from that day I gave up lying and don't tell lies now."

"Well, I shouldn't have given it up, if I were you. There is no knowing what may happen," observed Obnoskin, smiling ironically.

"To be sure, that's true! Goodness knows what may happen," my uncle assented good-naturedly.

Obnoskin burst into loud laughter, throwing himself back in his chair; his mother smiled; Miss Perepelitsyn sniggered in a particularly disgusting way; Tatyana Ivanovna giggled too, without knowing why, and even clapped her hands; in fact, I saw distinctly that my uncle counted for nothing in his own house. Sashenka's eyes flashed angrily, and she looked steadily at Obnoskin. The governess flushed and looked down. My uncle was surprised.

"What is it? What's happened?" he repeated, looking round at us all in perplexity.

All this time my cousin Mizintchikov was sitting a little way off, saying nothing and not even smiling when everyone laughed. He drank tea zealously, gazed philosophically at the whole company, and several times as though in an access of unbearable boredom broke into whistling, probably a habit of his, but pulled himself up in time. Obnoskin, who had jeered at my uncle and had attempted to attack me, seemed not to dare to glance at Mizintchikov; I noticed that. I noticed, too, that my silent cousin looked frequently at me and with evident

curiosity, as though he was trying to make up his mind what sort of person I was.

“I am certain,” Madame Obnoskin minced suddenly, “I am perfectly certain Monsieur Serge — that is your name, I believe? — that at home, in Petersburg, you were not greatly devoted to the ladies. I know that there are many, a great many young men nowadays in Petersburg who shun the society of ladies altogether. But in my opinion they are all free-thinkers. Nothing would induce me to regard it as anything but unpardonable free-thinking. And I must say it surprises me, young man, it surprises me, simply surprises me! . . .”

“I have not been into society at all,” I answered with extraordinary animation. “But that . . . I imagine at least . . . is of no consequence. I have lived, that is I have generally had lodgings . . . but that is no matter, I assure you. I shall be known one day; but hitherto I have always stayed at home. . . .”

“He is engaged in learned pursuits,” observed my uncle, drawing himself up with dignity.

“Oh, uncle, still talking of your learned pursuits! . . . Only fancy,” I went on with an extraordinary free and easy air, smirking affably, and again addressing Madame Obnoskin, “my beloved uncle is so devoted to learning that he has unearthed somewhere on the high road a marvellous practical philosopher, a Mr. Korovkin; and his first words to me after all these years of separation were that he was expecting this phenomenal prodigy with the most acute, one may say, impatience . . . from love of learning, of course. . . .”

And I sniggered, hoping to provoke a general laugh at my facetiousness.

“Who is that? Of whom is he talking?” Madame la Générale jerked out sharply, addressing Miss Perepelitsyn.

“Yegor Ilyitch has been inviting visitors, learned gentlemen; he drives along the high road collecting them,” the lady hissed out. My uncle was completely dumbfounded.

“Oh, yes! I had forgotten,” he cried, turning upon me a glance that expressed reproach. “I am expecting Korovkin. A man of learning, a man who will survive his century. . . .”

He broke off and relapsed into silence, Madame la Générale waved her arm, and this time so successfully that she knocked over a cup, which flew off the table and was smashed. General excitement followed.

“She always does that when she is angry; she throws things on the floor,” my uncle whispered in confusion. “But she only does it when she is angry. . . . Don’t stare, my boy, don’t take any notice, look the other way. . . . What made you speak of Korovkin? ...”

But I was looking away already; at that moment I met the eyes of the governess, and it seemed to me that in their expression there was something reproachful, even contemptuous; a flush of indignation glowed upon her pale cheeks. I understood the look in her face, and guessed that by my mean and disgusting desire to make my uncle ridiculous in order to make myself a little less so, I had not gained much in that young lady’s estimation. I cannot express how ashamed I felt!

“I must go on about Petersburg with you,” Anfisa Petrovna gushed again, when the commotion caused by the breaking of the cup had subsided. “I recall with such enjoyment, I may say, our life in that charming city. . . . We were very intimately

acquainted with a family — do you remember, Pavel, General Polovitsin. . . . Oh, what a fascinating, fas-ci-na-ting creature his wife was! You know that aristocratic distinction, beau ntondc! . . . Tell me, you have most likely met her? ... I must own I have been looking forward to your being here with impatience; I have been hoping to hear a great deal, a very great deal about our friends in Petersburg. ...”

“I am very sorry that I cannot . . . excuse me. ... As I have said already, I have rarely been into society, and I don’t know General Polovitsin; I have never even heard of him,” I answered impatiently, my affability being suddenly succeeded by a mood of extreme annoyance and irritability.

“He is studying mineralogy,” my incorrigible uncle put in with pride. “Is that investigating all sorts of stones, mineralogy, my boy?”

“Yes, uncle, stones. . . .”

“H’m. . . . There are a great many sciences and they are all of use! And do you know, my boy, to tell you the truth, I did not know what mineralogy meant! It’s all Greek to me. In other things I am so-so, but at learned subjects I am stupid — I frankly confess it!”

“You frankly confess!” Obnoskin caught him up with a snigger. “Papa!” cried Sashenka, looking reproachfully at her father.

“What is it, darling? Oh, dear, I keep interrupting you, Anfisa Petrovna,” my uncle caught himself up suddenly, not understanding Sashenka’s exclamation. “Please forgive me.” “Oh, don’t distress yourself,” Anfisa Petrovna answered with a sour smile. “Though I have said everything already to your

nephew, and will finish perhaps, Monsieur Serge — that is right, isn't it? — by telling you that you really must reform.

I believe that the sciences, the arts . . . sculpture, for instance ... all those lofty ideas, in fact, have their fas-cin-na-ting side, but they do not take the place of ladies! . . . Women, women would form you, young man, and so to do without them is impossible, young man, impossible, im-poss-ible!”

“Impossible, impossible,” Tatyana Ivanovna’s rather shrill voice rang out again. “Listen,” she began, speaking with a sort of childish haste and flushing crimson, of course, “listen, I want to ask you something. ...”

“Pray do,” I answered, looking at her attentively.

“I wanted to ask you whether you have come to stay long or not?”

“I really don’t know, that’s as my affairs ...”

“Affairs! What sort of affairs can he have? Oh, the mad fellow! . . .”

And Tatyana Ivanovna, blushing perfectly crimson and hiding behind her fan, bent down to the governess and at once began whispering something to her. Then she suddenly laughed and clapped her hands.

“Stay! stay!” she cried, breaking away from her confidante and again addressing me in a great hurry as though afraid I were going away. “Listen, do you know what I am going to tell you? You are awfully, awfully like a young man, a fas-ci-na-ting young man! Sashenka, Nastenka, do you remember? He is awfully like that madman — do you remember, Sashenka? We were out driving when we met him ... on horseback in a white waistcoat ... he put up his eyeglass at me, too, the shameless fellow!

Do you remember, I hid myself in my veil, too, but I couldn't resist putting my head out of the carriage window and shouting to him: 'You shameless fellow!' and then I threw my bunch of flowers on the road? ... Do you remember, Nastenka?"

And the lady, half crazy over eligible young men, hid her face in her hands, all excitement; then suddenly leaped up from her seat, darted to the window, snatched a rose from a bowl, threw it on the floor near me and ran out of the room. She was gone in a flash!

This time a certain embarrassment was apparent, though Madame la Generate was again completely unmoved. Anfisa Petrovna, for instance, showed no surprise, but seemed suddenly a little troubled and looked with anxiety at her son; the young ladies blushed, while Pavel Obnoskin, with a look of vexation which at the time I did not understand, got up from his chair and went to the window. My uncle was beginning to make signs to me, but at that instant another person walked into the room and drew the attention of all.

"Ah, here is Yevgraf Larionitch! Talk of angels!" cried my uncle, genuinely delighted. "Well, brother, have you come from the town?"

"Queer set of creatures! They seem to have been collected here on purpose!" I thought to myself, not yet understanding fully what was passing before my eyes, and not suspecting either that I was probably adding another to the collection of queer creatures by appearing among them.

Chapter V

YEZHEVIKIN

THERE walked or rather squeezed himself into the room (though the doors were very wide ones) a little figure which even in the doorway began wriggling, bowing and smirking, looking with extraordinary curiosity at all the persons present. It was a little pockmarked old man with quick and furtive eyes, with a bald patch at the top of his head and another at the back, with a look of undefined subtle mockery on his rather thick lips.

He was wearing a very shabby dress-coat which looked as though it were second-hand. One button was hanging by a thread; two or three were completely missing. His high boots full of holes, and his greasy cap, were in keeping with his pitiful attire; he had a very dirty check pocket-handkerchief in his hand, with which he wiped the sweat from his brow and temples. I noticed that the governess blushed slightly and looked rapidly at me. I fancied, too, that there was something proud and challenging in this glance.

“Straight from the town, benefactor! Straight from there, my kind protector! I will tell you everything, only first let me pay my respects,” said the old man. And he made straight for Madame la Generate, but stopped half-way and again addressed my uncle.

“You know my leading characteristic, benefactor — a sly rogue, a regular sly rogue! You know that as soon as I walk in I make for the chief person of the house, I turn my toes in her direction first of all, so as from the first step to win favour and protection. A sly rogue, my good sir, a sly rogue, benefactor. Allow me, my dear lady, allow me, your Excellency, to kiss your

dress, or I might sully with my lips your hand of gold, of general's rank."

Madame la Générale to my surprise gave him her hand to kiss rather graciously.

"And my respects to you, our beauty," he went on, "Miss Perepelitsyn. There is no help for it, Madam, I am a sly rogue. As long ago as 1841 it was settled that I was a rogue, when I was dismissed from the service just at the time when Valentin Ignatyevitch Tihontsev became 'your honour'. He was made an assessor; he was made an assessor and I was made a rogue. And, you know, I am so open by nature that I make no secret of it. It can't be helped. I have tried living honestly, I have tried it, but now I must try something else.

Alexandra Yegor-ovna, our little apple in syrup," he went on, going round the table and making his way up to Sashenka, "let me kiss your dress; there is a smell of apples and all sorts of nice things about you, young lady. Our respects to the hero of the day; I have brought you a bow and arrow, my little sir.

I was a whole morning making it, my lads helped me; we will shoot with it presently. And when you grow up you will be an officer and cut off a Turk's head. Tatyana Ivanovna . . . but oh, she is not here, my benefactress! Or I would have kissed her dress too.

Praskovya Ilyinitchna, my kindest friend, I can't get near you or I would kiss your foot as well as your hand, so there! Anfisa Petrovna, I protest my profound respect for you. I prayed for you only to-day, benefactress, on my knees with tears I prayed for you and for your son also that God might send him honours

of all sorts — and talents too, talents especially! And by the way, our humblest duty to Ivan Ivanitch Mizintchikov.

May God send you all that you desire for yourself, for you will never make out, sir, what you do want for yourself: such a silent gentleman. . . . Good-day, Nastya! All my small fry send their love to you, they talk of you every day. And now a deep bow to my host. I come from the town, your honour, straight off from the town. And this, no doubt, is your nephew who is being trained in a learned faculty? My humble duty, sir; let me have your hand.”

There was laughter. One could see that the old man played the part of an amateur clown. His arrival livened the party up. Many did not even understand his sarcasms, and yet he had made slight digs at them all. Only the governess, whom to my surprise he called simply Nastya, blushed and frowned. I was pulling back my hand, but I believe that was just what the horrid old man wanted.

“But I only asked to shake it, sir, if you will allow me; not to kiss it. And you thought I meant to kiss it? No, my dear sir, for the time being I will only shake it. I suppose you took me for the clown of the establishment, kind sir?” he said, looking at me mockingly.

“N — o, no, really, I . . .”

“To be sure, sir! If I am a fool, then someone else here is one too. Treat me with respect; I am not such a rogue yet as you imagine. Though maybe I am a clown too. I am a slave, my wife is a slave, and so there is nothing for it but flattery. That’s how it is! You get something by it anyway, if only to make sop for the children. Sugar, scatter as much sugar as you can in

everything, that will make things more wholesome for you. I tell you this in secret, sir; maybe you will have need of it. Fortune has been hard on me, that is why I am a clown.”

“He-he-he! The old man is a comical fellow! He always makes us laugh!” piped Anfisa Petrovna.

“My dear madam and benefactress, a fool has a better time of it in this world! If I had only known that, I would have enlisted among the fools in early childhood, and I dare say by now I might have been a wise man. But as it is, I wanted to be a clever man at first, so now I am a fool in my old age.”

“Tell me, please,” interposed Obnoskin (he probably was not pleased by the remark about talents), lolling in a particularly free and easy way in his arm-chair and staring at the old man through his eyeglass as though at an insect, “tell me, please ... I always forget your surname . . . what the deuce is it? ...”

“Oh, my dear sir! Why, my surname, if it please you, is Yezhevikin; but what does that matter? Here I have been sitting without a job these nine years, I just go on living in accordance with the laws of nature. And my children, my children are simply a family of Holmskys. As the proverb goes, The rich man has calves, the poor man has kids/”

“Oh, yes . . . calves ... but that’s beside the point. Come, listen, I have been wanting to ask you a long time: why is it that when you come in, you look back at once? It’s very funny.”

“Why do I look back? Why, I am always fancying, sir, that someone behind me wants to slap me on the back and squash me like a fly. That is why I look round. I have become a monomaniac, sir.”

Again there was laughter. The governess got up from her seat as though she would go away, but sank back in her chair again. There was a look of pain and suffering on her face in spite of the colour that flooded her cheeks.

“You know who it is, my boy?” my uncle whispered. “It’s her father, you know!”

I stared at my uncle open-eyed. The name of Yezhevikin had completely slipped out of my mind. I had been playing the hero, had been dreaming all the journey of my proposed bride, had been building magnificent plans for her benefit, and had utterly forgotten her name, or rather had taken no notice of it from the first.

“What, her father?” I answered, also in a whisper. “Why, I thought she was an orphan.”

“It’s her father, my boy, her father. And do you know, a most honest, a most honourable man and he does not even drink, but only plays at being a fool; fearfully poor, my boy, eight children! They live on Nastya’s salary. He was turned out of the service through his tongue. He comes here every week. He is such a proud fellow — nothing will induce him to take help. I have offered it, many times I have offered it — he won’t take it. An embittered man.”

“Well, Yevgraf Larionitch, what news have you?” uncle asked, and slapped him warmly on the shoulder, noticing that the suspicious old man was already listening to our conversation. “What news, benefactor? Valentin Ignatyitch made a statement about Trishin’s case yesterday. The flour under his charge turned out to be short weight. It is that Trishin, madam, who looks at you and puffs like a samovar. Perhaps you graciously remember him? So Valentin Ignatyitch writes of Trishin: ‘If,’

said he, 'the often-mentioned Trishin could not guard his own niece's honour — she eloped with an officer last year —

'how/ said he, 'should he take care of government property?'
He stuck that into his report, by God, I am not lying/'
"Fie! What stories you tell!" cried Anfisa Petrovna.

"Just so, just so, just so! You've overshot the mark, friend Yevgraf," my uncle chimed in. "Ate! your tongue will be your ruin. You are a straightforward man, honourable and upright, I can say that, but you have a venomous tongue! And I can't understand how it is you can't get on with them. They seem good-natured people, simple ..."

"Kind friend and benefactor! But it's just the simple man that I am afraid of," cried the old man with peculiar fervour.

I liked the answer. I went rapidly up to Yezhevikin and warmly pressed his hand. The truth is, I wanted in some way to protest against the general tone and to show my sympathy for the old man openly. And perhaps, who knows? perhaps I wanted to raise myself in the opinion of Nastasya Yevgrafovna! But my movement led to no good.

"Allow me to ask you," I said, blushing and flustered as usual, "have you heard of the Jesuits?"

"No, my good sir, I haven't; well, maybe something . . . though how should we! But why?"

"Oh ... I meant to tell you something apropos. . . . But remind me some other time. But now let me assure you, I understand you and . . . know how to appreciate ..."

And utterly confused, I gripped his hand again.

“Certainly, I will remind you, sir, certainly. I will write it in golden letters. If you will allow me, I’ll tie a knot in my handkerchief.”

And he actually looked for a dry corner in his dirty, snuffy handkerchief, and tied a knot in it.

“Yevgraf Larionitch, take your tea,” said Praskovya Ilyinitchna.

“Immediately, my beautiful lady; immediately, my princess, I mean, not my lady! That’s in return for your tea. I met Stepan Alexyevitch Bahtcheyev on the road, madam. He was so festive that I didn’t know what to make of it! I began to wonder whether he wasn’t going to get married. Flatter away, flatter away!” he said in a half whisper, winking at me and screwing up his eyes as he carried his cup by me. “And how is it that my benefactor, my chief one, Foma Fomitch, is not to be seen? Isn’t he coming to tea?”

My uncle started as though he had been stung, and glanced timidly at his mother.

“I really don’t know,” he answered uncertainly, with a strange perturbation. “We sent for him, but he ... I don’t know really, perhaps he is indisposed. I have already sent Vidoplyasov and . . . Perhaps I ought to go myself, though?”

“I went in to him myself just now,” Yezhevikin brought out mysteriously.

“Is it possible!” cried out my uncle in alarm. “Well, how was it?”

“I went in to him, first of all, I paid him my respects. His honour said he should drink his tea in solitude, and then added that a crust of dry bread would be enough for him, yes.”

These words seemed to strike absolute terror into my uncle.

“But you should have explained to him, Yevgraf Larionitch; you should have told him,” my uncle said at last, looking at the old man with distress and reproach. “I did, I did.”

“Well?”

“For a long time he did not deign to answer me. He was sitting over some mathematical problem, he was working out something; one could see it was a brain-racking problem. He drew the breeches of Pythagoras, while I was there, I saw him myself. I repeated it three times, only at the fourth he raised his head and seemed to see me for the first time. ‘I am not coming,’ he said; ‘a learned gentleman has arrived here now, so I should be out of place beside a luminary like that!’ He made use of that expression ‘beside a luminary’.”

And the horrid old man stole a sly glance at me.

“That is just what I expected,” cried my uncle, clasping his hands. “That’s how I thought it would be. He says that about you, Sergey, that you are a ‘learned gentleman’. Well, what’s to be done now?”

“I must confess, uncle,” I answered with dignity, shrugging my shoulders, “it seems to me such an absurd refusal that it is not worth noticing, and I really wonder at your being troubled by it. . . .”

“Oh, my boy, you know nothing about it!” he cried, with a vigorous wave of his hand.

“It’s no use grieving now, sir,” Miss Perepelitsyn put in suddenly, “since all the wicked causes of it have come from you in the first place, Yegor Ilyitch. If you take off your head you don’t weep for your hair. You should have listened to your mamma, sir, and you would have had no cause for tears now.”

“Why, how am I to blame, Anna Nilovna? Have some fear of God!” said my uncle in an imploring voice, as though begging for an explanation.

“I do fear God, Yegor Ilyitch; but it all comes from your being an egoist, sir, and not loving your mother,” Miss Perepelitsyn answered with dignity. “Why didn’t you respect her wishes in the first place? She is your mother, sir. And I am not likely to tell you a lie, sir. I am a major’s daughter myself, and not just anybody, sir.”

It seemed to me that Miss Perepelitsyn had intervened in the conversation with the sole object of informing us all, and me in particular as a new-comer, that she was a major’s daughter and not just anybody.

“It’s because he ill-treats his own mother,” Madame la Genirale herself brought out at last in a menacing voice.

“Mamma, have mercy on us! How am I ill-treating you?”

“It is because you are a black-hearted egoist, Yegorushka,” Madame la Générale went on, growing more and more animated “Mamma, mamma! in what way am I a black-hearted egoist?” cried my uncle, almost in despair. “For five days, for five whole days you have been angry with me and will not speak to me. And what for? what for? Let them judge me, let the whole world judge me! But let them hear my defence too. I have long kept silent, mamma, you would not hear me; let these people hear me now. Anfisa Petrovna! Pavel Semyonitch, generous Pavel Semyonitch! Sergey, my dear! You are an outsider, you are, so to speak, a spectator. You can judge impartially. ...”

“Calm yourself, Yegor Tlyitch, calm yourself,” cried Anfisa Petrovna, “don’t kill your mamma.”

“I am not killing my mamma, Anfisa Petrovna; but here I lay bare my heart, you can strike at it!” my uncle went on, worked up to the utmost pitch as people of weak character sometimes are when they are driven out of all patience, though their heat is like the fire of burning straws.

“I want to say, Anfisa Petrovna, that I am not ill-treating any one. I start with saying that Foma Fomitch is the noblest and the most honour able of men, and a man of superior qualities too, but . . . but he has been unjust to me in this case.”

“H’m!” grunted Obnoskin, as though he wanted to irritate my uncle still more.

“Pavel Semyonitch, noble-hearted Pavel Semyonitch! Can you really think that I am, so to speak, an unfeeling stone?

Why, I see, I understand — with tears in my heart, I may say I understand — that all this misunderstanding comes from the excess of his affection for me. But, say what you like, he really is unjust in this case. I will tell you all about it.

I want to tell the whole story, Anfisa Petrovna, clearly and in full detail, that you may see from what the thing started, and whether mamma is right in being angry with me for not satisfying Foma Fomitch. And you listen too, Seryozha,” he added, addressing me, which he did, indeed, during the rest of his story, as though he were afraid of his other listeners and doubtful of their sympathy; “you, too, listen and decide whether I am right or wrong.

You will see what the whole business arose from. A week ago — yes, not more than a week — my old chief, General Rusapetov, was passing through our town with his wife and stepdaughter, and broke the journey there. I was overwhelmed. I hastened to seize the opportunity, I flew over, presented myself and invited them to dinner. He promised to come if it were possible.

He is a very fine man, I assure you; he is conspicuous for his virtues and is a man of the highest rank into the bargain! He has been a benefactor to his stepdaughter; he married an orphan girl to an admirable young man (now a lawyer at Malinova; still a young man, but with, one may say, an all-round education); in short, he is a general of generals. Well, of course there was a tremendous fuss and bustle in the house — cooks, fricassees — I sent for an orchestra.

I was delighted, of course, and looked festive; Foma Fomitch did not like my being delighted and looking festive! He sat down to the table — I remember, too, he was handed his favourite jelly and cream — he sat on and on without saying a word, then all at once jumped up. ‘I am being insulted, insulted!’ But why, in what way are you being insulted, Foma Fomitch?’ ‘You despise me now,’ he said; ‘you are taken up with generals now, you think more of generals now than of me.’ Well, of course I am making a long story short, so to say, I am only giving you the pith of it; but if only you knew what he said besides ... in a word, he stirred me to my inmost depths.

What was I to do? I was depressed by it, of course; it was a blow to me, I may say. I went about like a cock drenched with rain. The festive day anived. The general sent to say he couldn’t come, he apologised — so he was not coming. I went to Foma.

‘Come, Foma/ I said, ‘set your mind at rest, he is not coming/
And would you believe it, he wouldn’t forgive me, and that was
the end of it. ‘I have been insulted/ he said, ‘and that is all
about it!’ I said this and that. ‘No/ he said. ‘You can go to your
generals; you think more of generals than of me, you have
broken our bonds of friendship,’ he said. Of course, my dear, I
understand what he was angry over, I am not a block,

I am not a sheep, I am not a perfect post. It was, of course,
from the excess of his affection for me, from jealousy — he says
that himself — he is jealous of the general on my account, he is
afraid of losing my affection, he is testing me, he wants to see
how much I am ready to sacrifice for him. ‘No/ he said, ‘I am
just as good as the general for you, I am myself “your
Excellency” for you! I will be reconciled to you when you prove
your respect for me/ ‘In what way am I to prove my respect for
you, Foma Fomitch?”Call me for a whole day “your Excellency”,
says he, ‘then you will prove your respect.’

I felt as though I were dropping from the clouds; you can
picture my amazement. ‘That will serve you,’ said he, ‘as a
lesson not to be in ecstasies at the sight of generals when there
are other people, perhaps, superior to all your generals.’ Well,
at that point I lost patience, I confess it! I confess it openly.
‘Foma Fomitch/ I said, ‘is such a thing possible? Can I take it
upon myself to do it? Can I, have I the right to promote you to
be a general? Think who it is bestows the rank of a general.
How can I address you as, “your Excellency”?’

Why, it is infringing the decrees of Providence! Why, the
general is an honour to his country; the general has faced the
enemy, he has shed his blood on the field of honour. How am I
to call you “your Excellency”?’ He would not give way, there

was no doing anything. ‘Whatever you want, Foma/ I said, ‘I will do anything for you. Here you told me to shave off my whiskers because they were not patriotic enough — I shaved them off; I frowned, but I did shave them.

What is more, I will do anything you like, only do give up the rank of a general’/ ‘No/ said he, ‘I won’t be reconciled till you call me “your Excellency”; that/ said he, ‘will be good for your moral character, it will humble your spirit!’ said he. And so now for a week, a whole week, he won’t speak to me; he is cross to everyone that comes; he heard about you, that you were learned — that was my fault; I got warm and said too much — so he said he would not set foot in the house if you came into it.

‘So I am not learned enough for you now,’ said he. So there will be trouble when he hears now about Korovkin! Come now, please, tell me in what way have I been to blame? Was I to take on myself to call him ‘your Excellency’? Why, it is impossible to live in such a position! What did he drive poor Bahtcheyev away from the table to-day for? Supposing Bahtcheyev is not a great astronomer, why I am not a great astronomer, and you are not a great astronomer. . . . Why is it? Why is it?”

“Because you are envious, Yegorushka,” mumbled Madame la Générale again.

“Mamma,” cried my uncle in despair, “you will drive me out of my mind! . . . Those are not your words, you are repeating what others say, mamma! I am, in fact, made out a stone, a block, a lamp-post and not your son.”

“I heard, uncle,” I interposed, utterly amazed by his story— “I heard from Bahtcheyev, I don’t know whether it was true or

not — that Foma Fomitch was jealous of Ilyusha's nameday, and declares that to-morrow is his nameday too. I must own that this characteristic touch so astounded me that I . . .”

“His birthday, my dear, his birthday!” my uncle interrupted me, speaking rapidly. “He only made a mistake in the word, but he is right; to-morrow is his birthday. Truth, my boy, before everything. ...”

“It's not his birthday at all!” cried Sashenka.

“Not his birthday!” cried my uncle, in a fluster.

“It's not his birthday, papa. You simply say what isn't true to deceive yourself and to satisfy Foma Fomitch. His birthday was in March. Don't you remember, too, we went on a pilgrimage to the monastery just before, and he wouldn't let anyone sit in peace in the carriage? He kept crying out that the cushion was crushing his side, and pinching us; he pinched auntie twice in his ill humour. I am fond of camellias/ he said, 'for I have the taste of the most refined society, and you grudge picking me any from the conservatory.' And all day long he sulked and grizzled and would not talk to us. . . .”

I fancy that if a bomb had fallen in the middle of the room it would not have astounded and alarmed them all as much as this open mutiny — and of whom? — of a little girl who was not even permitted to speak aloud in her grandmother's presence. Madame fa Generale, dumb with amazement and fury, rose from her seat, stood erect and stared at her insolent grandchild, unable to believe her eyes. My uncle was paralysed with horror.

“She is allowed to do just as she likes, she wants to be the death of her grandmother!” cried Miss Perepelitsyn.

“Sasha, Sasha, think what you are saying! What’s the matter with you, Sasha?” cried my uncle, rushing from one to the other, from his mother to Sashenka to stop her.

“I won’t hold my tongue, papa!” cried Sashenka, leaping up from her chair with flashing eyes and stamping with her feet. “I won’t hold my tongue! We have all suffered too long from Foma Fomitch, from your nasty, horrid Foma Fomitch! Foma Fomitch will be the ruin of us all, for people keep on telling him that he is so clever, generous, noble, learned, a mix-up of all the virtues, a sort of potpourri, and like an idiot Foma Fomitch believes it all.

So many nice things are offered to him that anyone else would be ashamed; but Foma Fomitch gobbles up all that is put before him and asks for more. You’ll see, he will be the ruin of us all, and it’s all papa’s fault! Horrid, horrid Foma Fomitch! I speak straight out, I am not afraid of anyone! He is stupid, ill-tempered, dirty, ungentle-manly, cruel-hearted, a bully, a mischief-maker, a liar. . . . Oh, I’d turn him out of the house this minute, I would, but papa adores him, papa is crazy over him!”

“Oh!” shrieked her grandmother, and she fell in a swoon on the sofa.

“Agafya Timofyevna, my angel,” cried Anfisa Petrovna, “take my smelling-salts! Water, make haste, water!”

“Water, water!” shouted my uncle. “Mamma, mamma, calm yourself! I beg you on my knees to calm yourself! ...”

“You ought to be kept on bread and water and shut up in a dark room . . . you’re a murderess!” Miss Perepelitsyn, shaking with spite, hissed at Sashenka.

“I will be kept on bread and water, I am not afraid of anything!” cried Sashenka, moved to frenzy in her turn. “I will defend papa because he can’t defend himself. Who is he, who is your Foma Fomitch compared with papa? He eats papa’s bread and insults papa, the ungrateful creature. I would tear him to pieces, your Foma Fomitch! I’d challenge him to a duel and shoot him on the spot with two pistols! . . .”

“Sasha, Sasha,” cried my uncle in despair. “Another word and I am ruined, hopelessly ruined.”

“Papa,” cried Sashenka, flinging herself headlong at her father, dissolving into tears and hugging him in her arms, “papa, how can you ruin yourself like this, you so kind, and good, and merry and clever? How can you give in to that horrid ungrateful man, be his plaything and let him turn you into ridicule? Papa, my precious papa! ...”

She burst into sobs, covered her face with her hands and ran out of the room.

A fearful hubbub followed. Madame la Générale lay in a swoon. My uncle was kneeling beside her kissing her hands. Miss Perepelitsyn was wriggling about them and casting spiteful but triumphant glances at us.

Anfisa Petrovna was moistening the old lady’s temples and applying her smelling-salts. Praskovya Ilyinitchna was shedding tears and trembling, Yezhevikin was looking for a corner to seek refuge in, while the governess stood pale and completely overwhelmed with terror. Mizintchikov was the only one who remained unchanged. He got up, went to the window and began looking out of it, resolutely declining to pay attention to the scene around him.

All at once Madame la Générale sat up, drew herself up and scanned me with a menacing eye.

“Go away!” she shouted, stamping her foot at me.

I must confess that this I had not in the least expected.

“Go away! Go out of the house! What has he come for? Don’t let me see a trace of him!”

“Mamma, mamma, what do you mean? Why, this is Seryozha,” my uncle muttered, shaking all over with terror. “Why, he has come to pay us a visit, mamma.”

“What Seryozha? Nonsense. I won’t hear a word. Go away! It’s Korovkin. I am convinced it is Korovkin. My presentiments never deceive me. He has come to turn Foma Fomitch out; he has been sent for with that very object. I have a presentiment in my heart. ... Go away, you scoundrel!”

“Uncle, if this is how it is,” I said, spluttering with honest indignation, “then excuse me, I’ll ...” And I reached after my hat.

“Sergey, Sergey, what are you about? . . . Well, this really is. . . . Mamma, this is Seryozha! . . . Sergey, upon my word!” he cried, racing after me and trying to take away my hat. “You are my visitor; you’ll stay, I wish it! She doesn’t mean it,” he went on in a whisper; “she only goes on like this when she is angry. . . . You only keep out of her sight just at first . . . keep out of the way and it will all pass over. She will forgive you, I assure you! She is good-natured, only she works herself up. You hear she takes you for Korovkin, but afterwards she will forgive you, I assure you. . . . What do you want?” he cried to Gavril, who came into the room trembling with fear.

Gavrila came in not alone; with him was a very pretty peasant boy of sixteen who had been taken as a house serf on account of his good looks, as I heard afterwards. His name was Falaley. He was wearing a peculiar costume, a red silk shirt with embroidery at the neck and a belt of gold braid, full black velveteen breeches, and goatskin boots turned over with red. This costume was designed by Madame la Générale herself. The boy was sobbing bitterly, and tears rolled one after another from his big blue eyes.

“What’s this now?” cried my uncle. “What has happened? Speak, you ruffian!”

“Foma Fomitch told us to come here; he is coming after us himself,” answered the despondent Gavrila. “Me for an examination, while he . . .”

“He?”

“He has been dancing, sir,” answered Gavrila in a tearful voice.

“Dancing!” cried my uncle in horror.

“Dancing,” blubbered Falaley with a sob.

“The Komarinsky!”

“Yes, the Kom-a-rin-sky.”

“And Foma Fomitch found him?”

“Ye-es, he found me.”

“You’ll be the death of me!” cried my uncle. “I am done for!” And he clutched his head in both hands.

“Foma Fomitch!” Vidoplyasov announced, entering the room. The door opened, and Foma Fomitch in his own person stood facing the perplexed company.

OF THE WHITE BULL AND THE KOMARINSKY PEASANT

BEFORE I have the honour of presenting the reader with Foma Fomitch in person, I think it is absolutely essential to say a few words about Falaley and to explain what there was terrible in the fact of his dancing the Komarinsky and Foma Fomitch's finding him engaged in that light-hearted diversion. Falaley was a house serf boy, an orphan from the cradle, and a godson of my uncle's late wife. My uncle was very fond of him.

That fact alone was quite sufficient to make Foma Fomitch, after he had settled at Stepantchikovo and gained complete domination over my uncle, take a dislike to the latter's favourite, Falaley. But Madame la Générale took a particular fancy to the boy, who, in spite of Foma Fomitch's wrath, remained upstairs in attendance on the family. Madame la Générale herself insisted upon it, and Foma gave way, storing up the injury — he looked on everything as an injury — in his heart and revenging it on every favourable occasion on my uncle, who was in no way responsible. Falaley was wonderfully good-looking. He had a girlish face, the face of a beautiful peasant girl.

Madame la Generale petted and spoiled him, prized him as though he were a rare and pretty toy, and there was no saying which she loved best, her little curly black dog Ami or Falaley. We have already referred to his costume, which was her idea. The young ladies gave him pomatum, and it was the duty of the barber Kuzma to curl his hair on holidays.

This boy was a strange creature. He could not be called a perfect idiot or imbecile, but he was so naive, so truthful and

simple-hearted, that he might sometimes be certainly taken for a fool.

If he had a dream, he would go at once to tell it to his master or mistress. He joined in the conversation of the gentlefolk without caring whether he was interrupting them. He would tell them things quite impossible to tell gentlefolks. He would dissolve into the most genuine tears when his mistress fell into a swoon or when his master was too severely scolded.

He sympathised with every sort of distress. He would sometimes go up to Madame la Generale, kiss her hands, and beg her not to be cross — and the old lady would magnanimously forgive him these audacities. He was sensitive in the extreme, kind-hearted, as free from malice as a lamb and as gay as a happy child. They gave him dainties from the dinner-table.

He always stood behind Madame la Generale's chair and was awfully fond of sugar. When he was given a lump of sugar he would nibble at it with his strong milk-white teeth, and a gleam of indescribable pleasure shone in his merry blue eyes and all over his pretty little face.

For a long time Foma Fomitch raged; but reflecting at last that he would get nothing by anger, he suddenly made up his mind to be Falaley's benefactor. After first pitching into my uncle for doing nothing for the education of the house serfs, he determined at once to set about training the poor boy in morals, good manners and French.

"What I" he would say in defence of his absurd idea (an idea not confined to Foma Fomitch, as the writer of these lines can

testify), “what! he is always upstairs waiting on his mistress; one day, forgetting that he does not know French, she will say to him, for instance: “Donnay mooah mon mooshooar’ — he ought to be equal to the occasion and able to do his duty even then!”

But it appeared not only that it was impossible to teach Falaley French, but that the cook Andron, the boy’s uncle, who had disinterestedly tried to teach him to read Russian, had long ago given it up in despair and put the alphabet away on the shelf.

Falaley was so dull at book-learning that he could understand absolutely nothing. Moreover, this led to further trouble. The house serfs began calling Falaley, in derision, a Frenchman, and old Gavrila, my uncle’s valet, openly ventured to deny the usefulness of learning French. This reached Foma Fomitch’s ears and, bursting with wrath, he made his opponent, Gavrila, himself learn French as a punishment. This was the origin of the whole business of teaching the servants French which so exasperated Mr. Bahtcheyev.

It was still worse in regard to manners. Foma was absolutely unable to train Falaley to suit his ideas, and in spite of his prohibition, the boy would go in to tell him his dreams in the morning, which Foma Fomitch considered extremely ill-mannered and familiar. But Falaley obstinately remained Falaley. My uncle was, of course, the first to suffer for all this.

“Do you know, do you know what he has done to-day?” Foma would exclaim, selecting a moment when all were gathered together in order to produce a greater sensation. “Do you know what your systematic spoiling is coming to? To-day he gobbled up a piece of pie given him at the table; and do you know what

he said of it? Come here, come here, silly fool; come here, idiot; come here, red face. ...”

Falaley would come up weeping and rubbing his eyes with both hands.

“What did you say when you greedily ate up your pie? Repeat it before everyone!”

Falaley would dissolve in bitter tears and make no answer.

“Then I’ll speak for you, if that’s how it is. You said, slapping yourself on your stuffed and vulgar stomach: ‘I’ve gobbled up the pie as Martin did the soap!’ Upon my word, Colonel, can expressions like that be used in educated society, still more in aristocratic society? Did you say it or not? Speak!”

“I di-id ...” Falaley would assent, sobbing.

“Well, then, tell me now, does Martin eat soap? Where have you seen a Martin who eats soap? Tell me, give me an idea of this phenomenal Martin!”

Silence.

“I am asking you,” Foma would persist, “who is this Martin? I want to see him, I want to make his acquaintance. Well, what is he? A registiy clerk, an astronomer, a provincial, a poet, an army captain, a serving man — he must have been something. Answer!”

“A ser-er-ving ma-an,” Falaley would answer at last, still weeping.

“Whose? Who is his master?”

But Falaley was utterly unable to say who was his master. It would end, of course, in Foma Fomitch’s rushing out of the room in a passion, crying out that he had been insulted;

Madame la Generate would show symptoms of an attack, while my uncle would curse the hour of his birth, beg everybody's pardon, and for the rest of the day walk about on tiptoe in his own rooms.

As ill-luck would have it, on the day after the trouble over Martin and the soap, Falaley, who had succeeded in completely forgetting about Martin and all his woes of the previous day, informed Foma Fomitch as he took in his tea in the morning that he had had a dream about a white bull.

This was the last straw! Foma Fomitch was moved to indescribable indignation, he promptly summoned my uncle and began upbraiding him for the vulgarity of the dream dreamed by his Faleley. This time severe steps were taken: Falaley was punished, he had to kneel down in the corner. He was sternly forbidden to dream of such coarse rustic subjects.

"What I am angry at," said Foma, "apart from the fact that he really ought not to dare to think of blurting out his dreams to me, especially a dream of a white bull — apart from that — you must agree, Colonel — what is the white bull but a proof of coarseness, ignorance and loutishness in your unkempt Falaley?"

As the thoughts are, so will the dreams be. Did I not tell you before that you would never make anything of him, and that he ought not to remain upstairs waiting upon the family? You will never, never develop that senseless peasant soul into anything lofty or poetical. Can't you manage," he went on, addressing Falaley, "can't you manage to dream of something elegant, refined, genteel, some scene from good society, such as gentlemen playing cards or ladies walking in a lovely garden?"

Falaley promised he would be sure to dream next night of gentlemen or ladies walking in a lovely garden.

As he went to bed, Falaley prayed tearfully on the subject and wondered for a long time what he could do so as not to dream of the accursed white bull. But deceitful are the hopes of man. On waking up next morning, he remembered with horror that he had again been dreaming all night of the hateful white bull, and had not dreamed of even one lady walking in a lovely garden. This time the consequences were singular.

Foma Fomitch positively declared that he did not believe in the possibility of such a coincidence, the possibility of such a repetition of a dream, and that Falaley was prompted to say this by someone of the household, perhaps even by the colonel himself on purpose to annoy Foma Fomitch. There was no end of an uproar, tears and reproaches. Madame la Générale was taken ill towards the evening, the whole household wore a dejected air. There was still a taint hope that the following, that is the third, night Falaley would be sure to have some dream of refined society.

What was the universal indignation when for a whole week, every blessed night, Falaley went on dreaming of the white bull and nothing but the white bull. It was no use even to think of refined society.

But the most interesting point was that Falaley was utterly incapable of thinking of lying, of simply saying that he had dreamed not of the white bull, but of a carriage, for instance, full of ladies and Foma Fomitch. This was all the more strange since lying indeed would not have been so very sinful in so

extreme a case. But Falaley was so truthful that he positively could not tell a lie even if he wanted to. It was, indeed, not even suggested to him by anyone.

They all knew that he would betray himself at the first moment, and Foma Fomitch would immediately detect him in lying. What was to be done? My uncle's position was becoming intolerable. Falaley was absolutely incorrigible. The poor boy was positively growing thinner from worry.

The housekeeper Malanya declared that he was bewitched, and sprinkled him with magic water. She was assisted in this compassionate and salutary operation by the tender-hearted Praskovya Ilyinitchna, but even that was no use. Nothing was of use!

“The deuce take the damned thing!” Falaley said. “The same dream every night! Every evening I pray, ‘Don't let me dream of the white bull, don't let me dream of the white bull!’ and there it is, there it is, the damned beast facing me, huge, with horns and such thick lips, oo-oo-oo!”

My uncle was in despair, but luckily Foma Fomitch seemed all at once to have forgotten about the white bull. Of course no one believed that Foma Fomitch could forget a circumstance so important. Everyone assumed with terror that he was keeping the white bull in reserve, and would bring it out on the first suitable occasion. It appeared later on that Foma Fomitch had no thoughts to spare for the white bull at that moment. He had other business in hand, other cares.

Other plans were maturing in his beneficent and fertile brain. That is why he let Falaley breathe in peace, and everyone else

too had a respite. The boy grew gay again, and even began to forget what had happened; even the white bull began to visit him less and less frequently, though it still at times reminded him of its fantastic existence. In fact, everything would have gone well if there had been no such thing as the Komarinsky.

It must be noted that Falaley was an excellent dancer. Dancing was his chief accomplishment, even something like his vocation. He danced with vigour, with inexhaustible gaiety, and he was particularly fond of dancing the Komarinsky Peasant. Not that he was so much attracted by the frivolous and in any case inexplicable steps of that volatile peasant — no, he liked dancing the Komarinsky solely because to hear the Komarinsky and not dance to the tune was utterly beyond him.

Sometimes in the evenings two or three of the footmen, the coachmen, the gardener who played the fiddle, and even some of the ladies of the servants' hall would gather together in a circle in some back yard as far away as possible from Foma Fomitch. Music and dances would begin, and finally the Komarinsky would triumphantly come into its own.

The orchestra consisted of two balalaikas, a guitar, a fiddle, and a tambourine, with which the postilion Mityushka was a capital hand. Falaley's condition was worth watching at such times: he would dance to complete oblivion of himself, to utter exhaustion, encouraged by the shouts and laughter of his audience.

He would squeal, shout, laugh, clap his hands. He danced as though carried away by some intangible outside force with which he could not cope, and he struggled persistently to keep up with the continually increasing pace of the reckless tune as

he tapped on the ground with his heels. These were minutes of real delight to him; and everything would have gone happily and merrily if rumours of the Komarinsky had not at last reached Foma Fomitch.

Foma Fomitch was petrified, and sent at once for the colonel. "There is only one thing I wish to learn from you," Foma began, "have you positively sworn to be the ruin of that luckless idiot or not? In the first case I will stand aside at once; if not, then I . . ."

"But what is the matter? What has happened?" cried my uncle, alarmed.

"You ask what has happened? Do you know that he is dancing the Komarinsky?"

"Well . . . well, what of it?"

"Well, what of it!" shrieked Foma. "And you say that — you, their master, standing in a sense in the place of their father! But have you then a true idea of what the Komarinsky is? Do you know that that song describes a debauched peasant, attempting in a state of drunkenness the most immoral action? Do you know what sacrilege it is that vicious Little Russian is committing? He is trampling upon the most precious bonds and, so to say, stamping them under his big loutish boots, accustomed to tread only the floor of the village inn. And do you realise that you have wounded my moral feelings by your answer? Do you realise that you have insulted me personally by your answer? Do you understand that or not?"

"But, Foma; why, it's only a song, Foma. ..."

"You say only a song! And you are not ashamed that you own to me that you know that song — you, a member of

honourable society, the father of honourable, innocent children and a colonel into the bargain! Only a song! But I am certain that the song is drawn from real life. Only a song! But what decent man can without a blush of shame admit that he knows that song, that he has ever heard that song? What man could?"

"Well, but, you see, you know it yourself, Foma, since you ask about it," my disconcerted uncle answered in the simplicity of his heart.

"What, I know it, I . . . P You have insulted me," Foma Fomitch cried at once, leaping up from his chair and spluttering with fury.

He had never expected such a crushing answer.

I will not undertake to describe the wrath of Foma Fomitch. The colonel was ignominiously driven from the presence of the guardian of morality for the ill manners and tactlessness of his reply. But from that hour Foma Fomitch vowed to catch Falaley in the act of dancing the Komarinsky. In the evening, when everyone supposed he was busy at work, he stole out into the garden, went the round of the kitchen garden, and threaded his way into the hemp patch, from which there was a view in the distance of the back yard in which the dances took place. He stalked poor Falaley as a sportsman stalks a bird, picturing with relish the wiggling he would, if he succeeded, give the whole household and the colonel in particular. His unwearying efforts were at last crowned with success. He had come upon the Komarinsky! It will be understood now why my uncle tore his hair when he saw Falaley weeping and heard Vidoplyasov announce Foma Fomitch, who so unexpectedly and at such a moment of perturbation was standing before us in person.

Chapter VII

FOMA FOMITCH

I SCRUTINISED this gentleman with intense curiosity.

Gavrila had been right in saying that he was an ugly little man. Foma was short, with light eyebrows and eyelashes and grizzled hair, with a hooked nose, and with little wrinkles all over his face. On his chin there was a big wart. He was about fifty.

He came in softly with measured steps, with his eyes cast down. But yet the most insolent self-confidence was expressed in his face, and in the whole of his pedantic figure. To my astonishment, he made his appearance in a dressing-gown — of a foreign cut it is true, but still a dressing-gown — and he wore slippers too. The collar of his shirt unadorned by any cravat was a lay-down one a Venfant; this gave Foma Fomitch an extremely foolish look.

He went up to an empty arm-chair, moved it to the table, and sat down in it without saying a word to anyone. All the hubbub, all the excitement that had been raging a minute before, vanished instantaneously. There was such a hush that one could have heard a pin drop. Madame la Générale became as meek as a lamb. The cringing infatuation of this poor imbecile for Foma Fomitch was apparent now. She fixed her eyes upon her idol as though gloating over the sight of him. Miss Perepelitsyn rubbed her hands with a simper, and poor Praskovya Ilyinitchna was visibly trembling with alarm. My uncle began bustling about at once.

“Tea, tea, sister! Only plenty of sugar in it, sister; Foma Fomitch likes plenty of sugar in his tea after his nap. You do like plenty of sugar, don’t you, Foma?”

“I don’t care for any tea just now!” Foma pronounced deliberately and with dignity, waving him off with a careworn air. “You always keep on about plenty of sugar.”

These words and Foma’s entrance, so incredibly ludicrous in its pedantic dignity, interested me extremely, i was curious to find out to what point, to what disregard of decency the insolence of this upstart little gentleman would go.

“Foma,” cried my uncle. “Let me introduce my nephew Sergey Alexandrovitch! He has just arrived.”

Foma Fomitch looked him up and down.

“I am surprised that you always seem to take pleasure in systematically interrupting me, Colonel,” he said after a significant silence, taking absolutely no notice of me. “One talks to you of something serious, and you . . . discourse ... of goodness knows what. . . . Have you seen Falaley?”

“I have, Foma. . . .”

“Ah, you have seen him. Well, I will show you him again though you have seen him; you can admire your handiwork ...ma moral sense. Come here, you idiot! come here, you Dutch-faced fool! Well, come along! Don’t be afraid!”

Falaley went up to him with his mouth open, sobbing and gulping back his tears. Foma Fomitch looked at him with relish.

“I called him a Dutch-faced fool with intention, Pavel Semyonitch,” he observed, lolling at his ease in his low chair and turning slightly towards Obnoskin, who was sitting next him. “And speaking generally, you know, I see no necessity for softening my expressions in any case. The truth should be the

truth. And however you cover up filth it will still remain filth. Why trouble to soften it? It's deceiving oneself and others. Only a silly worldly numskull can feel the need of such senseless conventions. Tell me — I submit it to your judgment — do you find anything lovely in that face? I mean, of course, anything noble, lovely, exalted, not just vulgar red cheeks.”

Foma Fomitch spoke quietly, evenly, and with a kind of majestic nonchalance.

“Anything lovely in him?” answered Obnoskin, with insolent carelessness. “I think that he is simply a good piece of roast beef — and nothing else.”

“Went up to the looking-glass and looked into it to-day,” Foma continued, pompously omitting the pronoun. “I am far from considering myself a beauty, but I could not help coming to the conclusion that there is something in these grey eyes which distinguished me from any Falaley. There is thought, there is life, there is intelligence in these eyes. It is not myself I am praising. I am speaking generally of our class.

Now what do you think, can there be a scrap, a grain of soul in that living beefsteak? Yes, indeed, take note, Pavel Semyonitch, how these people, utterly devoid of thought and ideal, and living by meat alone, always have revoltingly fresh complexions, coarsely and stupidly fresh! Would you like to know the level of his intellectual faculties. Hey, you image! Come nearer, let us admire you. Why are you gaping? Do you want to swallow a whale? Are you handsome? Answer, are you handsome?”

“I a-am!” answered Falaley, with smothered sobs.

Obnoskin roared with laughter. I felt that I was beginning to tremble with anger.

“Do you hear?” Foma went on, turning to Obnoskin in triumph. “Would you like to hear something more? I have come to put him through an examination. You see, Pavel Semyonitch, there are people who are desirous of corrupting and ruining this poor idiot. Perhaps I am too severe in my judgment, perhaps I am mistaken; but I speak from love of humanity. He was just now dancing the most improper of dances. That is of no concern to anyone here. But now hear for yourself. . . . Answer: what were you doing just now? Answer, answer immediately — do you hear?”

“I was da-ancing,” said Falaley, mastering his sobs.

“What were you dancing? What dance? Speak!”

“The Komarinsky. ...”

“The Komarinsky! And who was that Komarinsky? What was the Komarinsky? Do you suppose I can understand anything from that answer? Come, give us an idea. Who was your Komarinsky?”

“A pea-easant. ...”

“A peasant, only a peasant! I am surprised! A remarkable peasant, then! Then was it some celebrated peasant, if poems and dances are made about him? Come, answer!”

Foma could not exist without tormenting people, he played with his victim like a cat with a mouse; but Falaley remained mute, whimpering and unable to understand the question.

“Answer,” Foma persisted. “You are asked what sort of peasant was it? Speak! . . . Was he a seignorial peasant, a crown peasant, free, bond, industrial? There are ever so many sorts of peasants. ...”

“In-dus-tri-al. ...”

“Ah, industrial! Do you hear, Pavel Semyonitch? A new historical fact: the Komarinsky peasant was industrial. H’m. . . . Well, what did that industrial peasant do? For what exploits is he celebrated in song . . . and dance?”

The question was a delicate one, and since it was put to Falaley, a risky one too.

“Come . . . Though ...” Obnoskin began, glancing towards his mamma, who was beginning to wriggle on the sofa in a peculiar way.

But what was to be done? Foma Fomitch’s whims were respected as law.

“Upon my word, uncle, if you don’t suppress that fool he’ll . . . you see what he is working up to — Falaley will blurt out some nonsense, I assure you ...” I whispered to my uncle, who was utterly distracted and did not know what line to take.

“You had really better, Foma ..,” he began. “Here, I want to introduce to you, Foma, my nephew, a young man who is studying mineralogy.”

“I “beg you, Colonel, not to interrupt me with your mineralogy, a subject of which, as far as I am aware, you know nothing, and others perhaps little more. I am not a baby. He will answer me that this peasant, instead of working for the welfare of his family, has been drinking till he is tipsy, has sold his coat for drink, and is running about the street in an inebriated condition. That is, as is well known, the subject of the poem that sings the praises of drink. Don’t be uneasy, he knows now what he has to answer. Come, answer: what did that peasant do? Come, I have prompted you, I have put the words into your

mouth. What I want is to hear it from you yourself, what he did, for what he was famous, how he gained the immortal glory of being sung by the troubadours. Well?"

The luckless Falaley looked round him in misery and, not knowing what to say, opened and shut his mouth like a carp hauled out of the water on to the sand.

"I am ashamed to sa-ay!" he bellowed at last in utter despair.

"Ah, ashamed to say!" bellowed Foma in triumph. "See, that's the answer I have wrung out of him, Colonel! Ashamed to say, but not ashamed to do. That's the morality which you have sown, which has sprung up and which you are now . . . watering; but it is useless to waste words! Go to the kitchen now, Falaley. I'll say nothing to you now, out of regard for my audience, but to-day, to-day you will be severely and rigorously punished. If not, if this time they put you before me, you may stay here and entertain your betters with the Komarinsky while I will leave this house to-day! That's enough. I have spoken, you can go!"

"Come, I think you really are severe ..," mumbled Obnoskin.

"Just so, just so, just so," my uncle began crying out, but he broke off and subsided. Foma looked gloomily askance at him.

"I wonder, Pavel Semyonitch," he went on, "what all our contemporary writers, poets, learned men and thinkers are about. How is it they pay no attention to what songs are being sung by the Russian people and to what songs they are dancing? What have the Pushkins, the Lermontovs, the Borozdins been about all this time? I wonder at them. The people dance the Komarinsky, the apotheosis of drunkenness, while they sing of forget-me-nots!

Why don't they write poems of a more moral tone for popular use, why don't they fling aside their forget-me-nots? It's a social question. Let them depict a peasant, but a peasant made genteel, so to say, a villager and not a peasant; let them paint me the village sage in his simplicity, maybe even in his bark shoes — I don't object even to that — but brimming over with the virtues which — I make bold to say — some over-lauded Alexander of Macedon may envy.

I know Russia and Russia knows me, that is why I say this. Let them portray that peasant, weighed down maybe with a family and grey hair, in a stuffy hut, hungry, too, maybe, but contented; not repining, but blessing his poverty, and indifferent to the rich man's gold. Let the rich man at last with softened heart bring him his gold; let, indeed, in this the virtues of the peasant be united with the virtues of his master, perhaps a grand gentleman.

The villager and the grand gentleman so widely separated in social grade are made one at last in virtue — that is an exalted thought! But what do we see? On one side forget-me-nots, and on the other the peasant dashing out of the pothouse and running about the street in a dishevelled condition! What is there poetic in that? Tell me, pray, what is there to admire in that? Where is the wit? Where is the grace? Where is the morality? I am amazed at it!"

"I am ready to pay you a hundred roubles for such words," said Yezhevikin, with an enthusiastic air. "And you know the bald devil will try and get it out of me," he whispered on the sly.

"Flatter away, flatter away!"

"H'm, yes . . . you've put that very well," Obnoskin pronounced.

“Exactly so, exactly so,” cried my uncle, who had been listening with the deepest attention and looking at me with triumph.

“What a subject has come up!” he whispered, rubbing his hands. “A topic of many aspects, dash it all! Foma Fomitch, here is my nephew,” he added, in the overflow of his feelings. “He is engaged in literary pursuits too, let me introduce him.” As before, Foma Fomitch paid not the slightest attention to my uncle’s introduction.

“For God’s sake, don’t introduce me any more! I entreat you in earnest,” I whispered to my uncle, with a resolute air.

“Ivan Ivanitch!” Foma began, suddenly addressing Mizintchikov and looking intently at him, “we have just been talking. What is your opinion?”

“Mine? You are asking me?” Mizintchikov responded in surprise, looking as though he had only just woken up.

“Yes, you. I am asking you because I value the opinion of really clever people, and not the problematic wiseacres who are only clever because they are being continually introduced as clever people, as learned people, and are sometimes sent for expressly to be made a show of or something of the sort.”

This thrust was aimed directly at me. And yet there was no doubt that though Foma Fomitch took no notice whatever of me, he had begun this whole conversation concerning literature entirely for my benefit, to dazzle, to annihilate, to crush at the first step the clever and learned young man from Petersburg. I at any rate had no doubt of it.

“If you want to know my opinion, I ... I agree with your opinion,” answered Mizintchikov listlessly and reluctantly.

“You always agree with me! It’s positively wearisome,”

replied Foma. “I tell you frankly, Pavel Semyonitch,” he went on, after a brief silence again addressing Obnoskin, “if I respect the immortal Karamzin it is not for his history, not for Mar fa Posadnitsa, not for Old and New Russia, but just for having written Frol Silin; it is a noble epic! It is a purely national product, and will live for ages and ages! a most lofty epic!”

“Just so, just so! a lofty epoch! Frol Silin, a benevolent man! I remember, I have read it. He bought the freedom of two girls, too, and then looked towards heaven and wept. A very lofty trait,” my uncle chimed in, beaming with satisfaction.

My poor uncle! he never could resist taking part in an intellectual conversation. Foma gave a malicious smile, but he remained silent.

“They write very interestingly, though, even now,” Anfisa Petrovna intervened discreetly. “The Mysteries of Brussels, for instance.”

“I should not say so,” observed Foma, as it were regretfully. “I was lately reading one of the poems ... not up to much! ‘Forget-me-nots’. Of contemporary writers, if you will, the one I like best of all is ‘Scribbler’, a light pen!”

“‘Scribbler’!” cried Anfisa Petrovna. “Is that the man who writes letters in the magazines? Ah, how enchanting it is, what playing with words!”

“Precisely, playing with words; he, so to speak, plays with his pen. An extraordinary lightness of style.”

“Yes, but he is a pedant!” Obnoskin observed carelessly.

“Yes, a pedant he is, I don’t dispute it; but a charming pedant, a graceful pedant! Of course, not one of his ideas would stand serious criticism, but one is carried away by his lightness! A babbler, I agree, but a charming babbler, a graceful babbler. Do you remember, for instance, in one of his articles he mentions that he has his own estates?”

“Estates!” my uncle caught up. “That’s good! In what province?”

Foma stopped, looking fixedly at my uncle, and went on in the same tone:

“Tell me in the name of common sense, of what interest is it to me, the reader, to know that he has his own estates? If he has — I congratulate him on it! But how charmingly, how jestingly, it is described! He sparkles with wit, he splashes with wit, he boils over? He is a Narzan of wit! Yes, that is the way to write! I fancy I should write just like that, if I were to consent to write for magazines. ...”

“Perhaps you would do even better,” Yezhevikin observed respectfully.

“There is positively something musical in the language,” my uncle put in.

Foma Fomitch lost patience at last.

“Colonel,” he said, “is it not possible to ask you — with all conceivable delicacy of course — not to interfere with us, but to allow us to finish our conversation in peace. You cannot offer an opinion in our conversation! You cannot. Don’t disturb our agreeable literary chat. Look after your land, drink your tea, but . . . leave literature alone. It will lose nothing by it, I assure you — I assure you!”

This was surpassing the utmost limit of impudence! I did not know what to think.

“Why, you yourself, Foma, said it was musical,” my uncle brought out in confusion and distress.

“Quite so, but I spoke with a knowledge of the subject, I spoke appropriately; while you ...”

“To be sure, but we spoke with intellect,” put in Yezhevikin, wriggling round Foma Fomitch. “We have just a little intelligence, though we may have to borrow some; just enough to run a couple of government departments and we might manage a third, if need be — that’s all we can boast of!”

“So it seems I have been talking nonsense again,” said my uncle in conclusion, and he smiled his good-natured smile.

“You admit it, anyway,” observed Foma.

“It’s all right, it’s all right, Foma, I am not angry. I know that you pull me up like a friend, like a relation, like a brothei. I have myself allowed you to do it, begged you to, indeed. It’s a good thing. It’s for my benefit. I thank you for it and will profit by it.”

My patience was exhausted. All that I had hitherto heard about Foma Fomitch had seemed to me somewhat exaggerated. Now when I saw it all for myself, my astonishment was beyond all bounds. I could not believe my senses; I could not understand such impudence, such insolent domineering on one side and such voluntary slavery, such credulous good nature on the other. Though, indeed, my uncle himself was confused by such impudence. That was evident ...

I was burning with desire to come to grips with Foma, to do battle with him, to be rude to him in some way, in as startling a

fashion as possible — and then let come what may! This idea excited me. I looked for an opportunity, and completely ruined the brim of my hat while I waited for it. But the opportunity did not present itself. Foma absolutely refused to notice me.

“You are right, perfectly right, Foma,” my uncle went on, doing his utmost to recover himself, and to smoothe over the unpleasantness of what had been said before. “What you say is true, Foma. I thank you for it. One must know the subject before one discusses it. I am sorry! It is not the first time I have been in the same predicament. Only fancy, Sergey, on one occasion I was an examiner . . . you laugh!

But there it is! I really was an examiner, and that was all about it. I was invited to an institution, to be present at an examination, and they set me down together with the examiners, as a sign of respect, there was an empty seat. So, I will own to you, I was frightened, I was positively alarmed, I do not know a single science. What was I to do? I thought that in another minute they would drag me myself to the black board! Well, what then? Nothing happened, it went off all right, I even asked questions myself; who was Noah? On the whole they answered splendidly; then we had lunch and toasted enlightenment in champagne. It was a fine school!”

Foma Fomitch and Obnoskin burst into roars of laughter. “Indeed, I laughed myself afterwards,” cried my uncle, laughing in a most good-natured way and delighted that general cheerfulness was restored. “Yes, Foma, here goes! I will amuse you all by telling you how I put my foot in it once. . . . Only fancy, Sergey, we were staying at Krasnogorsk ...”

“Allow me to inquire, Colonel, will you be long in telling your story?” Foma interposed.

“Oh, Foma! Why, it is the most delightful story, enough to make one split with laughter; you only listen, it is good, it really is good. I’ll tell you how I put my foot in it.”

“I always listen with pleasure to your stories when they are of that sort,” Obnoskin pronounced, yawning.

“There is no help for it, we must listen,” Foma decided.

“But upon my word it is good, Foma, it really is. I want to tell you how I put my foot into it on one occasion, Anfisa Petrovna. You listen too, Sergey, it is an edifying story indeed. We were staying at Krasnogorsk,” my uncle began, beaming with pleasure, talking with nervous haste, and falling into innumerable parentheses as he always did when he was beginning to tell some story for the pleasure of his audience.

“As soon as we arrived, the same evening we went to the theatre.

There was a first-rate actress, Kuropatkina; she afterwards ran away with the cavalry captain Zvyerkov and did not finish the play she was acting: so they let down the curtain. . . . This Zvyerkov was a beast, both for drinking and playing cards, and not that he was a drunkard, but simply ready to join his comrades at festive moments. But when he did get really drunk then he forgot everything, where he lived, in what country, and what his name was.

Absolutely everything, in fact: but he was a very fine fellow really. . . . Well, I was sitting in the theatre. In the interval I got up, and I ran across a comrade called Kornouhov. ... A unique fellow, I assure you. We had not see each other for six years, it is true. Well, he had stayed in the company and was covered

with crosses. I have heard lately — he's an actual civil councillor; he transferred to the civil service and worked his way up to a high grade. . . . Well, of course, we were delighted. One thing and another. In the box next to us were three ladies; the one on the left was the ugliest woman in the world. . . .

Afterwards I found out that she was a splendid woman, the mother of a family, and the happiness of her husband. . . . Well, so I like a fool blurt out to Komouhov: 'T say, old man, can you tell me who that scarecrow is?' 'Who do you mean?' 'Why, that one.' 'That's my cousin.' 'Tfoo, the devil! judge of my position! To put myself right: 'Not that one,' I said. 'What eyes you've got! I mean the one who is sitting there, who is that?' 'That's my sister.'

Tfoo, plague take it all! And his sister, as luck would have it, was a regular rosebud, a sweet little thing; dressed up like anything — brooches, gloves, bracelets, in fact a perfect cherub. Afterwards she married a very fine fellow called Pyhtin; she eloped with him, it was a runaway match; but now it is all right, and they are very well off; their parents are only too delighted! Well, so I cried out, 'Oh, no!' not knowing how to get out of it, 'not that one, the one in the middle, who is she?' 'Tn the middle? Well, my boy, that's my wife.' . . . And she, between ourselves, was a perfect sugarplum.

I felt that I could have eaten her up at one mouthful, I was so delighted with her. . . . 'Well,' I said, 'have you ever seen a fool? Here is one facing you, and here's his head; cut it off, don't spare it!' He laughed. Afterwards he introduced them to me and must have told them, the rascal. They were in fits of laughter over something! And I must say I never spent an

evening more merrily. So you see, Foma, old man, how one can put one's foot in it! Ha-ha-ha-ha!"

But it was no use my poor uncle laughing; in vain he looked round the company with his kind and good-humoured eyes; a dead silence was the response that greeted his light-hearted story. Foma Fomitch sat in gloomy dumbness and all the others followed his example; only Obnoskin gave a faint smile, foreseeing the baiting my uncle would get. My uncle was embarrassed and flushed crimson. This was what Foma desired.

"Have you finished?" he asked at last, turning with dignity to the embarrassed story-teller.

"Yes, Foma."

"And are you satisfied?"

"How do you mean, satisfied?" asked my poor uncle miserably.

"Are you happier now? Are you pleased at having broken up the pleasant literary conversation of your friends by interrupting them and so satisfying your petty vanity?"

"Oh, come, Foma, I wanted to amuse you all, and you ..."

"Amuse!" cried Foma, suddenly becoming extraordinarily heated; "but you are only able to depress us, not amuse us. Amuse! but do you know that your story was almost immoral! I say nothing of its impropriety, that is self-evident. . . ."

You informed us just now with rare coarseness of feeling that you laughed at innocence, at an honourable lady, simply because she had not the honour to please you, and you wanted to make us, us laugh, that is applaud you, that is applaud a coarse and improper action, and all because you are the master of this house!

You can do as you like, Colonel, you can seek out toadies, flatterers, sycophants, you can even send for them from distant parts and so increase your retinue to the detriment of straightforwardness and frank nobility of soul, but never will Foma Opiskin be your toady, your flatterer, your sycophant! I can assure you of that, if of anything. ...”

“Oh, Foma! You misunderstand me, Foma.”

“No, Colonel; I have seen through you for a long time, I know you through and through. You are devoured by boundless vanity. You have pretensions to an incomparable keenness of wit, and forget that wit is blunted by pretension. You . . .”

“Oh, stop, Foma, for God’s sake! Have some shame, if only before people!”

“It’s sad, you know, to see all this, Colonel, and it’s im-

possible to be silent when one sees it. I am poor, I am living at the expense of your mother. It may be expected, perhaps, that I should flatter you by my silence, and I don’t care for any milksop to take me for your toady! Possibly when I came into this room just now I intentionally accentuated my truthful candour, was forced to be intentionally rude, just because you yourself put me into such a position.

You are too haughty with me, Colonel, I may be taken for your slave, your toady. Your pleasure is to humiliate me before strangers, while I am really your equal — your equal in every respect. Perhaps I am doing you a favour in living with you, and not you doing me one.

I am insulted, so I am forced to sing my own praises — that’s natural! I cannot help speaking, I must speak, I am bound at

once to protest, and that is why I tell you straight out that you are phenomenally envious. You see, for instance, someone in a simple friendly conversation unconsciously reveals his knowledge, his reading, his taste, and so you are annoyed, you can't sit still. 'Let me display my knowledge and my taste,' you think!

And what taste have you, if you will allow me to ask? You know as much about art — if you will excuse my saying so, Colonel — as a bull about beef! That's harsh and rude, I admit; anyway it is straightforward and just. You won't hear that from your flatterers, Colonel.'

"Oh, Foma! ..."

"It is 'Oh, Foma,' to be sure. The truth is not a feather bed, it seems. Very well, then, we will speak later about this, but now let me entertain the company a little. You can't be the only one to distinguish yourself all the time. Pavel Semyonitch, have you seen this sea monster in human form? I have been observing him for a long time. Look well at him; why, he would like to devour me whole, at one gulp."

He was speaking of Gavrila. The old servant was standing at the door, and certainly was looking on with distress at the scolding of his master.

"I want to entertain you, too, with a performance, Pavel Semyonitch. Come here, you scarecrow, come here! Condescend to approach us a little nearer, Gavrila Ignatitch! Here you see, Pavel Semyonitch, is Gavrila; as a punishment for rudeness he is studying the French dialect. Like Orpheus, I soften the manners of these parts not only with songs but with the French dialect. Come, Mossoo Frenchy — he can't bear to be called Mossoo — do you know your lesson?"

“I have learnt it,” said Gavrila, hanging his head.

“Well, Parlay — voo — fransay?”

“Vee, moossyu, zhe — le — pari — on — peu. ...”

I don't know whether it was Gavrila's mournful face as he uttered the French phrase, or whether they were all aware of Foma's desire that they should laugh, but anyway they all burst into a roar of laughter as soon as Gavrila opened his lips. Even Madame la Générale deigned to be amused. Anfisa Petrovna, sinking back on the sofa, shrieked, hiding her face behind her fan. What seemed most ludicrous was that Gavrila, seeing what his examination was being turned into, could not restrain himself from spitting and commenting reproachfully: “To think of having lived to such disgrace in my old age!”

Foma Fomitch was startled.

“What? What did you say? So you think fit to be rude?”

“No, Foma Fomitch,” Gavnla replied with dignity. “My words were no rudeness, and it's not for me, a serf, to be rude to you, a gentleman born. But every man bears the image of God upon him, His image and semblance.

I am sixty-three years old. My father remembers Pugatchev, the monster, and my grandfather helped his master, Matvey Nikititch — God grant him the kingdom of heaven — to hang Pugatchev on an aspen tree, for which my father was honoured beyond all others by our late master, Afanasy Matveyitch: he was his valet, and ended his life as butler. As for me, Foma Fomitch, sir, though I am my master's bondman, I have never known such a shame done me from my birth upward till now.”

And at the last word Gavrila spread out his hands and hung his head. My uncle was watching him uneasily.

“Come, that’s enough, Gavrila,” he cried. “No need to say more, that’s enough!”

“Never mind, never mind,” said Foma, turning a little pale and giving a forced smile. “Let him speak, these are the fruits of your . . .”

“I will tell you everything,” said Gavrila with extraordinary fervour, “I will conceal nothing! You may bind the hands, but there is no binding the tongue. Though I may seem beside you, Foma Fomitch, a low man, in fact a slave, yet I can feel insulted! Service and obedience I am always bound to give you, because I am born a slave and must do my duty in fear and trembling. You sit writing a book, it’s my duty not to let you be interrupted — that is my real duty.

Any service that is needed I am pleased to do. But in my old age to bleat in some outlandish way and be put to shame before folk! Why, I can’t go into the servants’ room now: ‘You are a Frenchyl’ they say, ‘a Frenchy!’ No, Foma Fomitch, sir, it’s not only a fool like me, but all good folks have begun to say the same: that you have become now a wicked man and that our master is nothing but a little child before you, that though you are a gentleman by birth and a general’s son, and yourself may be near being a general too, yet you are as wicked as a real fury must be.”

Gavrila had finished. I was beside myself with delight. Foma Fomitch sat pale with rage in the midst of the general discomfiture and seemed unable to recover from Gavrila’s sudden attack upon him; he seemed at that moment to be

deliberating how far his wrath should carry him. At last the outburst followed.

“What, he dares to be rude to me — me! but this is mutiny!” shrieked Foma, and he leapt up from his chair. Madame la Générale followed his example, clasping her hands. There was a general commotion, my uncle rushed to turn the culprit out, “Put him in fetters, put him in fetters!” cried Madame la Générale. “Take him to the town at once and send him for a soldier, Yegorushka, or you shall not have my blessing. Fix the fetters on him at once, and send him for a soldier.”

“What!” cried Foma. “Slave! Lout! Hamlet! He dares to be rude to me! He, he, a rag to wipe my boots! He dares to call me a fury!”

I slipped forward with unusual determination.

“I must confess that in this affair I am completely of Gavrila’s opinion,” I said, looking Foma Fomitch straight in the face and trembling with excitement.

He was so taken aback by this onslaught that for the first minute he seemed unable to believe his ears.

“What’s this now?” he cried out at last, pouncing upon me in a frenzy, and fixing his little bloodshot eyes upon me. “Why, who are you?”

“Foma Fomitch ..,” my uncle, utterly distracted, began, “this is Seryozha, my nephew. . . .”

“The learned gentleman!” yelled Foma. “So he’s the learned gentleman! Liberie — egahte — fratermte. Journal des Debuts! No, my friend, you won’t take me in! I am not such a fool. This

isn't Petersburg, you won't impose upon us. And I spit on your des Debats. You have your des Debats, but to us that's all fiddlesticks, young man! Learned! You know as much as I have forgotten seven times over. So much for your learning!"

If they had not held him back I believe he would have fallen upon me with his fists.

"Why, he is drunk," I said, looking about me in bewilderment.

"Who, I?" cried Foma, in a voice unlike his own.

"Yes, you!"

"Drunk?"

"Yes, drunk."

This was more than Foma could endure. He uttered a screech as though he were being murdered and rushed out of the room. Madame la Générale seemed desirous of falling into a swoon, but reflected that it would be better to run after Foma Fomitch. She was followed by all the others, and last of all by my uncle. When I recovered myself and looked round I saw in the room no one but Yezhevikin. He was smiling and rubbing his hands.

"You promised just now to tell me about the Jesuits," he said in an insinuating voice.

"What?" I asked, not understanding what he was talking about.

"About the Jesuits, you promised just now to tell me . . . some little anecdote. . ."

I ran out into the veranda and from there into the garden. My head was going round. . . .

Chapter VIII

A DECLARATION OF LOVE

I WANDERED about the garden for about a quarter of an hour, feeling irritated and extremely dissatisfied with myself, and deliberating what I should do now. The sun was setting. Suddenly at a turning into a dark avenue I met Nastenka face to face. She had tears in her eyes, in her hand a handkerchief with which she was wiping them.

"I was looking for you," she said.

"And I for you," I answered. "Tell me, am I in a madhouse?"

"Certainly not in a madhouse," she answered resentfully, with an intent glance at me.

"Well, if that's so, what's the meaning of it all? For Christ's sake give me some advice. Where has my uncle gone now? Can I go to him? I am very glad that I have met you; perhaps you will be able to suggest what I ought to do."

"No, better not go to him. I have just come away from them."

"Why, where are they?"

"Who knows? Perhaps by now they have run into the kitchen garden again," she said irritably.

"Into the kitchen garden!"

"Why, last week, Foma Fomitch began shouting that he wouldn't stay in the house, and all at once he ran into the kitchen garden, found a spade in the shed and began digging the beds. We were all amazed, and wondered whether he hadn't gone out of his mind. That I may not be reproached for doing nothing for my keep,' said he, 'here I will dig and pay for the bread I have eaten, and then I will go away. That's what you have driven me to.' And then they all began crying and almost falling on their knees before him; they took the spade away from him; but he would go on digging; he dug up all the turnips,

that was all he did. They humoured him once, he may do it again. That would be just like him.”

“And you . . . you tell that with such coolness!” I cried out, with intense indignation.

She looked at me with flashing eyes.

“Forgive me, I really don’t know what I am saying! Listen! do you know what I’ve come here for?”

“N-no,” she answered, flushing crimson, and some painful feeling was reflected in her charming face.

“You must excuse me,” I went on. “I am upset, I feel that this is not how I ought to have begun speaking of this . . . especially with you. . . . But never mind! To my thinking, openness in such matters is best. I confess . . . that is, I meant to say . . . you know my uncle’s design? He has told me to ask for your hand. . . .”

“Oh, what nonsense! don’t speak of it, please,” she said, hurriedly interrupting me and flushing crimson.

I was disconcerted.

“How nonsense? But he wrote to me, you see.”

“So he wrote to you?” she asked eagerly. “Oh, what a man! How he promised that he would not write! What nonsense! Good heavens, what nonsense!”

“Forgive me,” I muttered, not knowing what to say. “Perhaps I have acted incautiously, crudely . . . but, you see, it’s such a moment! Only think, goodness knows what’s going on around us. . . .”

“Oh, for God’s sake don’t apologise! Believe me that it is painful for me to hear this apart from that, and yet, do you know, I

wanted to speak to you myself, to find out something. . . . Oh, how vexatious! So he really wrote to you? That's what I was most afraid of! My God, what a man he is! And you believed him and galloped here full speed? Well, that's the last straw!" She did not conceal her annoyance. My position was not an attractive one.

"I must confess I did not expect ..." I blurted out in the utmost confusion, "such a turn ... I expected, on the contrary . . ."

"Ah, so that's what you expected? ..," she brought out with light irony, biting her lip. "And do you know, you must show me the letter he wrote."

"Very good."

"And please don't be angry with me, don't be offended; I have trouble enough without that!" she said in an imploring voice, though a mocking smile faintly gleamed on her pretty hps.

"Oh, please don't take me for a fool," I cried hotly. "But perhaps you are prejudiced against me, perhaps someone has spoken against me? Perhaps you say this because I put my foot in it just now? But that is nothing, I assure you. I know what a fool I must look to you now. Don't laugh at me, please! I don't know what I am saying, and it is all because I am twenty-two, damn it."

"Oh, mercy on us, why?"

"You ask why? Anyone who is twenty-two, you know, has it written in his face; as I had, for instance, when I bounced out just now in the middle of the room, or as when I stand before you now. . . . It's a damnable age!"

"Oh, no, no!" answered Nastenka, hardly able to restrain her laughter. "I am sure that you are kind and nice and clever, and I

say that sincerely, I do really! But . . . you are only very vain. You may get over that in time.”

“I fancy I am only as vain as I ought to be.”

“Oh, no. Think how embarrassed you were just now, and what for? Because you stumbled as you came in! ... What right had you to turn into ridicule your good generous uncle who has done you so much kindness? Why did you try to turn the laugh against him when you were laughable yourself? That was horrid, shameful! It does not do you credit, and I must own I disliked you very much at that minute, so there!”

“That’s true! I was a blockhead! more than that — I did a mean thing! You noticed it, and that is my punishment. Abuse me, laugh at me, but listen; perhaps you will change your opinion of me in the end,” I added, carried away by a strange feeling. “You know so little of me as yet; afterwards when you know more of me, then . . . perhaps ...”

“For God’s sake let us stop this conversation!” cried Nastenka, with visible impatience.

“Very well, very well, let us stop! But . . . where can I see you?”

“Where can you see me?”

“Why, you know, this cannot be the last word we have to say to each other, Nastasya Yevgrafovna! For God’s sake, let me meet you again to-day, for instance. But it’s already getting dark. So if it is anyhow possible let it be to-morrow early, I will ask to be called earlier on purpose. You know there’s an arbour over there by the pond. You see, I remember it, I know the way. I used to stay here when I was little.”

“Meet you! What for? Why, we are talking now.”

“But I know nothing yet, Nastasya Yevgrafovna, I will first find out everything from my uncle. Why, he is bound to tell me everything now. And then, perhaps, I shall have something very important to tell you. ...”

“No, no! You mustn’t, you mustn’t!” cried Nastenka. “Let us end it all at once now, so that we may never think of it again. And don’t go to that arbour for nothing; I assure you I shall not go. And please put all this nonsense out of your head — I beg you in earnest. ...”

“So then uncle has behaved like a madman to me!” I cried in an excess of insufferable vexation. “Why did he send for me? But listen, what is that noise?”

We were close to the house; from the open windows came the sounds of shrieking and extraordinary outcries.

“My God!” she said, turning pale, “again! I foresaw it would be so!”

“You foresaw it? Nastasya Yevgrafovna, one more question. Of course I have not the least right to do so, but I venture to put this last question to you for the good of us all. Tell me — and I will keep it secret to the grave — tell me frankly: is my uncle in love with you or not?”

“Oh! Please, please put that nonsense out of your head once for all,” she cried, flushing crimson with anger. “And you, too! If he were in love with me, he wouldn’t have wanted to have married me to you,” she added with a bitter smile. “And what put that idea into your head? Don’t you know what the trouble’s about? Do you hear those shouts?”

“But. . . . It’s Foma Fomitch. . . .”

“Yes, of course it is Foma Fomitch; but now the trouble is over me because they are saying the same thing as you, the same senseless thing; they, too, suspect that he is in love with me. And as I am poor and of no consequence, and as it costs nothing to throw dirt on me and they want to marry him to someone else, they are insisting that he should send me home to my father to make things sure. And when they talk to him of that he flies into a rage at once; he’s ready to tear Foma Fomitch to pieces even. They are quarrelling about that now; I feel that it is about that.”

“So that’s the truth! So he really is going to marry that Tatyana, then.”

“That Tatyana?”

“Yes, that silly fool!”

“Not a silly fool at all! She is good; you have no right to talk like that! She has a noble heart, nobler than many other people. It’s not her fault that she is unfortunate.”

“Forgive me. Supposing you are quite right about that, yet aren’t you mistaken about the chief point? Tell me, how is it, then, that they make your father welcome, as I noticed? Why, if they were so set against you as you say and were turning you out, they would be angry with him too, and would give him a cold welcome.”

“Why, don’t you see what my father is doing for my sake? He is playing the fool before them! He is received just because he has succeeded in ingratiating himself with Foma Fomitch; and as Foma Fomitch was a buffoon himself, you see it flatters him to have buffoons about him now. For whose sake do you suppose my father does it? He does it for me, only for me. He wants nothing; he wouldn’t bow down to anyone for himself.

He may be very absurd in some people's eyes, but he is a noble man, the noblest of men! He thinks — goodness knows why, and certainly not because I get a good salary here, I assure you — he thinks that it is best for me to stay here in this house;

but now I have quite brought him round. I wrote to him firmly. He has come on purpose to take me; and if it comes to extremes, to-morrow. For things have got beyond everything; they are ready to tear me to pieces, and I am certain that they are quarrelling about me now. They are at him, on my account, they will be the death of him! And he is like a father to me — do you hear? more even than my own father.

I won't stay to see it. I know more than other people. To-morrow, to-morrow I am going! Who knows: perhaps that will make them put off, if only for a time, his marriage to Tatyana Ivanovna. . . . Here I have told you all about it now. Tell him this, because I can't speak to him now; we are watched, especially by that Perepelitsyn woman. Tell him not to worry about me, tell him I would rather eat black bread and live in my father's hut than be the cause of his sufferings here. I am a poor girl, and I ought to live like a poor girl. But, my God, what an uproar! What shouting! What is happening? Yes, come what may I shall go in! I will tell them all this straight to their faces myself, whatever happens! I ought to do it! Good-bye."

She ran away. I remained standing on the same spot, fully conscious of the absurdity of the part it had just been my lot to play, and completely puzzled to think how it would all be settled. I was sorry for the poor girl, and I was afraid for my uncle. All at once I found Gavriila at my side; he was still holding the exercise book in his hand.

"Please come to your uncle," he said in a dejected voice.

I pulled myself together.

“To my uncle? Where is he? What’s happening to him now?”

“In the tea-room. Where your honour had tea this afternoon.”

“Who is with him?”

“His honour’s alone. He is waiting.”

“For whom? For me?”

“He has sent for Foma Fomitch. Happy days have come for us,” he added, with a deep sigh.

“Foma Fomitch? H’m! Where are the others? Where’s your mistress?”

“In her own apartments. Her honour’s fallen into a swoon, and now she is lying unconscious and crying.”

Conversing in this way, we reached the veranda. It was almost completely dark outside. My uncle really was alone in the very room in which my encounter with Foma Fomitch had taken place, and he was striding up and down it. There were lighted candles on the tables. He was pale and breathing hard; his hands were trembling, and from time to time a nervous shudder ran over his whole frame.

Chapter IX

YOUR EXCELLENCY

“A >f Y dear boy, it’s all over, it’s all settled,” he pronounced IVXin a tragic half-whisper.

“Uncle,” I said, “I heard shouts and uproar.”

“Yes, my boy, shouts there were; shouts of all sorts. Mamma is in a swoon, and everything is upside down now. But I have made up my mind, and shall insist on my own way. I am afraid of no one now, Seryozha. I want to show them that I, too, have a will of my own, and I will show them! And so I have sent for you on purpose that you may help me show them. . . . My heart is broken, Seryozha . . . but I ought, I am bound to act with severity. Justice is inexorable.”

“But whatever has happened, uncle?”

“I am parting with Foma,” my uncle pronounced in a resolute voice.

“Uncle,” I cried, delighted, “you could have thought of nothing better! And if I can assist in any way to carry out your decision . . . make use of me now and always.”

“Thank you, my boy, thank you! But now it is all settled. I am waiting for Foma, I have already sent for him. Either he or I. We must part. Either Foma leaves this house to-morrow or I swear I’ll throw up everything and go into the Hussars again. They will take me and give me a division. Away with all this bobbery! A fresh start in every way now. What have you got that French exercise book for?” he cried furiously, addressing Gavrila.

“Away with it! Burn it, stamp on it, tear it to pieces! I am your master, and I order you not to learn French. You can’t disobey me, you dare not, for I am your master, and not Foma Fomitch!”

“I thank Thee, O Lord!” Gavrila muttered to himself. Evidently things had got beyond a joke.

“My dear,” my uncle went on, with deep feeling, “they are asking me the impossible. You shall decide; you stand between me and them now as an impartial judge. You don’t know what they have insisted on my doing, you don’t know, and at last they have formally demanded it, they have spoken out. But it’s repugnant to humanity, to decent feeling, to honour. . . . I will tell you all about it, but first ...”

“I know about it already, uncle!” I cried, interrupting him. “I can guess ... I have just been talking to Nastasya Yevgrafovna.”
“My dear, not a word, not a word of that now!” he interrupted me hurriedly, as though he were frightened. “I will explain about it later on, but meanwhile. . . . Well?” he cried to Vidoplyasov, who walked in. “Where is Foma Fomitch?”

Vidoplyasov entered with the information “that Foma Fomitch did not wish to come, and considered that the insistence on his doing so was rude to the point of impertinence, so that his honour, Foma Fomitch, was greatly offended by it.”

“Bring him! Drag him! Fetch him here! Drag him here by force!” cried my uncle, stamping.

Vidoplyasov, who had never seen his master in such a rage, retreated in alarm. I was surprised.

“Something very important must have happened,” I thought, “if a man of his character is capable of being moved to such wrath and such determination.”

For some moments my uncle walked up and down the room as though struggling with himself.

“Don’t tear up your exercise book though,” he said to Gavrila as last. “Wait a little and stay here. You may perhaps be wanted. My dear,” he went on, turning to me, “I think I was too noisy

just now. Everything must be done with dignity and manliness, but without shouting and insulting people. Do you know what, Seryozha; wouldn't it be better if you were to go out? It will be just the same to you. I will tell you all about it later on — eh? What do you think? Do that for my sake, please."

"Are you frightened, uncle? Are you repenting?" I said, looking at him intently.

"No, no, my dear boy, I am not repenting," cried my uncle, with redoubled earnestness. "I am afraid of nothing now. I have taken decisive steps, the most decisive! You don't know, you can't imagine what they have demanded of me! Ought I to consent? No, I will show them. I have made a stand against them and I will show them. I was bound to show them sooner or later! But you know, my dear boy, I am sorry I

sent for you; it will be very liard, perhaps, for Foma if you are here, so to say, the witness of his humiliation. You see, I want to turn him out of the house in a gentlemanly way, without humiliating him at all. Though, indeed, it is only a form of words to say, without humiliation. The position is such, my boy, that however honied one's speech is it will still be insulting. I am coarse, uneducated perhaps,

I may do something in my foolishness that I may regret later. Anyway he has done a great deal for me. ... Go away, my dear. . . Here, they are bringing him! Seryozha, I entreat you, go away; I will tell you all about it afterwards. For Christ's sake go away!"

And uncle led me out on to the veranda at the very moment when Foma walked into the room. But I must confess I did not go away; I made up my mind to stay on the veranda, where it

was very dark, and so it was difficult to see me from within. I made up my mind to play the eavesdropper! I do not justify my action, but I can boldly say that I consider I performed an heroic feat in standing that whole half-hour on the veranda without losing patience.

From my position I could not only hear well, but could even see well; the doors were of glass. I now beg the reader to imagine Foma Fomitch after he had been commanded to come, and threatened with force if he refused.

“Can my ears have heard that threat aright, Colonel? cried Foma, entering the room. “Was that your message?”

“Yes, Foma, yes; calm yourself,” my uncle answered valiantly. “Sit down; we must have a little serious friendly talk like brothers. Sit down, Foma.”

Foma Fomitch majestically sat down on a low chair. My uncle walked about the room with rapid and uneven steps, evidently puzzled how to begin.

“Like brothers, precisely,” he repeated. “You understand me, Foma; you are not a boy, I am not a boy either — in fact, we are both getting on. . . . H’m! You see, Foma, we don’t get on together on certain points . . . yes, on certain points, precisely, and so, Foma, would it not be better to part? I am convinced that you are a generous man, that you wish me well, and so . . . But why prolong the discussion?”

Foma, I am your friend now and always, and I swear that by all the saints! Here are fifteen thousand roubles in silver; it’s all I have to bless myself with. I have scraped together every farthing, I have robbed my own children. Take it boldly!

I ought — it is my duty — to secure your future. It's almost all in bank-notes and very little in cash. Take it boldly; you owe me nothing, for I shall never be able to repay you for all you have done for me. Yes, yes, precisely, I feel that, though now we are in disagreement over the most important point.

Tomorrow or the day after, or when you like, let us part. Drive to our little town, Foma, it is not eight miles away; there behind the church in the first side-street there is a little house with green shutters, a charming little house belonging to the widow of a priest, that looks as though it had been built for you. She is selling it, and I will buy it for you in addition to this money. Settle there near us.

Work at literature, study science, you will win fame. . . . The officials there are gentlemanly, agreeable, disinterested men; the head priest is learned. You shall come and stay with us for the holidays — and we shall all live as in paradise. Will you?"

"So these are the terms on which Foma is to be kicked out!" I thought. "Uncle did not say a word to me about money." For a long time a profound silence reigned. Foma sat in his easy-chair as though struck dumb, gazing fixedly at my uncle, who was evidently becoming uncomfortable from that silence and that stare.

"The money!" Foma articulated at last in an affectedly faint voice. "Where is it? Where is that money? Give it me, give it here at once!"

"Here it is, Foma, everything I have to the last farthing, just fifteen thousand. Here are notes and securities; you can see for yourself . . . here!"

“Gavrila, take that money,” Foma said mildly, “it may be of use to you, old man. But no!” he cried all at once, raising his voice to an extraordinary squeal and leaping up from his chair; “no, give me that money first, Gavnl! Give it me. Give it me. Give me those millions that I may trample them underfoot; give them to me that I may tear them to pieces, spit on them, fling them away, spurn them, scorn them! . . . They offer money to me — to me! They try to buy me to leave this house! Have I heard that? Have I lived to see this last ignominy? Here they are, here are your millions! Look! there, there, there, there. That is how Foma Opiskin behaves if you did not know it before, Colonel!”

And Foma threw the whole roll of notes about the room. It was noticeable that he did not tear or spit on one of the notes as he had boasted of doing; he only crumpled them a little, and even that rather carefully. Gavrila flew to pick up the notes from the floor, and later on, after Foma’s departure, he carefully restored them to his master.

Foma’s action produced an overwhelming impression upon my uncle. In his turn, he now stood facing him, immovably, senselessly, open-mouthed. Foma meanwhile had replaced himself in his arm-chair and was panting as though from unutterable agitation.

“You are a man of lofty feelings, Foma!” my uncle cried out at last, recovering himself. “You are the noblest of men!” * “I know it,” Foma answered in a faint voice, but with ineffable dignity.

“Foma, forgive me! I have been a mean wretch to you, Foma!”

“Yes, to me,” Foma assented.

“Foma, it is not your disinterestedness that I marvel at,” my uncle went on enthusiastically, “but that I could have been so coarse, blind and mean as to offer you money in such circumstances. But, Foma, you are mistaken about one thing; I was not bribing you, I was not paying you for leaving this house, but just simply I wanted you to have money that you might not be in straits when you leave me. I swear that! On my knees, on my knees I am ready to beg your forgiveness, Foma; and if you like, I am ready to go down on my knees before you this moment ... if you wish me to. . . .”

“I don’t want your kneeling, Colonel.”

“But, my God! Foma, consider: you know I was carried away, overwhelmed, I was not myself. . . . But do tell me, do say in what way I can, in what way I may be able to efface this insult! Instruct me, admonish me. . . .”

“In no way, in no way, Colonel! And rest assured that tomorrow morning I shall shake the dust from off my boots on the threshold of this house.”

And Foma began to get up from his chair. My uncle rushed in horror to make him sit down again.

“No, Foma, you will not go away, I assure you!” cried my uncle.

“It is no use talking about dust and boots, Foma! You are not going away, or I will follow you to the utmost ends of the earth, and I will follow you till such time as you forgive me ... I swear it, Foma, and I will do it!”

“Forgive you? You are to blame?” said Foma. “But do you yet understand the wrong you have done me? Do you understand that even the fact that you have given me a piece of bread here has become a wrong to me now? Do you under-

stand that now in one minute you have poisoned every morsel I have tasted in your house? You reproached me just now with those morsels, with every mouthful of the bread I have eaten; you have shown me now that I have been living like a slave in your house, like a flunkey, like a rag to wipe your polished boots I And yet I, in the purity of my heart, imagined up to now that I was residing in your house as a friend and a brother!

Did you not, did you not yourself in your snakelike speeches assure me a thousand times of that brotherly relation? Why did you mysteriously weave for me the snare in which I have been caught like a fool? Why have you dug in the darkness this wolt-pit into which you have yourself thrust me now? Why did you not strike me down with one blow before?

Why did you not wring my neck at the very beginning like a cock, because he . . . well, for instance, simply because he doesn't lay eggs? Yes, that's just it! I stick to that comparison, Colonel, though it is taken from rustic life and recalls the trivial tone of modern literature; I stick to it, because one sees in it all the senselessness of your accusation; for I am as much in fault as this supposititious cock who displeases his frivolous owner by not laying eggs! Upon my word, Colonel! Does one pay a friend, a brother, with money — and what for?

That's the point, what for? 'Here, my beloved brother, I am indebted to you; you have even saved my life; here are a few of Judas's silver pieces for you, only get away out of my sight!' How naive!

How crudely you have behaved to me! You thought that I was thirsting for your gold, while I was cherishing only the heavenly

feeling of securing your welfare. Oh, how you have broken my heart! You have played with my finest feelings like some wretched boy with a ninepin! Long, long ago, Colonel, I foresaw all this — that is why I have long choked over your bread, I have been suffocated by your bread! That is why your feather beds have stifled me, they have stifled me instead of lulling me to slumber!

That is why your sugar, your sweetmeats have been cayenne pepper to me and not sweetmeats! No, Colonel! live alone, prosper alone, and let Foma go his sorrowful way with a wallet on his back. So it shall be, Colonel!”

“No, Foma, no! It shall not be so, it cannot be so!” moaned my uncle, utterly crushed.

“Yes, Colonel, yes! So it shall be, for so it must be. Tomorrow I shall depart from you. Scatter your millions, strew all my way, ail the high road to Moscow with your bank-notes — and I will walk proudly and scornfully over your notes; this very foot, Colonel, will trample your notes into the mud and crush them; for Foma Opiskin the nobility of his own soul will be enough t I have said it and I have shown it! Farewell, Colonel, fa-re-we-ell!”

And Foma began again getting up from his chair.

“Forgive me, forgive me, Foma; forget it! . . .,” repeated my uncle, in an imploring voice.

“Forgive you! Why, what use will my forgiveness be to you? Why, supposing I do forgive you: I am a Christian; I cannot refuse to forgive; I have almost forgiven you already. But consider yourself: is it in the least consistent with common

sense and gentlemanly feeling for me to stay one minute longer in your house? Why, you have turned me out of it!”

“It is consistent, it is consistent, Foma! I assure you that it is consistent!”

“It is? But are we equals now? Don’t you understand that I have, so to speak, crushed you by my generosity, and you have crushed yourself by your degrading action? You are crushed and I am uplifted. Where is the equality? Is friendship possible without equality? I say this, uttering a cry of lamentation from my heart, and not triumphing, not exalting myself over you, as you perhaps imagine.”

“But I am uttering a cry of lamentation from my heart too, Foma, I assure you.”

“And this is the man,” Foma went on, changing his severe tone for a sanctimonious one, “this is the man for whom I so often kept vigil at night! How many times on my sleepless nights have I arisen from my bed, have lighted a candle and said to myself, ‘Now he is sleeping peacefully, trusting in you. Do not you, Foma, sleep, be valiant for him; maybe you will think of something more for the welfare of that man.’ That is what Foma thought on his sleepless nights, Colonel! And this is how that colonel has repaid him! But enough, enough ...”

“But I will deserve your friendship again, Foma; I will deserve it, I swear to you.”

“You will deserve it? Where is the guarantee? As a Christian I will forgive you, and even love you; but as a man and a gentleman I shall not be able to help despising you. I must, I am bound to, in the name of morality, because — I repeat it — you have disgraced yourself, while my action has been most high-

minded. Why, who out of your set would perform such an action? Would any one of them refuse an immense sum of money which poor destitute Foma, despised by all, has refused from devotion to true greatness? No, Colonel; to be on a level with me you must perform now a regular series of heroic deeds. And what are you capable of when you cannot even address me as your equal, but call me Foma like a servant. ...”

“Foma! but I call you so from affection!” wailed my uncle. “I did not know you disliked it. My God! if I had only known! ...”

“You,” Foma pursued, “you who could not, or rather, would not, grant the most insignificant, the most trivial request when I asked you to address me like a general as ‘your Excellency’ ...”

“But, Foma, you know that is really, so to say, high treason, Foma!”

“High treason! You have learnt some phrase out of a book and repeat it like a parrot! But, do you know, you put me to shame, covered me with ignominy by your refusal to call me ‘your Excellency’; you covered me with ignominy because without understanding my reasons you made me look a capricious fool worthy of a madhouse.

Why, do you suppose I don’t understand that I should have been ridiculous if I had wanted to be styled ‘Excellency’ — I who despise all these ranks and earthly grandeurs, insignificant in themselves if they are not lighted up by virtue? For a million I would not accept the rank of general, without virtue.

And meanwhile you looked upon me as a madman! It was for your benefit I sacrificed my pride and allowed you, you to be able to look upon me as a madman, you and your learned gentlemen! It was solely in order to enlighten your mind, to

develop your morals, and to shed upon you the light of new ideas that I made up my mind to demand from you a general's title.

I wanted you for the future not to regard generals as the highest luminaries on this earthly sphere; I wanted to show you that rank is nothing without greatness of soul, and that there is no need to rejoice at the arrival of your general when there are, perhaps, standing at your side, people made illustrious by virtue!

But you have so constantly prided yourself before me on your rank of colonel that it was hard for you to say to me: 'your Excellency.' That was the root of it! That was where one must look for the reason, and not in any breach of the decrees of Providence! The whole reason is, that you are a colonel and I am simply Foma. ..."

"No, Foma; no, I assure you that it is not so. You are a learned man . . . you are not simply Foma. ... I respect you. ..."

"You respect me! Good! Then tell me, since you respect me, what is your opinion, am I worthy of the rank of a general or am I not? Answer at once and straightforwardly, am I or not? I want to see your intelligence, your development."

"For honesty, for disinterestedness, for intelligence, for lofty nobility of soul you are worthy of it," my uncle brought out with pride.

"Well, if I am worthy of it, why will you not say 'your Excellency' to me?"

"Foma, I will, perhaps."

“But, I insist! And I insist now, Colonel, I require it and insist. I see how hard it is for you, that is why I insist. That sacrifice on your side will be the first step in your moral victory, for — don’t forget it — you will have to gain a series of moral victories to be on a level with me; you must conquer yourself, and only then I shall feel certain of your sincerity. ...”

“To-morrow, then, I will call you ‘your Excellency’, Foma.”

“No, not to-morrow, Colonel, to-morrow can take care of itself. I insist that you now at once address me as ‘your Excellency’.”

“Certainly, Foma, I am ready; only what do you mean by ‘at once’, Foma?”

“Why not at once, or are you ashamed? That’s an insult to me if you are ashamed.”

“Oh, well, if you like, Foma. I am ready ... I am proud to do so, indeed; only it’s queer, Foma, apropos of nothing, ‘Good-day, your Excellency.’ You see, one can’t.”

“No, not ‘Good-day, your Excellency.’ That’s an offensive tone, it is like a joke, a farce. I do not permit such jokes with me. You forget yourself, Colonel, you forget yourself. Change your tone!”

“And you are not joking, Foma?”

“In the first place, I am not Foma, Yegor Ilyitch, and don’t you forget it. I am Foma Fomitch.”

“Oh, Foma Fomitch, I am delighted, really, I am altogether delighted, only what am I to say?”

“You are puzzled what to add to the phrase, ‘your Excellency’. That I understand. You should have explained yourself long ago. It is excusable indeed, especially if a man is not a literary

character, to put it politely. Well, I will help you, since you are not a literary character. Repeat after me, 'Your Excellency!' . . ."

"Well, your Excellency ..."

"No, not 'Well, your Excellency,' but simply 'your Excellency!' I tell you, Colonel, you must change your tone. I hope, too, that you will not be offended if I suggest that you should make a slight bow. And at the same time bend forward, expressing in that way respectfulness and readiness, so to say, to fly on his errands. I have been in the society of generals myself, and I know all that, so then 'your Excellency.'"

"Your Excellency . . ."

"How inexpressibly delighted I am that I have at last an opportunity of asking your forgiveness for not having recognised from the first moment your Excellency's soul. I make bold to assure you that I will not for the future spare my poor efforts for the public welfare. . . . Well, that's enough!"

Poor uncle! He had to repeat all this rigmarole phrase by phrase, word by word. I stood and blushed as though I were guilty. I was choking with rage.

"Well, don't you feel now," the torturer went on, "that your heart is suddenly lighter, as though an angel had flown into your soul? ... Do you feel the presence of that angel? Answer."

"Yes, Foma, I certainly feel more at ease," answered my uncle.

"As though after you have conquered yourself your heart were, so to say, steeped in holy oil?"

"Yes, Foma; certainly it all seems as it were in butter."

"As it were in butter? H'm. I wasn't talking of butter, though. . . . Well, never mind! You see, Colonel, the value of a duty performed! Conquer yourself. You are vain, immensely vain!"

“I see I am, Foma,” my uncle answered, with a sigh.

“You are an egoist, and indeed a gloomy egoist. . . .”

“An egoist I am, it is true, Foma, and I see it; ever since I have come to know you, I have learned to know that too.”

“I am speaking to you now like a father, like a tender mother. . . . You repel people and forget that a friendly calf sucks two mothers.”

“That is true too, Foma!”

“You are coarse. You jar so coarsely upon the human heart, you so egoistically insist upon attention, that a decent man is ready to run from you to the utmost ends of the earth.”

My uncle heaved another deep sigh.

“Be softer, more attentive, more loving to others; forget yourself for the sake of others, then they will think of you. Live and let others live — that is my rule! Suffer, labour, pray and hope — those are the truths which I would like to instil into all mankind at once!

Model yourself on them and then I shall be the first to open my heart to you, I shall weep on your bosom ... if need be. . . . As it is, it is always T and T and ‘my gracious self with you. But, you know, one may get sick at last of your gracious self, if you will allow me to say so.”

“A sweet-tongued gentleman,” Gavrila brought out, awestruck.

“That’s true, Foma, I feel all’ that,” my uncle assented, deeply touched. “But I am not altogether to blame, Foma. I’ve been brought up like this, I have lived with soldiers; but I swear, Foma, I have not been without feeling. When I said good-bye to the regiment, all the hussars, all my division, simply shed tears

and said they would never get another like me. I thought at the time that I too was not altogether a lost soul.”

“Again a piece of egoism! Again I catch you in vanity. You are boasting and at the same time reproaching me with the hussars’ tears. Why don’t I boast of anyone’s tears? And yet there may have been grounds, there may have been grounds for doing so.”

“I meant nothing, Foma, it was a slip of the tongue. I couldn’t help remembering those old happy times.”

“Happy times do not fall from heaven, we make them ourselves; it lies in our hearts, Yegor Ilyitch. That is why I am always happy and, in spite of my sufferings, contented, tranquil in spirit, and am not a burden to anyone unless it is to fools, upstarts and learned gentlemen, on whom I have no mercy and don’t care to have. I don’t like fools! And what are these learned gentlemen? ‘A man of learning’; and his learning turns out to be nothing but a hoaxing trick, and not learning. Why, what did he say just now? Let him come here! Let all these men of learning come here! I can refute them all; I can refute all their propositions! I say nothing of greatness of soul . . .”

“Of course, Foma. Who doubts it?”

“This afternoon, for instance, I showed intelligence, talent, colossal erudition, knowledge of the human heart, knowledge of contemporary literature; I showed and displayed in a brilliant fashion how some wretched Komarinsky may furnish a lofty topic of conversation for a man of talent.

And did any one of them appreciate me as I deserved? No, they turned away! Why, I am certain he has told you already that I

know nothing, and yet perhaps Macchiaveili himself or some Mercadante was sitting before him and only to blame for being poor and in obscurity. . . . That does not penetrate to them I . . . I hear of Korovkin too. What sort of queer fish is he?"

"He is a clever man, Foma, a man of learning. ... I am expecting him. He will certainly be a nice man, Foma."

"H'm, I doubt it. Most likely some modern ass laden with books; there is no soul in them, Colonel, no heart in them! And what is learning without virtue?"

"No, Foma, no. How he talked of family happiness! The heart feels it of itself, Foma."

"H'm! We will have a look at him; we will examine Korovkin too. But enough," Foma concluded, getting up from his easy-chair. "I cannot altogether forgive you yet, Colonel; the insult was too deadly; but I will pray, and perhaps God will shed peace on the wounded heart. We will speak further of this tomorrow, but now permit me to withdraw. I am tired and exhausted. ..."

"Oh, Foma!" cried my uncle in a fluster, "why, of course you are tired! I say, won't you have something to support you, a snack of something? I will order something at once."

"A snack! Ha-ha-ha!" answered Foma, with a contemptuous laugh. "First they offer you a drink of poison, and then they ask you if you won't have a snack of something. They want to heal the wounds of the heart with stewed mushrooms or pickled apples! What a pitiful materialist you are, Colonel!"

"Oh, Foma, I spoke in all simplicity . . ."

“Oh, very well. Enough of that. I will withdraw, and you go at once to your mother; fall on your knees, sob, weep, but beg for her forgiveness, that is your duty, that is a moral obligation.”

“Oh, Foma, I have been thinking of nothing but that all the time; even now while I have been talking to you I have been thinking of it. I am ready to implore her on my knees till dawn. But only think, Foma, what they are expecting of me.

Why, you know it's unjust, Foma, it's cruel. Be entirely magnanimous, make me completely happy, think a little, decide, and then . . . then ... I swear! . . .”

“No, Yegor Ilyitch, no, it's no business of mine,” answered Foma. “You know that I do not meddle in the slightest degree in all that; you may be persuaded that I am at the bottom of it all, but I assure you that from the very beginning I have held entirely aloof from this affair.

It is solely the desire of your mother, and she, of course, wishes for nothing but your good. ... Go to her, make haste, fly and rectify the position by your obedience . . . and let not the sun go down upon your wrath; while I ... I shall be all night long praying for you. I have known no sleep for many a night, Yegor Ilyitch. Good night! I forgive you too, old man,” he said, turning to Gavrila. “I know you did not do it of yourself. You forgive me too if I have offended you. . . . Good night, good night, all, and may the Lord bless you.”

Foma went out. I rushed at once into the room.

“You've been listening!” cried my uncle.

“Yes, uncle, I have been listening! And you, you could call him ‘your Excellency’?”

“What could I do, brother? Indeed, I am proud of it. . . . That was no great act of sacrifice. But what a noble, what a disinterested, what a great man! Sergey, why, you heard yourself . . . and how I could, how I could thrust that money on him, I simply don’t understand I My dear, I was carried away, I was in a rage. I did not understand him; I suspected him, I accused him. . . .

But no, he could not be antagonistic to me — I see that now . . . and do you remember what a noble expression there was on his face when he was refusing the money?”

“Very well, uncle, you can be as proud as you like, but I am going; my patience is at an end. For the last time I say it, tell me what you want of me? Why did you send for me, and what do you expect? And if it is all over and I am of no use to you, then I am going. I can’t endure such exhibitions! I am going this very day.”

“My dear!” My uncle was in a fluster as usual. “Only wait two minutes; I am going now, dear boy, to mamma, to settle there . . . a grave, important, immense question! . . . And you meanwhile go to your room. Here, Gavrila will take you to the summer lodge. You know the summer lodge, it is in the garden.

I have given orders, and your trunk has been taken there; and I am going in to beg forgiveness and settle one question — I know now what to do — and then I will be with you in a flash, and then I’ll tell you everything, I’ll open my whole soul to you and . . . and . . . happy days will come for us too, some time! Two minutes, only two minutes, Sergey!”

He pressed my hand and hurriedly went out. There was nothing to be done, I had to go off with Gavrila again.

Chapter X

MIZINTCHIKOV

THE lodge to which Gavrila conducted me was called “the new lodge” only from old habit, because it was built long ago in the time of the former owners. It was a pretty little wooden house, standing in the garden a few paces from the old house. It was surrounded on three sides by tall old lime trees which touched the roof with their branches.

All the four rooms of this little house were kept ready for visitors, and were not badly furnished. Going into the room assigned me, to which my portmanteau had been already taken, I saw on a little table before the bedstead a sheet of notepaper, covered with magnificent handwriting in various styles framed in garlands and flourishes. The capital letters and the garlands were illuminated in various colours. The whole made a very pretty specimen of calligraphy.

From the first words I read I saw that it was a begging letter addressed to me, and that in it I was styled “Enlightened benefactor”. It was headed “The Complaints of Vidoplyasov”. Though I tried with strained attention to make out something of what was written, my efforts were all in vain, it was the most inflated nonsense, written in a high-flown flunkey lingo.

I could only surmise that Vidoplyasov was in trouble of some sort, was begging for my assistance, was building great hopes upon me, “by reason of my enlightenment”, and in conclusion

begged me to interest myself on his behalf with my uncle and to work upon him with “my machinery”, as he expressed it at the end of this epistle. I was still reading it when the door opened and Mizintchikov walked in.

“I hope you will allow me to make your acquaintance,” he said in a free and easy way, though with extreme courtesy, offering me his hand. “I could not say two words to you this afternoon, and yet from the first glance I felt a desire to know you better.”

I answered at once that I was delighted and so on, though I was, in fact, in an extremely bad temper. We sat down.

“What have you got here?” he said, glancing at the sheet of paper which I was still holding in my hand. “Not ‘the complaints of Vidoplyasov’? That’s what it is. I was certain that Vidoplyasov was attacking you too. He presented me with just such a document with the same complaints; and he has been expecting you a long time and most likely got ready beforehand. You need not be surprised: there’s a great deal that’s queer here, and really there is plenty to laugh at.”

“Only to laugh at?”

“Oh, well, surely not to cry over. If you like I will give you Vidoplyasov’s history, and I am certain that you will laugh.”

“I confess I am not interested in Vidoplyasov just now,” I answered with vexation.

It was evident to me that Mr. Mizintchikov’s friendliness and his polite conversation were all assumed by him with some object, and that he was simply trying to get something out of me. He had sat scowling and serious in the afternoon; now he was good-humoured, smiling, and ready to tell me long stories. It

was evident from the first glance that the man was perfectly self-possessed, and he seemed to understand human nature.

“That cursed Foma!” I said, banging my fist on the table with fury. “I am positive that he is at the bottom of every sort of mischief here and mixed up in it all! Cursed brute!”

“I think your anger is excessive,” Mizintchikov observed.

“My anger excessive!” I cried, instantly firing up. “I let myself go too far this afternoon, of course, and so gave everyone a right to blame me. I know very well that I plunged in and put my foot in it on every point, and I think there is no need to tell me that! ... I know, too, that that’s not the way to behave in decent society; but how could I help letting myself go? tell me that. Why, this is a madhouse, if you care to know! And . . . and ... in fact ... I am simply going away, so there.”

“Do you smoke?” Mizintchikov asked calmly.

“Yes.”

“Then you will probably allow me to smoke? They won’t let me in there, and I am wretched without it. I agree,” he went on, as he lighted a cigarette, “that all this is like a madhouse; but believe me, I do not venture to criticise you, just because in your place I should perhaps be three times as excited and violent as you.”

“And why were you not violent if you really were angry too? I remember you very cool, on the contrary, and, I confess, I even thought it strange that you did not stand up for my poor uncle, who is ready to befriend . . . all and everyone!”

“You are right: he has beliened many people; but I consider it perfectly useless to stand up for him: in the first place it would be useless and even derogatory for him in a way; and in the second I should be kicked out to-morrow. And I tell you frankly my circumstances are such that to be a guest here is a great advantage for me.”

“But I do not make the slightest claim on your frankness in regard to your circumstances ... I should, however, have liked to ask, since you have been here a month ...”

“Please, do, ask anything: I am at your service,” Mizintchikov answered, hurriedly moving up a chair.

“Well, explain this, for instance: Foma Fomitch has just refused fifteen thousand roubles which were in his hands — I saw it with my own eyes.”

“What? Impossible!” cried Mizintchikov. “Tell me, please.”

I told him, saying nothing about “your Excellency”, Mizintchikov listened with greedy curiosity. He positively changed countenance when the fifteen thousand were mentioned.

“That’s smart!” he said, when he heard my story. “I really did not expect it of Foma.”

“He did refuse the money, though! How do you explain that? Surely not by the nobility of his soul?”

“He refused fifteen thousand to take thirty later. Though, do you know,” he added after a moment’s thought, “I doubt whether Foma had any mercenary design in it. He is not a practical man; he is a sort of poet, too, in his own way. Fifteen thousand . . . h’m. He would have taken the money, do you see, but he couldn’t resist the temptation to strike an attitude and give himself airs. I tell you he’s a sentimental mush, and the

sloppiest old sniveller and all that, with the most unbounded vanity!”

Mizintchikov was positively roused to anger. It was evident that he was very much annoyed and even envious. I looked at him with curiosity.

“H’m! We may expect great changes,” he added, musing. “Now Yegor Ilyitch is ready to worship Foma. I shouldn’t wonder if he does get married now that his heart is softened,” he muttered through his teeth.

“So you think that this abominable, unnatural marriage with that crazy fool really will come off?”

Mizintchikov looked at me searchingly.

“The scoundrels!” I cried emphatically.

“There is a fairly sound idea at the back of it, though. They maintain that he ought to do something for his family.”

“As though he hadn’t done enough for them,” I cried indignantly. “And you, you talk of there being a sound idea in marrying a vulgar fool!”

“Of course I agree with you that she is a fool. . . . H’m! It’s a good thing that you are so fond of your uncle; I sympathise with him myself . . . though he could round off his estate finely with her fortune! They have other reasons, though; they are afraid that Yegor Ilyitch may marry that governess ... do you remember, an attractive girl?”

“But is that likely to be true? ...” I asked in agitation. “It seems to me that it’s spiteful gossip. Tell me, for goodness’ sake, it interests me extremely. ...”

“Oh, he is head over ears in love with her! Only, of course, he conceals it.”

“He conceals it? You think that he is concealing it? And she? Does she love him?”

“It is very likely she does. It is all to her advantage to marry him, though; she is very poor.”

“But what grounds have you for your supposition that they love each other?”

“Oh, you know, you can’t help seeing it; besides, I believe they meet in secret. They do say that she has illicit relations with him, in fact. Only, please, don’t repeat that. I tell you as a secret.”

“Is it possible to believe that?” I cried. “And you, you acknowledge that you believe it?”

“Of course I do not fully believe it, I wasn’t there. But it’s very possible, though.”

“Very possible? Think of my uncle’s sense of honour, his noble character.”

“I agree; but one may be carried away, with a conviction that one is going to make it right with matrimony afterwards. People often are. But, I repeat, I don’t insist on the absolute certainty of the facts, especially as they have blackened her character in all sorts of ways here; they even say that she had an intrigue with Vidoplyasov.”

“There, you see,” I cried, “with Vidoplyasov. Why, as though it were possible! Isn’t it revolting even to listen to such a thing? Surely you can’t believe it?”

“I tell you that I do not quite believe it,” answered Mizintchikov calmly, “but it might happen. Anything may happen in this

world. I was not there, and besides, I consider it not my business.

But as I see you take great interest in all this, I feel I ought to add that I really don't put much faith in the story about Vidoplyasov. It's all the invention of Anna Nilovna, that Miss Perepelitsyn; it's she who has set those rumours going here out of envy because she dreamed in the past of marrying Yegor Ilyitch herself — yes, by Jove, on the ground that she is a major's daughter.

Now she is disappointed and awfully furious. But I believe I have told you all about that business now, and I confess I greatly dislike gossip, especially as we are losing precious time. I have come to ask you a trifling favour, you see."

"A favour? Certainly; any way in which I can be of use to you."

"I understand, and indeed I hope to interest you, for I see you love your uncle and take great interest in his fate in the matrimonial line; but before I ask you that favour I will ask you another, a preliminary one."

"What is that?"

"I'll tell you; perhaps you will consent to grant my chief request, and perhaps not; but in any case, before telling it you I will humbly ask you to grant one great favour, to give me your word of honour as a nobleman and a gentleman that all you hear from me shall remain a dead secret, and that you will not betray the secret in any case or for the sake of any person, and will not take advantage for your own benefit of the idea which I now find it necessary to communicate to you. Do you agree or not?"

It was a solemn introduction. I gave my assent.

“Well?” ... I said.

“It is really a very simple matter,” Mizintchikov began. “I want to elope with Tatyana Ivanovna and to marry her; in short, there is to be something in the Gretna Green style, do you understand?”

I stared Mizintchikov straight in the face, and for some time I could not utter a word.

“I confess I don’t understand at all,” I brought out at last; “and what’s more,” I went on, “expecting that I had to do with a sensible man, I did not in the least expect ...”

“Expecting you did not expect,” interrupted Mizintchikov; “which may be translated, that I and my project are stupid—that’s so, isn’t it?”

“Oh, not at all . . . but . . .”

“Oh, please, don’t mind speaking plainly! Don’t be uneasy; you will do me a great pleasure by plain speaking, in fact, for so we shall get nearer our object. I agree with you, though, that all this must seem somewhat strange at the first glance. But I venture to assure you that so far from being foolish, my project is extremely sensible; and if you will be so good as to listen to all the circumstances ...”

“Oh, certainly! I am listening eagerly.”

“There is scarcely anything to tell, though. You see, I am in debt and haven’t a farthing. I have, besides, a sister, a girl of nineteen, fatherless and motherless, living in a family and entirely without means, you know.

For that I am partly to blame. We inherited a property of forty serfs. Just at that time I was promoted to be a cornet. Well, at

first, of course, I mortgaged, and then I squandered our money in other ways too. I lived like a fool, set the fashion, gave myself airs, gambled, drank — it was idiotic, in fact, and I am ashamed to remember it. Now I have come to my senses and want to change my manner of life completely.

But to do so it is absolutely essential to have a hundred thousand roubles. As I shall never get anything in the service, since I am not qualified for anything and have scarcely any education, there are, of course, only two resources left to me: to steal or to marry a rich wife. I came here almost without boots to my feet, I walked, I could not drive.

My sister gave me her last three roubles when I set off from Moscow. Here I saw Tatyana Ivanovna, and at once the idea dawned upon me. I immediately resolved to sacrifice myself and marry her. You will agree that all that is nothing but good sense. Besides, I am doing it more for my sister's sake . . . though, of course, for my own too."

"But allow me to ask, do you mean to make a formal proposal to Tatyana Ivanovna? ..."

"God forbid, they would kick me out at once; but if I suggest an elopement, a runaway match, she will marry me at once. That's the whole point, that there should be something romantic and sensational about it. Of course it would all immediately end in legal matrimony. If only I can allure her away from here!"

"But why are you so sure that she will elope with you?"

"Oh, don't trouble about that! I am perfectly sure of that. The whole plan rests on the idea that Tatyana Ivanovna is ready to carry on an intrigue with anyone she meets, with anyone, in

fact, to whom it occurs to respond to her. That is why I first asked you to give me your word of honour that you would not take advantage of the idea. You will understand, of course, that it would be positively wicked of me not to take advantage of such an opportunity, especially in my circumstances.”

“So then she is quite mad. ... Oh, I beg your pardon,” I added, catching myself up. “Since you now have intentions. . . .”

“Please don’t mind speaking out, as I have asked you already. You ask, is she quite mad? What shall I tell you? Of course she is not mad, since she is not yet in a madhouse; besides, I really don’t see anything particularly mad in this mania for love affairs. She is a respectable girl in spite of everything. You see, till a year ago she was horribly poor, and from her birth up has lived in bondage to the ladies who befriended her.

Her heart is exreptionally susceptible; no one has asked her in marriage. . . . Well, you understand: dreams, desires, hopes, the fervour of feelings which she has always had to conceal, perpetual agonies at the hands of the ladies who befriended her — all that of course might well drive a sensitive character to derangement. And all at once she comes in for a fortune; you’ll allow that is enough to upset anyone. Well, now of course people make up to her and hang about her, and all her hopes have risen up. She told us this afternoon about a dandy in a white waistcoat; that’s a lact which happened literally as she described.

From that fact you can judge of the rest. With sighs, notes, verses you can inveigle her at once; and if with all that you hint at a silken rope ladder, a Spanish serenade and all that nonsense, you can do what you like with her. I have put it to

the test, and at once obtained a secret interview. But meanwhile I have put it off till the right moment.

But I must carry her off within four days. The evening before I shall begin to make tender speeches, to sigh: I can sing and play the guitar pretty well. At night there will be a meeting in the harbour, and at dawn the coach will be in readiness; I shall entice her away, we shall get into the coach and drive off. You understand that there is no risk about it whatever; she is of age, and what's more, completely her own mistress.

And if once she ran away with me she would, of course, be bound to me. I should take her to a poor but respectable family, thirty miles away, who would look after her, and not let anyone come near her till the wedding; and meanwhile I shan't lose time, we'll get married within three days — it can be done. Of course, first of all, money is needed; but I have reckoned that I shall not need more than five hundred roubles for the whole business, and for that I rely on Yegor Ilyitch. He will give it, of course, without knowing what is up. Do you understand now?"

"I do," I answered, taking it all in fully. "But tell me, in what way can I be of use to you?"

"Oh, in a great deal, I assure you, or I would not have asked you. I told you that I had in view a poor but very respectable family. You can help me both here and there, and as a witness. I must own that without your help I should be at a loss."

"Another question, why have you done me the honour to select me to receive your confidence, though you know nothing of me, since I have only been here a few hours?"

“Your question,” Mizintchikov answered with the most polite smile, “your question, I frankly confess, gives me great satisfaction, because it affords me an opportunity of expressing my special regard for you.”

“Oh, you do me too much honour!”

“No; you see, I have been studying you a little this afternoon. Admitting you are both hasty and . . . and . . . well, young, I tell you what I am thoroughly certain of: when you have given me your word that you will tell no one you will certainly keep it. You are not Obnoskin — that’s the first point. Secondly, you are honest and will not take advantage of my idea — for yourself, of course, I mean — unless you would like to enter into a friendly compact with me. In that case I will perhaps agree to yield to you my idea — that is, Tatyana Ivanovna — and be ready to help you zealously in the elopement, only on condition of receiving from you a month after your marriage fifty thousand roubles, for which you would of course give me security beforehand in the shape of an IOU.”

“What!” I cried out. “So now you are offering her to me?”

“Naturally, I can give it up to you if on reflection you wish it. I should of course be a loser, but . . . the idea belongs to me, and you know one is paid for one’s ideas. Thirdly and lastly I asked you because I had no choice. And taking into consideration the position here, it was impossible to delay long; besides which it will soon be the fast of the Assumption, and they won’t celebrate weddings. I hope you fully understand me now?”

“Perfectly. And once more, I feel bound to keep your secret quite sacred; but I cannot be your accomplice in the business, and I think it my duty to tell you so at once.”

“Why so?”

“You ask, why so?” I cried, giving the rein to my pent-up feelings at last. “Why, surely you must understand that such an act is positively dishonourable. Supposing you were quite correct in your calculations, reckoning on the lady’s weakness of mind and unhappy mania, why it’s that very thing which ought to restrain you as an honourable man! You say yourself that she is worthy of respect in spite of being ridiculous, and you are taking advantage of her misfortune to rob her of a hundred thousand.

You will not, of course, be a real husband to her, carrying out your obligations: you will certainly leave her . . . it’s so dishonourable that, excuse me, I can’t even understand how you could bring yourself to ask me to assist you.”

“Ough! my goodness! how romantic!” cried Mizintchikov, looking at me with unfeigned surprise. “Though, indeed, it’s not that it’s romantic, but simply I believe that you don’t understand the position. You say that it’s dishonourable, and yet all the advantages are not on my side, but hers . . . only consider ...”

“Of course, if one looks at it from your point of view I dare say it will appear that you will be doing something most magnanimous in marrying Tatyana Ivanovna,” I answered, with a sarcastic smile.

“Well, what else? Just so, it is something most magnanimous,” cried Mizintchikov, growing hot in his turn. “Only consider: in the first place, I am sacrificing myself in consenting to be her husband. Is not that some sacrifice? In the second place, although she has certainly a hundred thousand in silver roubles

I shall only take a hundred thousand in paper, and I have sworn that I won't take another farthing from her all my life, though I could; that's some sacrifice again. Lastly, look into it more deeply.

Could she anyway lead a peaceful life? For her to live in peace one would have to take her money from her and put her in a madhouse, for one may expect any minute that some worthless fellow, some scheming rogue, some adventurer, will turn up with a moustache and an imperial, with a guitar and serenades, someone in the style of Obnoskin, who will inveigle her, marry her and strip her completely, and then turn her out into the gutter.

This, for instance, is a most respectable household, and yet they are only keeping her here because they are speculating on her fortune. From such risks she must be saved, rescued. Well, you see, as soon as she marries me such risks are over, it will be my duty to see that no trouble comes near her. In the first place, I shall settle her at once in Moscow, in a poor but honourable family — not the one I have spoken of to you, but another; my sister will be constantly with her; they will look after her and pay her every attention.

She will have two hundred and fifty thousand, possibly three hundred, in paper left, one can do well on that, you know! Every pleasure will be provided for her, all sorts of entertainment, balls, masquerades and concerts. She may even dream of love affairs, only of course I shall look after that. She may dream as much as she likes, but not so in reality! Now, for instance, anyone can ill-treat her, but no one will be able to then; she will be my wife, she will be a Mizintchikov, and I

won't allow my name to be insulted! That alone is worth something, isn't it? Naturally I am not going to live with her.

She will live in Moscow, and I shall live somewhere in Petersburg. I admit that, because I am doing things straightforwardly with you. But what if we do live apart? Look at her character and just consider, is she fit to be a wife and live with a husband?

Is it possible to go on living with her continually? Why, she is the most light-headed creature in the world. She must have incessant change; she is capable next day of forgetting that she was married yesterday and made a lawful wife. Why, I should make her wretched in the end if I were to live with her and insist on her strictly performing her wifely duties.

Naturally I shall go and see her once a year or oftener, and not to get money, I assure you. I have told you that I am not going to take more than a hundred thousand in paper from her, and I shan't either!

On the money side I shall treat her in the most honourable way. If I come to see her for two or three days, my visit will actually be a pleasure to her and not a bore; I shall laugh with her, tell her stories, take her to a ball, make love to her, give her little souvenirs, sing songs to her, make her a present of a lapdog, have a romantic parting from her, and keep up an exchange of love letters.

Why, she will be in ecstasies over such a romantic, devoted, and amusing husband. To my thinking, that is the rational way to proceed; that's how all husbands ought to behave. Husbands are only precious to their wives when they are absent, and

following my system, I shall engage Tatyana Ivanovna's heart in the most honied way for the whole of her life. What more can she want? tell me that. Why, it is paradise, not life!"

I listened in silence and with wonder; I realised that it was impossible to turn Mr. Mizintchikov from his plan. He was fanatically persuaded of the rectitude and even the greatness of his project, and spoke of it with the enthusiasm of an inventor. But there was still one rather delicate question which it was essential to clear up.

"Have you reflected," I said, "that she is almost betrothed to my uncle? It will be a great insult to him if you elope with her; you will be carrying her off almost on the eve of her wedding, and what's more, will borrow from him to carry out your exploit."

"That is just where I have you!" Mizintchikov cried out with heat. "You needn't trouble, I foresaw your objection. But first and foremost, your uncle has not yet made her an offer, consequently there is no need for me to know that they are intending her for a match for him; moreover, I beg you to note that I thought of this enterprise three weeks ago, when I knew nothing of their intentions, so I am perfectly justified from the moral point of view as regards them. And in fact, strictly speaking, it is rather he who is carrying off my betrothed than I his, whom, take note, I have already met in secret at night in the arbour.

And lastly, allow me to ask, were not you yourself in a perfect frenzy at your uncle's being forced to marry Tatyana Ivanovna? And now you are all at once standing up for the marriage, and talking of honour, of some insult to the family! Why, on the

contrary, I am doing your uncle the greatest service, I am saving him — you ought to understand that. He looks on the match with aversion, and what's more, is in love with another young lady! Why, what sort of wife would Tatyana Ivanovna be to him?

And she would be wretched with him too, because, say what you like, she would then have to be restrained from throwing roses at young men. And you know if I elope with her in the night, then no Madame la Generale, no Foma Fomitch, will be able to do anything. To bring back a bride who has run away from the wedding would be too discreditable. Isn't that a service, isn't it a benefit to Yegor Ilyitch?"

I must own this last argument had a great effect on me. "But what if he makes her an offer to-morrow?" I said. "You see, it would be rather too late then; she will be formally betrothed to him."

"To be sure it will be, but that is just why we must work to prevent it. What am I asking you to help me for? It's hard for me alone, but the two of us together can arrange things and prevent Yegor Ilyitch from making a proposal. We must do everything we can to prevent it, even if it comes to thrashing Foma Fomitch and so distracting the general attention from all thoughts of the match. Of course that is only in the last extremity, I only give that for the sake of example. This is what I am relying on you for."

"One more last question: have you told no one but me of your scheme?"

Mizintchikov scratched the back of his head and made a very wry face.

“I must confess that question is worse than the bitterest pill for me. That’s just the trouble, that I have given away the idea ... in fact, I have been the most awful fool! And to whom, do you suppose? To Obnoskin! I can scarcely believe it myself. I don’t know how it happened! He is always about the place, I did not know him so well, and when this inspiration dawned upon me I was, of course, greatly excited; and as I realised even then that I should need someone to help me, I appealed to Obnoskin ... it was unpardonable, unpardonable!”

“Well, and what did Obnoskin say?”

“He agreed with enthusiasm, but next day early in the morning he disappeared. Three days later he turned up again with his mamma. He doesn’t say a word to me, and in fact avoids me as though he were afraid of me. I saw at once what was up. And his mother is a regular shark, she’s been in tight places before now. I used to know her in the past. Of course he has told her all about it. I am waiting and keeping quiet; they are spying on me, and »things are in rather a strained position . . . that’s why I am fa a hurry.”

“What is it exactly you fear from them?”

“They can’t do a great deal, of course, but that they will do something nasty — that is certain. They will insist on having money for keeping quiet and helping, that I expect. . . . Only I can’t give them a great deal, and I am not going to.

I have made up my mind about that. I can’t give more than three thousand paper roubles. Judge for yourself: three thousand to them, five hundred in silver for the wedding, for I must pay your uncle back in full; then my old debts; then at least something for my sister, something at least. There won’t

be much left out of a hundred thousand, will there? Why, it will be ruin! . . . The Obnoskins have gone away, though.”

“Gone away?” I asked with curiosity.

“Just after tea, damn them! but they will turn up again to-morrow, you will see. Well, how is it to be, then? Do you agree?”

“I must own,” I answered, shrugging, “I really don’t know what to say. It’s a delicate matter. . . . Of course I will keep it all secret, I am not Obnoskin; but . . . I think it’s no use your building hopes on me.”

“I see,” said Mizintchikov, getting up from his chair, “that you are not yet sick of Foma Fomitch and your grandmother; and though you do care for your kind and generous uncle, you have not yet sufficiently realised how he is being tormented. You are new to the place. . . . But patience! You will be here to-morrow, look about you, and by evening you’ll consent. Your uncle is lost if you don’t, do you understand? They will certainly force him to marry her. Don’t forget that to-morrow he may perhaps make her an offer. It will be too late, we must settle things to-day.”

“Really, I wish you every success, but as for helping you . . . I don’t know in what way.”

“We know! But let us wait till to-morrow,” said Mizintchikov, smiling ironically. “La mat porte conseil. Good-bye for the present. I will come to you early in the morning, and you think things over. . . .”

He turned and went out whistling.

I almost followed him out, to get a breath of fresh air. The moon had not yet risen; it was a dark night, warm and stifling. The leaves on the trees did not stir. In spite of being terribly tired I wanted to walk to distract my mind, collect my thoughts; but I had not gone above ten paces when I suddenly heard my uncle's voice. He was mounting the steps of the lodge in company with someone, and speaking with great animation. I turned back and called to him. My uncle was with Vidoplyasov.

Chapter XI

THE EXTREME OF PERPLEXITY

"UNCLE," I said, "at last I have got you."

"My dear boy, I was rushing to you myself. Here, I will just finish with Vidoplyasov, and then we can talk to our hearts' content. I have a great deal to tell you."

"What, Vidoplyasov now! Oh, get rid of him, uncle."

"Only another five or ten minutes, Sergey, and I shall be entirely at your disposal. You see, it's important."

"Oh, no doubt, it is his foolishness," I said, with vexation.

"What can I say to you, my dear? The man has certainly found a time to worry me with his nonsense! Yes, my good Grigory, couldn't you find some other time for your complaints? Why, what can I do for you? You might have compassion even on me, my good boy. Why, I am, so to say, worn out by you all, devoured alive, body and soul! They are too much for me, Sergey!" And my uncle made a gesture of the profoundest misery with both hands.

“But what business can be so important that you can’t leave it? And, uncle, I do so want ...”

“Oh, my dear boy, as it is they keep crying out that I take no trouble over my servants’ morals! Very likely he will complain of me to-morrow that I wouldn’t listen to him, and then ..,” and my uncle waved his hand in despair again.

“Well, then, make haste and finish with him! Perhaps I can help you; let us go up the steps. What is it? What does he want?” I said as we went into the room.

“Well, you see, my dear, he doesn’t like his own surname, and asks leave to change it. What do you think of that?”

“His surname! What do you mean? . . . Well, uncle, before I hear what he has to say himself, allow me to remark that it is only in your household such queer things can happen,” I said, flinging up my hands in amazement.

“Oh, my dear boy, I might fling up my hands like you, but that’s no good,” my uncle said with vexation. “Come, talk to him yourself, you have a try. He has been worrying me for two months past. ...”

“It’s not a respectable surname,” Vidoplyasov observed.

“But why is it not respectable?” I asked him in surprise.

“Oh, because it suggests all sorts of abomination.”

“But why abomination? And how can you change it? Does anyone change his surname?”

“Well, really, sir, do other people have such surnames?”

“I agree that your surname is a somewhat strange one,” I went on, in complete bewilderment; “but there is no help for it now,

you know. Your father had the same surname, I suppose, didn't he?"

"That is precisely so that through my parent I have in that way had to suffer all my life, inasmuch as I am destined by my name to accept many jeers and to endure many sorrows," answered Vidoplyasov.

"I bet, uncle, that Foma Fomitch has a hand in this!" I cried with vexation.

"Oh, no, my boy; oh, no, you are mistaken. Foma certainly has befriended him. He has taken him to be his secretary, that's the whole of his duty. Well, of course he has developed him, has filled him with noble sentiments, so that he is even in some ways cultivated. . . . You see, I will tell you all about it. ..."

"That is true," Vidoplyasov interrupted, "that Foma Fomitch is my true benefactor, and being a true benefactor to me, he has brought me to understand my insignificance, what a worm I am upon the earth, so that through his honour I have for the first time learned to comprehend my destiny."

"There you see, Seryozha, there you see what it all means," my uncle went on, growing flustered as he always did. "He lived at first in Moscow, almost from childhood, in the service of a teacher of calligraphy.

You should see how he has learned to write from him, and he illuminates in colours and gold with cupids round, you know — in fact he is an artist, you know. Ilyusha has lessons from him; I pay him a rouble and a half a lesson. Foma himself fixed on a rouble and a half. He goes to three gentlemen's houses in the

neighbourhood; they pay him too. You see how he is dressed! What's more, he writes poetry."

"Poetry! That's the last straw!"

"Poetry, my dear boy, poetry. And don't imagine I am joking; real poetry, so to say, versifications, and so well composed, you know, on all sorts of subjects. He'll describe any subject you like in a poem. It's a real talent!

On mamma's nameday he concocted such a harangue that we listened with our mouths open; there was something from mythology in it, and the Muses flying about, so that indeed, you know, one could see the . . . what do you call it? . . . polish of form — in fact it was perfectly in rhyme. Foma corrected it.

Well, I have nothing against that, and indeed I am quite pleased. Let him compose, as long as he doesn't get into mischief. You see, Grigory, my boy, I speak to you like a father. Foma heard of it, looked at his poetry, encouraged him, and chose him as his reader and copyist — in fact he has educated him.

It is true, as he says, that Foma has been a benefactor to him. Well, and so, you know, he has begun to have gentlemanly and romantic sentiments, and a feeling of independence — Foma explained it all to me, but I have really forgotten; only I must own that I wanted, apart from Foma, to give him his freedom.

I feel somehow ashamed, you know! . . . but Foma opposes that and says that he finds him useful, that he likes him; and what's more he says: 'It's a great honour to me, as his master, to have poets among my own servants; that that's how some barons somewhere used to live, and that it is living en grand.' Well, en

grand so be it, then! I have begun to respect him, my boy — you understand. . . . Only goodness knows how he is behaving! The worst of it is that since he has taken to poetry he has become so stuck-up with the rest of the servants that he won't speak to them.

Don't you take offence, Grigory, I am speaking to you like a father. Last winter, he promised to marry a serf girl here, Matryona, and a very nice girl she is, honest, hard-working and merry. But now it is 'No, I won't'. That's all about it, he has given her up. Whether it is that he has grown conceited, or has planned first to make a name and then to seek a match in some other place."

"More through the advice of Foma Fomitch," observed Vidoplyasov, "seeing that his honour is my true well-wisher." "Oh, of course Foma Fomitch has a hand in everything," I could not help exclaiming.

"Ough, my dear boy, that's not it!" my uncle interrupted me hurriedly. "Only, you see, now he has no peace. She's a bold, quarrelsome girl, she has set them all against him, they mimic him, bait him, even the serf boys look upon him as a buffoon. . . ."

"It's chiefly owing to Matryona," observed Vidoplyasov; "for Matryona's a real fool, and being a real fool, she's a woman of unbridled character. Through her I have come in this manner to endure such prolonged sufferings."

"Ough, Grigory, my boy, I have talked to you already/" my uncle went on, looking reproachfully at Vidoplyasov. "You see, Sergey, they have made up some horrid rhyme on his surname.

He comes to me and complains, asks whether he cannot somehow change his surname, says that he has long been upset at its ugly sound. ...”

“It’s an undignified name,” Vidoplyasov put in.

“Come, you be quiet, Grigory! Foma approved of it too . . . that is, he did not approve exactly, but, you see, this was his idea: that in case he were to publish his poems — and Foma has a project of his doing so — such a surname perhaps might be a drawback, mightn’t it?”

“So he wants to publish his verses, uncle?”

“Yes, my boy. It’s settled already — at my expense, and on the title-page will be put, ‘the serf of so-and-so’, and in the preface, the author’s thanks to Foma for his education. It’s dedicated to Foma. Foma is writing the preface himself. Well, so just fancy if on the title-page there stands, ‘The Poems of Vidoplyasov’.”

“The Complaints of Vidoplyasov,” Vidoplyasov corrected.

“There, you see, complaints too! Well, Vidoplyasov is no use for a surname, it positively revolts the delicacy of one’s feelings, so Foma says. And all these critics, they say, are such fellows for picking holes and jeering; Brambeus, for instance. . . .

They don’t stick at anything, you know! They will make a laughing-stock of him for his surname alone; they’ll tickle your sides for you till you can do nothing but scratch them, won’t they? What I say is, put any surname you like on your poems — a pseudonym it’s called, isn’t it? I don’t remember; some word ending in nym. ‘But no,’ he says; ‘give the order to the whole servants’ hall to call me by a new name hereafter, for ever, so that I may have a genteel surname to suit my talent.’”

“I bet that you consented, uncle. ...”

“I did, Seryozha, my boy, to avoid quarrelling with them; let them do as they like. You see, at that time there was a misunderstanding between Foma and me. So since then it has come to a new surname every week, and he keeps choosing such dainty ones as Oleandrov, Tulipov. . . .

Only think, Grigory, at first you asked to be called ‘Vyerny’ (i.e. true, faithful)—‘Grigory Vyerny’; afterwards you didn’t like the name yourself because some simpleton found a rhyme to it, ‘skverny’ (i.e. nasty, horrid). You complained, and the fellow was punished. You were a fortnight thinking of a new name — what a selection you had! — at last you made up your mind and came to be asked to be called ‘Ulanov’.

Come, tell me, my boy, could anything be sillier than ‘Ulanov’? I agreed to that too, and gave instructions a second time about changing your surname to Ulanov. It was simply to get rid of him,” added my uncle, turning to me. “You spoilt all the walls, all the window-sills in the arbour scribbling ‘Ulanov’ in pencil, they have had to paint it since.

You wasted a whole quire of good paper on signing your name ‘Ulanov’. At last that was a failure too, they found a rhyme for you: ‘Bolvanov’ (i.e. fool, blockhead). He didn’t want to be a blockhead, so the name must be changed again! What did you choose next? I have forgotten.”

“Tantsev,” answered Vidoplyasov. “If I am destined through my surname to be connected with dancing, it would be more dignified in the foreign form: ‘Tantsev’.”

“Oh, yes, ‘Tantsev’. I agreed to that too, Sergey. Only they found a rhyme to that which I don’t like to repeat. To-day he

comes forward again, he has thought of something new. I bet he has got some new surname. Have you, Grigory? Confess!”

“I have truly been meaning for a long time to lay at your feet a new name, a genteel one.”

“What is it?”

“Essbouquetov.”

“Aren’t you ashamed, really ashamed, Grigory? A surname off a pomatum pot! And you call yourself a clever man. How many days he must have been thinking about it! Why, that’s what is written on scent-bottles.”

“Upon my word, uncle,” I said in a half-whisper, “why, he is simply a fool, a perfect fool.”

“It can’t be helped,” my uncle answered, also in a whisper.

“They declare all round that he is clever, and that all this is due to the working of noble qualities. ...”

“But for goodness’ sake, get rid of him!”

“Listen, Grigory! I have really no time, my boy,” my uncle began in something of an imploring tone, as though he were afraid even of Vidoplyasov. “Come, judge for yourself, how can I attend to your complaints now? You say that they have insulted you in some way again. Come, I give you my word that tomorrow I will go into it all; and now go, and God be with you. . . . Stay! What is Foma Fomitch doing?”

“He has lain down to rest. He told me that if I was asked about him, I was to say that he is at prayer, that he intends to be praying a long time to-night.”

“H’m! Well, you can go, you can go, my boy! You see, Seryozha, he is always with Foma, so that I am actually afraid of him. And that’s why the servants don’t like him, because he is always telling tales to Foma. Now he has gone away, and very likely tomorrow he will have spun some fine yarn about something! I’ve made it all right, my boy, and feel at peace now. ... I was in haste to get to ycm.

Now at last I am with you again,” he brought out with feeling, pressing my hand. “And you know I thought, my dear, that you were desperately angry with me, and would be sure to slip off. I sent them to keep an eye on you. But now, thank God I And this afternoon, Gavril, what a to-do! and Falaley, and you, and one thing after another! Well, thank God! thank God! At last we can talk to our hearts’ content. I will open my heart to you. You mustn’t go away, Seryozha; you are all I have, you and Korovkin. ...”

“But excuse me, uncle, how have you put things right, and what have I to expect here after what has happened? I must own my head’s going round.”

“And do you suppose that mine isn’t? It has been waltzing round for the last six months, my head has, my boy! But, thank God, everything is settled now. In the first place, they have forgiven me, completely forgiven me, on certain conditions of course; but now I am scarcely afraid of anything. Sashenka has been forgiven too. Ah, Sasha, Sasha, this afternoon ... a passionate little heart! She went a little too far, but she has a heart of gold! I am proud of that girl, Seryozha.

May the blessing of God be with her for ever. You too have been forgiven, and even — do you know — you can do just

what you like; you can go all over the house and into the garden, and even among the guests. In fact, you can do just as you like; but only on one condition, that you will say nothing tomorrow in the presence of mamma or Forna — that's an absolute condition, that is literally not half a word, I have promised for you already — but will only listen to what your elders . . . that is, I mean, what others may say. They say that you are young. Don't you be offended, Seryozha; you know you really are young. . . . That's what Anna Nilovna says. ...”

Of course I was very young, and showed it at once by boiling over with indignation at such insulting conditions.

“Listen, uncle,” I cried, almost breathless. “Tell me one thing and set my mind at rest: am I really in a madhouse or not?”

“There you are, my boy, criticising at once! You can't be patient,” my uncle answered, in distress. “It's not a madhouse at all, it's nothing but over-hastiness on both sides. But you must consider, my boy, how you have behaved yourself. You remember what a sousing you gave him — a man, so to say, of venerable years?”

“Such men have no venerable years, uncle.”

“Oh, there, my boy, you go too far! That's really free-thinking. I have nothing against rational free-thinking myself, my boy, but really that is beyond the mark; you really surprise me, Sergey.”

“Don't be angry, uncle. I beg pardon, but I only beg your pardon. As for your Foma Fomitch ...”

“There, now, it is your! Oh, Sergey, my boy, don't judge him too harshly; he is a misanthropical man and nothing more, morbid! You musn't judge him too severely. But he is a high-minded man; in fact, he is simply the most high-minded of men! Why,

you saw it yourself just now; he was simply glorious. And as for the tricks he plays sometimes, it is no use noticing it. Why, it happens to everyone.”

“On the contrary, uncle, it happens to nobody.”

“Ough, he keeps on at the same thing! There is not much good nature in you, Seryozha; you don’t know how to forgive. . . .”

“Oh, all right, uncle, all right! Let us leave that. Tell me, have you seen Nastasya Yevgrafovna?”

“Oh, my dear, the whole bother has been about her. I tell you what, Seryozha, and first, what is most important: we’ve all decided to congratulate him to-morrow on his birthday — Foma, I mean — for to-morrow really is his birthday. Sashenka is a good girl, but she is mistaken; so we will go, the whole tribe of us, rather early, before mass. Ilyusha will recite some verses to him which will be like oil on his heart — in fact, it will flatter him.

Oh, if only you, Seryozha, would congratulate him with us! He would perhaps forgive you altogether. How splendid it would be if you were reconciled! Forget your wrongs, Seryozha; you insulted him too, you know ... he is a most worthy man. . . .”

“Uncle! uncle!” I cried, losing all patience, “I want to talk of what is important, and you. ... Do you know, I s\y again, what is happening to Nastasya Yevgrafovna?”

“Why, what is the matter, my boy? Why are you shouting? All the trouble has arisen over her, though indeed it arose some time ago. I did not want to tell you about it before, so as not to frighten you, for they wanted simply to turn her out, and they insisted on my sending her away too.

You can imagine my position. . . . Oh, well, thank God, all that is set right now. They thought, you see — I will confess it all to you — that I was in love with her myself, and wanted to marry her; that I was, in short, rushing to ruin, and that really would be rushing to my ruin, they have explained it so to me. And so, to save me, they meant to turn her out. It was mamma's doing, and most of all Anna Nilovna's. Foma says nothing so far.

But now I have convinced them all that they are wrong, and I must confess I have told them already that you are making Nastenka a formal proposal and that is what you have come for. Well, that has pacified them to some extent, and now she will remain, though not altogether; that is, so far only on probation. Still, she will remain. And indeed you have risen in general esteem since I told her you were courting her. Anyway, mamma seems pacified. Only Anna Nilovna goes on grumbling! I really don't know what to think of to satisfy her. And what is it she really wants, Anna Nilovna?"

"Uncle, you are greatly in error! Why, do you know that Nastasya Yevgrafovna is going away to-morrow if she has not gone away already? Do you know that her father came to-day on purpose to take her away? That it's all a settled thing, that she told me of it to-day herself, and in consequence I asked me to give you her greetings? Do you know that or not?"

My uncle stood blankly facing me with his mouth open. I fancied that he shuddered, and a moan broke from his lips.

Without loss of time I had to describe to him all my conversation with Nastenka, my attempt to pay her my addresses, her resolute refusal, her anger with my uncle for having summoned me. I explained that she was hoping by her

departure to save him from marrying Tatyana Ivanovna. In fact I concealed nothing from him; indeed I purposely exaggerated everything that was unpleasant in my story. I wanted to impress my uncle so as to wring some resolute step out of him, and I really did impress him. He cried out and clutched at his head.

“Where is she, don’t you know? Where is she now?” he brought out at last, turning pale with alarm. “And I, like a fool came here quite easy in my mind, I thought everything had been set right,” he added in despair.

“I don’t know where she is now; only when the uproar was beginning she went to you: she meant to proclaim all this aloud, before them all. Most likely they would not let her go in.”

“No, indeed! What might she not have done! Ah, the hot-headed proud little thing! And what is she going to? What is she going to? And you, you are a pretty fellow. Why, what did she refuse you for? It’s nonsense! You ought to have made her like you. Why doesn’t she like you? For God’s sake, answer, why are you standing there?”

“Have mercy on me, uncle! How can you ask such questions?”

“But you know this is impossible! You must marry her, you must. What did I bring you from Petersburg for? You must make her happy! Now they will drive her away, but when she is your wife, my own niece, they won’t drive her away. If not, what has she to go to? What will become of her?

To be a governess. Why, that is simply senseless nonsense, being a governess. While she is looking for a place, what is she going to live upon at home? Her old father has got nine to

keep; they go hungry themselves. She won't take a farthing from me, you know, if she goes away through this disgusting gossip; she won't, nor will her father. And to go away like this — it is awful! It will cause a scandal — I know.

And her salary has been paid for a long time in advance for necessities at home; you know she is their breadwinner. Why, supposing I do recommend her as a governess, and find an honest and honourable family. . . . But where the devil is one to find them, honourable, really honourable people?

Well, granting that there are many — indeed it's a blasphemy to doubt it, but, my dear boy, you see it's risky — can one rely on people? Besides, anyone poor is suspicious, and apt to fancy he is being forced to pay for food and kindness with humiliation!

They will insult her; she is proud, and then . . . and what then? And what if some scoundrelly seducer turns up? She would spurn him, I know she would, but yet he would insult her, the scoundrel! And some discredit, some slur, some suspicion may be cast upon her all the same, and then. . . . My head is going round! Ah, my God!”

“Uncle, forgive me for one question,” I said solemnly. “Don't be angry with me; understand that your answer to this question may decide much. Indeed, I have a right in a way to demand an answer from you, uncle!”

“What, what it is? What question?”

“Tell me as in God's presence, openly and directly; don't you feel that you are a little in love with Nastasya Yevgrafovna

yourself and would like to marry her? Just think; that is why she is being turned away from here.”

My uncle made a vigorous gesture of the most violent impatience.

“I? In love? With her? Why, they have all gone off their heads, or are in a conspiracy against me. And why did I write to you to come if not to prove to them that they were all off their heads? Why am I making a match for her with you? I? In love? With her? They are all crazy, that’s all about it!”

“But if it is so, uncle, do allow me to speak freely. I declare to you solemnly that I see absolutely nothing against the suggestion. On the contrary, you would make her happy, if only you love her and — and — God grant it may be so. And God give you love and good counsel!”

“But upon my word, what are you talking about?” cried my uncle, almost with horror. “I wonder how you can say such a thing coolly . . . and . . . you are altogether, my boy, in too great a hurry, I notice that characteristic in you! Why, aren’t you talking nonsense? How, pray, am I to marry her when I look upon her as a daughter and nothing else?”

It would be shameful for me, indeed, to look upon her in any other light; it would be a sin in fact! I am an old man, while she is a flower! Indeed, Foma made that clear to me in those very words.

My heart glows with a father’s love for her, and here you talk of marriage! Maybe out of gratitude she would not refuse me, but you know she would despise me afterwards for taking advantage of her gratitude. I should spoil her life, I should lose

her affection! And I would give my soul for her, she is my beloved child! I love her just as I do Sasha, even more, I must own. Sasha is my daughter by right, by law, but this one I have made my daughter by love. I took her out of poverty, I have brought her up Katya, my lost angel, loved her; she left her to me as a daughter.

I have given her a good education: she speaks French and plays the piano, she has read books and everything. . . . Such a sweet smile she has! Have you noticed it, Seryozha? As though she were laughing at one, but yet she is not laughing, but on the contrary, loving one. . . .

You see I thought that you would come and make her an offer; they would be convinced that I had no intentions in regard to her, and would give over spreading these disgusting stories. She would remain with us then in peace, in comfort, and how happy we should be! You are both my children, both almost orphans, you have both grown up under my guardianship ...

I should have loved you so! I would have devoted my life to you; I would not part from you; I would follow you anywhere! Oh, how happy we might have been! And why are these people always so cross, always so angry, why do they hate each other? If only I could explain it all to them! If only I could make them see the whole truth! Ah, my God!”

“Yes, uncle, yes, that is all so; but, you see, she has refused me.”

“Refused you! Hm. ... Do you know, I had a sort of presentiment that she would refuse you,” he said, musing. “But no!” he cried. “I don’t believe it. It’s impossible. In that case, all

our plans are upset! But you must have begun injudiciously somehow, even offended her perhaps. Perhaps you tried your hand at paying compliments. . . . Tell me how it was again, Sergey.”

I repeated the whole story in full detail again. When I came to Nastenka’s hoping by her departure to save my uncle from Tatvana Ivanovna, he gave a bitter smile.

“Save me!” he said. “Save me till to-morrow morning. . . .”

“But you don’t mean to say that you are going to marry Tatyana Ivanovna!” I cried in alarm.

“How else could I have paid for Nastasya’s not being sent away to-morrow? To-morrow I make the offer — the formal proposal.”

“And you have made up your mind to it, uncle?”

“What could I do, my boy, what could I do? It rends my heart, but I have made up my mind to it. The proposal will be to-morrow; they suggest that the wedding should be a quiet one, at home; it would certainly be better at home. You will perhaps be best man. I have already dropped a hint about you, so they won’t drive you away before then. There is no help for it, my boy. They say, ‘It’s a fortune for your children!’ Of course one would do anything for one’s children. One would turn head over heels, especially as really, perhaps, what they say is right. You know, I really ought to do something for my family. One can’t sit an idle drone for ever!”

“But, uncle, she is mad, you know!” I cried, forgetting myself, and there was a sickly pang at my heart.

“Oh, mad, is she now? She is not mad at all; it’s only, you know, that she has had trouble. . . . There is no help for it, my boy. Of

course I should have been glad of one with sense. . . . Though, after all, some who have sense are no better! If only you knew what a kind-hearted creature she is, noble-hearted!”

“But, my God! he is resigning himself to the thought of it already,” I said in despair.

“And what else is there to do? You know they are doing their utmost for my benefit, and, indeed, I felt beforehand that sooner or later they would force me to marry, that there is no getting out of it. So better now than make more quarrelling about it. I am telling you everything quite openly, Seryozha. In a way I am actually glad. I have made up my mind, somehow. Why, I came here with my mind almost at ease. It seems, it’s my fate. And the great thing to make up for it was that Nastenka would stay on. You know I agreed on that condition. And now she wants to run away of herself! But that shall not be!” my uncle cried, stamping. “Listen, Sergey,” he added with a determined air; “wait for me here, don’t go away. I will come back to you in an instant.”

“Where are you off to, uncle?”

“Perhaps I shall see her, Sergey; it will all be cleared up, believe me that it will all be cleared up, and . . . and . . . you shall marry her, I give you my word of honour!” . My uncle went quickly out of the room, and turned not towards the house, but into the garden. I watched him from the window.

Chapter XII

THE CATASTROPHE

I WAS left alone. My position was insufferable; I had been rejected, and my uncle meant to marry me almost by force. I

was perplexed and lost in a tangle of ideas. Mizintchikov and his proposition was not absent from my mind for an instant.

At all costs uncle must be saved! I even thought of going to look for Mizintchikov and telling him all about it. But where had my uncle gone, though? He had said himself that he was going to look for Nastenka, but had turned in the direction of the garden. The thought of secret meetings flashed through my mind, and a very unpleasant feeling clutched at my heart. I remembered what Mizintchikov had said of a secret liaison.

After a moment's thought I rejected my suspicions with indignation. My uncle was incapable of deceit: that was obvious. My uneasiness grew greater every moment. Unconsciously I went out on to the steps, and walked into the garden down the very avenue into which my uncle had disappeared. The moon was beginning to rise. I knew that garden through and through, and was not afraid of losing myself. As I drew near the old arbour which stood in solitude on the bank of the neglected scum-covered pond, I suddenly stood rooted to the spot; I heard voices in the arbour. I cannot describe the strange feeling of annoyance that took possession of me.

I felt convinced that my uncle and Nastenka were there, and went on going nearer, appeasing my conscience by thinking that I was walking at the same pace as before and not trying to approach stealthily. Suddenly there was the distinct sound of a kiss, then stifled exclamations, and immediately afterwards a shrill feminine shriek. At that instant a woman in a white dress ran out of the arbour and flashed by me like a swallow.

It even seemed to me that she hid her face in her hands that she might not be recognised: probably I had been noticed from the arbour. But what was my amazement when in the swain who emerged after the flying lady I recognised — Obnoskin, Obnoskin, who, according to Mizintchikov's words, had gone away some hours before. Obnoskin on his side was greatly confused when he saw me; all his impudence vanished instantly.

"Excuse me, but ... I did not in the least expect to meet you," he brought out, smiling and hesitating.

"Nor I you," I answered ironically, "especially as I heard you had already gone away."

"No. ... It was just ... I went a little on the way with my mother. But may I appeal to you as an absolutely honourable man?"

"What about?"

"There are cases — and you will agree yourself that it is so — when a truly honourable man is forced to appeal to the highest sense of honour of another truly honourable man. ... I hope you understand me. . . ."

"Do not hope, I understand absolutely nothing. ..."

"You saw the lady who was here with me in the arbour?"

"I saw her, but I did not recognise her."

"Ah, you did not recognise her. . . . That lady I shall shortly call my wife."

"I congratulate you. But in what way can I be of use to you?"

"Only in one way, by keeping it a dead secret that you have seen me with that lady."

"Who can she be?" I wondered. "Surely not . . ."

“I really don’t know,” I answered Obnoskin. “I hope that you will excuse me for not being able to promise.”

“Yes, please, for God’s sake,” Obnoskin besought me.

“Understand my position, it’s a secret. You may be betrothed too: then I . . .”

“Shi someone is coming!”

“Where?”

We did indeed catch a glimpse thirty paces away of the shadow of someone passing.

“It ... it must be Foma Fomitch!” Obnoskin whispered, trembling all over. “I know him from his walk. My God! And steps again from the other direction! Do you hear? . . . Good-bye! I thank you . . . and I entreat you . . .”

Obnoskin vanished. A minute later, as though he had sprung out of the earth, my uncle was before me.

“Is it you?” he greeted me. “It is all over, Seryozha, it is all over!”

I noticed, too, that he was trembling from head to foot.

“What is all over, uncle?”

“Come along!” he said, gasping for breath, and clutching my hand tightly he drew me after him. He did not utter a word all the way to the lodge, nor did he let me speak. I was expecting something monstrous, and my expectations were almost realised.

When we went indoors he was overcome with giddiness, he was deathly pale. I promptly sprinkled him with water.

“Something very awful must have happened,” I thought, “for a man like this to faint.”

“Uncle, what is the matter with you?” I asked him at last.

“All is over, Seryozha! Foma found me in the garden with Nastenka, at the very moment when I was kissing her.”

“Kissing her! In the garden!” I cried, looking at my uncle in amazement.

“In the garden, my boy. The Lord confounded me I I went there to be sure of seeing her. I wanted to speak openly to her, to make her see reason — about you, I mean. And she had been waiting for me a whole hour, on the broken seat, beyond the pond. . . . She often goes there when she wants to speak to me.”

“Often, uncle?”

“Yes, often, my boy! Of late we have been meeting almost every night. Only they must have watched us — in fact, I know that they watched us and that it was Anna Nilovna’s doing. We gave it up for a time. The last four days we have not met; but to-day it was necessary again. You saw yourself how necessary it was; how else could I have said anything to her? I went in the hope of finding her, and she had been sitting there a whole hour, waiting for me: she, too, wanted to tell me something. ...”

“Good heavens, how incautious! Why, you knew that you were being watched!”

“But, you see, it was a critical matter, Seryozha; there was a great deal we had to discuss together. I don’t dare to look at her in the daytime. She looks in one corner and I look in another, as though she did not exist. But towards night we meet and have a talk. ...”

“Well, what happened, uncle?”

“Before I could utter a couple of words, you know, my heart began throbbing and the tears gushed from my eyes. I began trying to persuade her to marry you, and she answered me: ‘You certainly don’t love me — you must be blind.’ And all of a sudden she flings herself on my neck, throws her arms round me, and begins crying and sobbing! ‘I love no one but you,’ she said, ‘and won’t marry anyone. I have loved you for ever so long, but I will never marry you. And to-morrow I am going away and going into a nunnery.’”

“My goodness! Did she really say that? Well, what then, uncle, what then?”

“I looked up and there was Foma facing us! And where had he sprung from? Could he have been sitting behind a bush, and waiting for some such lapse?”

“The scoundrel!”

“I was petrified, Nastenka ran away, while Foma Fomitch passed by without a word and held up his finger at me. Sergey, do you understand what a hubbub there will be to-morrow?”

“I should think I do!”

“Do you understand?” he cried in despair, leaping up from his seat. “Do you understand that they will try to ruin her, to disgrace her, to dishonour her; they are looking for a pretext to accuse her of something disgraceful, and now the pretext is found. You know they will say that she is carrying on an abominable intrigue with me! You know, the scoundrels made out that she had an intrigue with Vidoplyasov! It’s all Anna Nilovna’s tales. What will happen now? What will happen to-morrow? Will Foma really tell them?”

“He’ll certainly tell them, uncle.”

“If he does, if he really does tell ..,” he brought out, biting his lips and clenching his fists. “But no, I don’t believe it! He won’t tell, he will understand ... he is a man of the loftiest character! He will spare her. ...”

“Whether he spares her or whether he doesn’t,” I answered resolutely, “it is your duty in any case to make Nastasya Yevgrafovna an offer to-morrow.”

My uncle looked fixedly at me.

“Do you understand, uncle, that you have mined the girl’s reputation if this story gets about? Do you understand that you ought to prevent that calamity as quickly as possible; that you ought to look them all in the face boldly and proudly, ought to offer her your hand publicly, to spurn their arguments and pound Foma to a jelly if he hints a word against her?”

“My dear boy,” cried my uncle. “I thought of that as I came along here!”

“And did you make up your mind?”

“Yes, and finally! I had made up my mind before I began speaking to you.”

“Bravo, uncle!”

And I rushed to embrace him.

We talked for a long time. I put before him all the arguments, all the absolute necessity for marrying Nastenka, which, indeed, he understood far better than I did. But my eloquence was aroused. I was delighted on my uncle’s account. He was impelled by a sense of duty or he would never have taken a stand. He had the deepest reverence for duty, for obligation. But in spite of that I was quite unable to imagine how things would be settled. I knew and blindly believed that nothing

would induce my uncle to fall short of what he had once recognised as his duty; but yet I could not believe that he would have the strength to stand out against his household. And so I did my utmost to incite him and urge him on, and set to work with all the fervour of youth.

“The more so,” I said, “as now everything is settled and your last doubts have vanished! What you did not expect, though in reality everyone else saw it, and everyone noticed it before you did, has happened; Nastasya Yevgrafovna loves you! Surely,” I cried, “you will not let that pure love be turned into shame and disgrace for her?”

“Never! But, my dear boy, can I really be going to be so happy?” I cried my uncle, throwing himself on my neck. “And how is it she loves me, and what for? What for? It seems to me there is nothing in me likely to ... I am an old man compared to her; I certainly did not expect it! My angel, my angel! . . . Listen, Seryozha! you asked me this evening whether I were not in love with her: had you any idea?”

“All I saw, uncle, was that you love her as much as anyone can love: you love her and at the same time you don’t know it yourself. Upon my word! You invite me, you want to marry me to her solely in order that she may become your niece, and so you may have her always with you. ...”

“But you . . . you do forgive me, Sergey?”

“Oh, uncle. . . .”

And he embraced me again.

“Mind, uncle, they will all be against you: you must stand up for yourself and resist them, and no later than to-morrow!”

“Yes . . . yes, to-morrow ..,” he repeated somewhat pensively. “And you know we must attack the business with manliness, with true nobility of soul, with strength of will . . . Yes, with strength of will!”

“Don’t be frightened, uncle.”

“I am not frightened, Seryozha! There’s one thing I don’t know how to begin, how to proceed.”

“Don’t think about it, uncle. To-morrow will settle everything. Set your mind at rest for to-day. The more you think the worse it will be. And if Foma begins — kick him out of the house at once and pound him to a jelly.”

“And can’t we avoid kicking him out? What I have decided, my boy, is this. To-morrow I shall go to him early, at dawn, I shall tell him all about it, just as I have told you here. Surely he cannot but understand me, he is a high-minded man, the most high-minded of men. But I tell you what does worry me: what if mamma speaks to Tatyana Ivanovna to-day of the offer to be made to her to-morrow? That would be unlucky, wouldn’t it?”

“Don’t worry yourself about Tatyana Ivanovna, uncle.”

And I told him about the scene in the arbour with Obnoskin. My uncle was extremely surprised. I did not say a word about Mizintchikov.

“A fantastical person. A really fantastical person!” he cried.

“Poor thing! They ingratiate themselves with her and try to take advantage of her simplicity. Was it really Obnoskin? But, you know, he has gone away. . . . Strange, awfully strange! I am astonished, Seryozha. . . . We must look into it to-morrow and

take steps. . . . But are you perfectly certain that it was Tatyana Ivanovna?"

I answered that I had not seen her face, but for certain reasons I was positive that it was Tatyana Ivanovna.

"H'm. Wasn't it a little intrigue with one of the servant girls and you fancied it was Tatyana Ivanovna? Wasn't it Dasha, the gardener's daughter? A sly hussy! She has been remarked upon, that's why I say so. Anna Nilovna caught her! . . . But it wasn't she, though! He said he meant to marry her. Strange, strange!"

At last we parted. I embraced my uncle and gave him my blessing.

"To-morrow, to-morrow," he repeated, "it will all be settled; before you are up it will be settled. I shall go to Foma and take a chivalrous line, I will speak frankly as I would to my own brother, I will lay bare the inmost recesses of my heart. Good-bye, Seryozha. You go to bed, you are tired; but I am sure I shan't shut my eyes all night."

He went away. I went to bed at once, tired out and utterly exhausted. It had been a hard day. My nerves were overwrought, and before I fell really asleep I kept starting and waking up again. But strange as my impressions were on going off to sleep, the strangeness of them was as nothing beside the queerness of my awakening next morning.

PART II

Chapter I

THE PURSUIT

I SLEPT soundly without dreaming. Suddenly I felt as though a load of some hundredweights was lying on my feet. I cried out and woke up. It was daylight; the sun was peeping brightly into the room. On my bed, or rather on my feet, was sitting Mr. Bahtcheyev.

It was impossible to doubt that it was he. Managing somehow to release my legs, I sat up in bed and looked at him with the blank amazement of a man just awake.

“And now he is looking about him,” cried the fat man. “Why are you staring at me? Get up, sir, get up. I have been waking you for the last half-hour; rub away at your eyes!”

“Why, what has happened? What’s the time?”

“It’s still early by the clock, but our Fevronya did not wait for dawn, but has given us the slip. Get up, we are going in pursuit!”

“What Fevronya?”

“Why, our young lady, the crazy one! She has given us the slip! She was off before dawn. I came to you, sir, only for a minute, to wake you, and here I have been busy with you a couple of hours. Get up, your uncle’s waiting for you. They waited for the festive day!” he added, with a malignant quiver in his voice.

“But whom and what are you talking about?” I asked impatiently, though I was beginning to guess. “Surely not Tatyana Ivanovna?”

“To be sure. She it is. I said so, I foretold it; they wouldn’t listen to me. A nice treat she has given us for the festive day now! She is mad on amour, and has amour on the brain. Tfoo! And

that fellow, what do you say to that fellow? With his little beard, eh?"

"Can you mean Mizintchikov?"

"Tfoo, plague take it! Why, my dear sir, you had better rub your eyes and pull yourself together — if only for the great holy festive day. You must have had a great deal too much at supper last night if you are still hazy this morning. With Mizintchikov I It's with Obnoskin, not Mizintchikov. Ivan Ivanovitch Mizintchikov is a moral young man and he is coming with us in pursuit."

"What are you saying?" I cried, jumping up in bed. "Is it really with Obnoskin?"

"Tfoo, you annoying person!" answered the fat man, leaping up from his seat. "I come to him as to a man of culture to inform him of what has happened, and he still doubts it. Well, sir, if you want to come with us, get up, shoot into your breeches. It's no good my spending more words on you; I've wasted golden time on you as it is."

And he went out in extreme indignation.

Amazed by the news, I jumped out of bed, hurriedly dressed, and ran downstairs. Thinking to find my uncle in the house, where everyone still seemed asleep and knowing nothing of what had happened, I cautiously mounted the front steps, and in the hall I met Nastenka. She seemed to have dressed hurriedly in some sort of peignoir or schlafrock. Her hair was in disorder; it was evident that she had only just jumped out of bed, and she seemed to be waiting for someone in the hall.

“Tell me, is it true that Tatvana Ivanovna has run away with Obnoskin?” she asked hurriedly in a breaking voice, looking pale and frightened.

“I am told it is true. I am looking for my uncle, we want to go after them.”

“Oh, bring her back, make haste and bring her back. She will be ruined if you don’t fetch her back.”

“But where is uncle?”

“Most likely in the stable; they are getting the carriage out. I have been waiting for him here. Listen: tell him from me that I must go home to-day, I have quite made up my mind. My father will take me; I shall go at once if I can. Everything is hopeless now. All is lost!”

Saying this, she looked at me as though she were utterly lost, and suddenly dissolved into tears. I think she began to be hysterical.

“Calm yourself,” I besought her. “Why, it’s all for the best — you will see. What is the matter with you, Nastasya Yevgrafovna?”

“I ... I don’t know . . . what is the matter with me,” she said, sighing and unconsciously squeezing my hands. “Tell him . . .” At that instant there was a sound from the other side of the door on the right.

She let go of my hand and, panic-stricken, ran away upstairs without finishing her sentence.

I found the whole party — that is, my uncle, Bahtcheyev, and Mizintchikov — in the back yard by the stable. Fresh horses had been harnessed in Bahtcheyev’s carriage. Everything was ready for setting off; they were only waiting for me.

“Here he is!” cried my uncle on my appearance. “Have you heard, my boy?” he asked, with a peculiar expression on his face.

Alarm, perplexity, and, at the same time, hope were expressed in his looks, in his voice and in his movements. He was conscious that a momentous crisis had come in his life.

I was immediately initiated into all the details of the case. Mr. Bahtcheyev, who had spent a very bad night, left his house at dawn to reach the monastery five miles away in time for early mass. Just at the turning from the high road to the monastery he suddenly saw a chaise dashing along at full trot, and in the chaise Tatyana Ivanovna and Obnoskin. Tatyana Ivanovna, with a tear-stained and as it seemed frightened face, uttered a shriek and stretched out her hands to Mr. Bahtcheyev as though imploring his protection — so at least it appeared from his story; “while he, the scoundrel, with the little beard,” he went on, “sits more dead than alive and tries to hide himself. But you are wrong there, my fine fellow, you can’t hide yourself.” Without stopping, Stepan Alexyevitch turned back to the road and galloped to Stepantchikovo and woke my uncle, Mizintchikov, and finally me. They decided to set off at once in pursuit.

“Obnoskin, Obnoskin,” said my uncle, looking intently at me, looking at me as though he would like to say something else as well. “Who would have thought it?”

“Any dirty trick might have been expected of that low fellow!” cried Mizintchikov with the most vigorous indignation, and at once turned away to avoid my eye.

“What are we going to do, go or not? Or are we going to stand here till night babbling!” interposed Mr. Bahtcheyev as he clambered into the carriage.

“We are going, we are going,” cried my uncle.

“It’s all for the best, uncle,” I whispered to him. “You see how splendidly it has all turned out?”

“Hush, my boy, don’t be sinful. . . . Ah, my dear I They will simply drive her away now, to punish her for their failure, you understand. It’s fearful, the prospect I see before me!”

“Well, Yegor Ilyitch, are you going on whispering or starting?”

Mr. Bahtcheyev cried out a second time. “Or shall we unharness the horses and have a snack of something? What do you say; shall we have a drink of vodka?”

These words were uttered with such furious sarcasm that it was impossible not to satisfy Bahtcheyev at once. We all promptly got into the carriage, and the horses set off at a gallop.

For some time we were all silent. My uncle kept looking at me significantly, but did not care to speak to me before the others. He often sank into thought; then as though waking up, started and looked about him in agitation. Mizintchikov was apparently calm, he smoked a cigar, and his looks expressed the indignation of an unjustly treated man. But Bahtcheyev had excitement enough for all of us. He grumbled to himself, looked at everyone and everything with absolute indignation, flushed crimson, fumed, continually spat aside, and could not recover himself.

“Are you sure, Stepan Alexyevitch, that they have gone to Mishino?” my uncle asked suddenly. “It’s fifteen miles from here, my boy,” he added, addressing me. “It’s a little village of thirty souls, lately purchased from the former owners by a

provincial official. The most pettifogging fellow in the world. So at least they say about him, perhaps mistakenly Stepan Alexyevitch declares that that is where Obnoskin has gone, and that that official will be helping him now."

"To be sure," cried Bahtcheyev, starting. "I tell you, it is Mishino. Only by now maybe there is no trace of him left at Mishino. I should think not, we have waited three hours chattering in the yard!"

"Don't be uneasy," observed Mizint'hikov. "We shall find them."

"Find them, indeed! I dare say he will wait for you. The treasure is in his hands. You may be sure we have seen the last of him!"

"Calm yourself, Stepan Alexyevitch, calm yourself, we shall overtake them," said my uncle. "They have not had time to take any steps yet, you will see that is so"

"Not had time!" Mr. Bahtcheyev brought out angrily. "She's had time for any mischief, for all she's such a quiet one! 'She's a quiet one/ they say, 'a quiet one,' he added in a mincing voice, as though he were mimicking someone. 'She has had troubles.' Well, now, she has shown us her heels, for all her troubles. Now you have to chase after her along the high roads with your tongue out before you can see where you are going! They won't let a man go to church for the holy saint's day. Tfoo!"

"But she is not under age," I observed; "she is not under guardianship. We can't bring her back if she doesn't want to come. What are we going to do?"

"Of course," answered my uncle; "but she will want to — I assure you. What she is doing now means nothing. As soon as she sees us she will want to come back — I'll answer for it. We

can't leave her like this, my boy, at the mercy of fate, to be sacrificed; it's a duty, so to say. ..."

"She's not under guardianship!" cried Bahtcheyev, pouncing on me at once. "She is a fool, my dear sir, a perfect fool — it's not a case of her being under guardianship. I didn't care to talk to you about her yesterday, but the other day I went by mistake into her room and what did I see, there she was before the looking-glass with her arms akimbo dancing a schottische! And dressed up to the nines: a fashion-plate, a regular fashion-plate! I simply spat in disgust and walked away. Then I foresaw all this, as clear as though it were written in a book!"

"Why abuse her so?" I observed with some timidity. "We know that Tatyana Ivanovna ... is not in perfect health ... or rather she has a mania. ... It seems to me that Obnoskin is the one to blame, not she."

"Not in perfect health! Come, you get along," put in the fat man, turning crimson with wrath. "Why, he has taken an oath to drive a man to fury! Since yesterday he has taken an oath to! She is a fool, my dear sir, I tell you, an absolute fool. It's not that she's not in perfect health; from early youth she has been mad on Cupid. And now Cupid has brought her to this pass. As for that fellow with the beard, it's no use talking about him. I dare say by now he is racing off double quick with the money in his pocket and a grin on his face.

"Do you really think, then, that he'll cast her off at once?"

"What else should he do? Is he going to drag such a treasure about with him? And what good is she to him? He'll fleece her of everything and then sit her down somewhere under a bush on the high road — and make off. While she can sit there under the bush and sniff the flowers."

“Well, you are too hasty there, Stepan, it won’t be like that!” cried my uncle. “But why are you so cross? I wonder at you, Stepan. What’s the matter with you?”

“Why, am I a man or not? It does make one cross, though it’s no business of mine. Why, I am saying it perhaps in kindness to her. . . . Ech, damnation take it all! Why, what have I come here for? Why, what did I turn back for? What is it to do with me? What is it to do with me?”

So grumbled Mr. Bahtcheyev, but I left off listening to him and mused on the woman whom we were now in pursuit of — Tatyana Ivanovna. Here is a brief biography of her which I gathered later on from the most trustworthy sources, and which is essential to the explanation of her adventures.

A poor orphan child who grew up in a strange unfriendly house, then a poor girl, then a poor young woman, and at last a poor old maid, Tatyana Ivanovna in the course of her poor life had drained the over-full cup of sorrow, friendlessness, humiliation and reproach, and had tasted to the full the bitterness of the bread of others. Naturally of a gay, highly susceptible and frivolous temperament, she had at first endured her bitter lot in one way or another and had even been capable at times of the gayest careless laughter; but with years destiny at last got the upper hand of her. Little by little Tatyana Ivanovna grew thin and sallow, became irritable and morbidly susceptible, and sank into the most unrestrained, unbounded dreaminess, often interrupted by hysterical tears and convulsive sobbing. The fewer earthly blessings real life left to her lot, the more she comforted and deluded herself in imagination.

The more certainly, the more irretrievably her last hopes in real life were passing and at last were lost, the more seductive grew her dreams, never to be realised. Fabulous wealth, unheard-of beauty, rich, elegant, distinguished suitors, always princes and sons of generals, who for her sake had kept their hearts in virginal purity and were dying at her feet from infinite love; and finally, he — he, the ideal of beauty combining in himself every possible perfection, passionate and loving, an artist, a poet, the son of a general — all at once or all by turns — began to appear to her not only in her dreams but almost in reality. Her reason was already beginning to fail, unable to stand the strain of this opiate of secret incessant dreaming. . . .

And all at once destiny played a last fatal jest at her expense. Living in the last extreme of humiliation, in melancholy surroundings that crushed the heart, a companion to a toothless old lady, the most peevish in the world, scolded for everything, reproached for every crust she ate, for every threadbare rag she wore, insulted with impunity by anyone, protected by no one, worn out by her miserable existence and secretly plunged in the luxury of the maddest and most fervid dreams — she suddenly heard the news of the death of a distant relation, all of whose family had died long before (though she in her frivolous way had never taken the trouble to ascertain the fact); he was a strange man, a phrenologist and a money-lender, who led a solitary, morose, unnoticed life, in seclusion somewhere very remote in the wilds.

And now all at once immense wealth fell as though by miracle from heaven and scattered gold at Tatyana Ivanovna's feet; she turned out to be the sole legitimate heiress of the dead money-lender. A hundred thousand silver roubles came to her at once.

This jest of destiny was the last straw. Indeed, how could a mind already tottering doubt the truth of dreams when they were actually beginning to come true? And so the poor thing took leave of her last remaining grain of common sense. Swooning with bliss, she soared away beyond recall into her enchanted world of impossible imaginations and seductive fancies.

Away with all reflection, all doubt, all the checks of real life, all its laws clear and inevitable as twice two make four. Thirty-five years and dreams of dazzling beauty, the sad chill of autumn and the luxuriance of the infinite bliss of love — all blended in her without discord. Her dreams had once already been realised in life; why should not all the rest come true? Why should not he appear?

Tatyana Ivanovna did not reason, but she had faith. But while waiting for him, the ideal — suitors and knights of various orders and simple gentlemen, officers and civilians, infantry men and cavalry men, grand noblemen and simply poets who had been in Paris or had been only in Moscow, with beards and without beards, with imperials and without imperials, Spaniards and not Spaniards (but Spaniards, by preference), began appearing before her day and night in horrifying numbers that awakened grave apprehensions in onlookers; she was but a step from the madhouse. All these lovely phantoms thronged about her in a dazzling, infatuated procession.

In reality, in actual life, everything went the same fantastic way: anyone she looked at was in love with her; anyone who passed by was a Spaniard; if anyone died it must be for love of her. As ill-luck would have it, all this was confirmed in her eyes by the fact that men such as Obnoskin, Mizintchikov, and dozens of

others with the same motives began running after her. Everyone began suddenly trying to please her, spoiling her, flattering her.

Poor Tatyana Ivanovna refused to suspect that all this was for the sake of her money. She was fully convinced that, as though at some signal, people had suddenly reformed, and all, every one of them, grown gay and kind, friendly and good. He had not appeared himself in person; but though there could be no doubt that he would appear, her daily life as it was was so agreeable, so alluring, so full of all sorts of distractions and diversions, that she could wait.

Tatyana Ivanovna ate sweetmeats, culled the flowers of pleasure, and read novels. The novels heated her imagination and were usually flung aside at the second page; she could not read longer, but was carried to dreamland by the very first lines, by the most trivial hint at love, sometimes simply by the description of scenery, of a room, of a toilette.

New finery, lace, hats, hair ornaments, ribbons, samples, paper patterns, designs, sweetmeats, flowers, lapdogs were being continually sent her. Three girls spent whole days rewing for her in the maid's room, while their lady was trying on bodices and flounces, and twisting and turning before the looking-glass from morning to night, and even in the night. She actually seemed younger and prettier on coming into her fortune.

To this day I don't know what was her relationship to the late General Krahotkin. I have always been persuaded that it was the invention of Madame la (ienerale, who wanted to get possession of Tatyana Ivanovna and at all costs to marry her to my uncle for her money. Mr. Bahtcheyev was right when he

spoke of its being Cupid that had brought Tatyana Ivanovna to the last point; and my uncle's idea on hearing of her elopement with Obnoskin — to run after her and bring her back even by force — was the most rational one. The poor creature was not fit to live without a guardian, and would have come to grief at once if she had fallen into evil hands.

It was past nine when we reached Mishino. It was a poor little village, lying in a hole two miles from the high road. Six or seven peasants' huts, berrimed with ^moke, slanting on one side and barely covered with blackened thatch, looked dejectedly and inhospitably at the traveller.

There was not a garden, not a bush, to be seen for a quarter of a mile round. Only an old willow hung drowsily over the greenish pool that passed for a pond. Such a new abode could hardly make a cheering impression on Tatyana Ivanovna. The manor house consisted of a new long, narrow, wooden building with six windows in a row, and had been roughly thatched.

The owner, the official, had only lately taken possession. The yard was not even fenced, and only on one side a new hurdle had been begun from which the dry leaves of the nut branches had not yet dropped. Obnoskin's chaise was standing by the hurdle. We had fallen on the fugitives like snow on the head. From an open window came the sound of cries and weeping.

The barefoot boy who met us dashed away at breakneck speed. In the first room Tatyana Ivanovna with a tear-stained face was seated on a long chintz-covered sofa without a back. On seeing us she uttered a shriek and hid her face in her hands. Beside her stood Obnoskin, frightened and pitifully confused. He was so distraught that he flew to shake hands with us, as though

overjoyed at our arrival. From the door that opened into the other room we had a peep of some lady's dress; someone was listening and looking through a crack imperceptible to us.

The people of the house did not put in an appearance; it seemed as though they were not in the house; they were all in hiding somewhere.

"Here she is, the traveller! Hiding her face in her hands too!" cried Mr. Bahtcheyev, lumbering after us into the room.

"Restrain your transports, Stepan Alexyevitch! They are quite unseemly. No one has a right to speak now but Yegor Ilyitch; we have nothing to do here!" Mizintchikov observed sharply. My uncle, casting a stern glance at Mr. Bahtcheyev, and seeming not to observe the existence of Obnoskin who had rushed to shake hands with him, went up to Tatyana Ivanovna, whose face was still hidden in her hands, and in the softest voice, with the most unaffected sympathy, said to her —

"Tatyana Ivanovna, we all so love and respect you that we have come ourselves to learn your intentions. Would you care to drive back with us to Stepantchikovo? It is Ilyusha's name-day, mamma is expecting you impatiently, while Sasha and Nastenka have no doubt been crying over you all the morning. ..."

Tatyana Ivanovna raised her head timidly, looked at him through her fingers, and suddenly bursting into tears, flung herself on his neck.

"Oh, take me away, make haste and take me away from here!" she said, sobbing. "Make haste, as much haste as you can!"

"She's gone off on the spree and made an ass of herself!" hissed Mr. Bahtcheyev, nudging my arm.

“Everything is at an end, then,” said my uncle, turning dryly to Obnoskin and scarcely looking at him. “Tatyana Ivanovna, please give me your arm. Let us go!”

There was a rustle the other side of the door; the door creaked and opened wider.

“If you look at it from another point of view though,” Obnoskin observed uneasily, looking at the open door, “you will see yourself, Yegor Ilyitch . . . your action in my house . . . and in fact I was bowing to you, and you would not even bow to me, Yegor Ilyitch. . . .”

“Your action in my house, sir, was a low action,” said my uncle, looking sternly at Obnoskin, “and this house is not yours. You have heard: Tatyana Ivanovna does not wish to remain here a minute. What more do you want? Not a word — do you hear? Not another word, I beg! I am extremely desirous of avoiding further explanations, and indeed it would be more to your interest to do so.”

But at this point Obnoskin was so utterly crestfallen that he began uttering the most unexpected drivel.

“Don’t despise me, Yegor Ilyitch,” he began in a half-whisper, almost crying with shame and continually glancing towards the door, probably from fear of being overheard. “It’s not my doing, but my mother’s. I didn’t do it from mercenary motives, Yegor Ilyitch; I didn’t mean anything; I did, of course, do it from interested motives, Yegor Ilyitch . . . but I did it with a noble object, Yegor Ilyitch. I should have used the money usefully . . . I should have helped the poor. I wanted to support the movement for enlightenment, too, and even dreamed of endowing a university scholarship. . . . That was what I wanted

to turn my wealth to, Yegor Ilyitch; and not to use it just for anything, Yegor Ilyitch.”

We all felt horribly ashamed Even Mizintchikov reddened and turned away, and my uncle was so confused that he did not know what to say.

“Come, come, that’s enough,” he said at last. “Calm yourself, Pavel Scmyonitch. It can’t be helped! It might happen to anyone. ... If you like, come to dinner . . . and I shall be delighted.”

But Mr. Bahtcheyev behaved quite differently.

“Endow a scholarship!” he bawled furiously. “You are not the sort to endow a scholarship! I bet you’d be ready to fleece anyone you come across. . . . Not a pair of breeches of his own, and here he is bragging of scholarships! Oh, you rag-and-bone man! So you’ve made a conquest of a soft heart, have you? And where is she, the parent? Hiding, is she? I bet* she is sitting somewhere behind a screen, or has crept under the bed in a fright. ...”

“Stepan, Stepan I” cried my uncle.

Obnoskin flushed and was on the point of protesting; but before he had time to open his mouth the door was flung open and Anfisa Petrovna herself, violently irritated, with flashing eyes, crimson with wrath, flew into the room.

“What’s this?” she shouted. “What’s this going on here? You break into a respectable house with your rabble, Yegor Ilyitch, frighten ladies, give orders! . . . What’s the meaning of it? I have not taken leave of my senses yet, Yegor Ilyitch! And you, you booby,” she went on yelling, pouncing on her son, “you are snivelling before them already. Your mother is insulted in her

own house, and you stand gaping. Do you call yourself a gentlemanly young man after that? You are a rag, and not a young man, after that.”

Not a trace of the mincing airs and fashionable graces of the day before, not a trace of the lorgnette even was to be seen about Anfisa Petrovna now. She was a regular fury, a fury without a mask.

As soon as my uncle saw her he made haste to take Tatyana Ivanovna on his arm, and would have rushed out of the room, but Anfisa Petrovna at once barred the way.

“You are not going away like that, Yegor Ilyitch,” she clamoured again. “By what right are you taking Tatyana Ivanovna away by force? You are annoyed that she has escaped the abominable snares you had caught her in, you and your mamma and your imbecile Foma Fomitch; you would have liked to marry her yourself for the sake of filthy lucre.

I beg your pardon, but our ideas here are not so low! Tatyana Ivanovna, seeing that you were plotting against her, that you were bringing her to ruin, confided in Pavlusha of herself. She herself begged him to save her from your snares, so to say; she was forced to run away from you by night — that’s a pretty thing! That’s what you have driven her to, isn’t it, Tatyana Ivanovna?

And since that’s so, how dare you burst, a whole gang of you, into a respectable gentleman’s house and carry off a young lady by force in spite of her tears and protests? I will not permit it! I will not permit it! I have not taken leave of my senses! Tatyana Ivanovna will remain because she wishes it! Come, Tatyana

Ivanovna, it is useless to listen to them, they are your enemies, not your friends! Come along, don't be frightened! I'll see them all out directly! . .

"No, no!" cried Tatyana Ivanovna, terrified, "I don't want to, I don't want to I He is no husband for me. I don't want to marry your son! He's no husband for me!"

"You don't want to!" shouted Anfisa Petrovna, breathless with rage. "You don't want to! You have come and you don't want to! Then how dared you deceive us like this? Then how dared you give him your promise? You ran away with him by night, you forced yourself upon him, and have led us into embarrassment and expense. My son has perhaps lost an excellent match through you! He may have lost a dowry of ten thousand through you! ... No I you must pay for it, you ought to pay for it; we have proofs; you ran away at night. . . ."

But we did not hear this tirade to the end. All at once, grouping ourselves round my uncle, we moved forward straight upon Anfisa Petrovna and went out to the steps. The carriage was at hand at once.

"None but dishonourable people, none but scoundrel behave like that," cried Anfisa Petrovna from the steps, in an absolute frenzy. "I will lodge a petition, you shall pay for it . . . you are going to a disreputable house, Tatyana Ivanovna. You cannot marry Yegor Ilyitch, under your very nose he is keeping his governess as his mistress."

My uncle shuddered, turned pale, bit his lip and rushed to assist Tatyana Ivanovna into the carriage. I went round to the other side of the carriage, and was waiting for my turn to get in,

when I suddenly found Obnoskin by my side, clutching at my hand.

“Allow me at least to seek your friendship!” he said warmly, squeezing my hand, with an expression of despair on his face. “What’s that, friendship?” I said, lifting my foot to the carriage step.

“Yes! I recognised in you yesterday a man of culture; do not condemn me. . . . My mother led me on, I had nothing to do with it. My inclinations are rather for literature — I assure you; this was all my mother. ...”

“I believe you, I believe you,” I said. “Good-bye!”

We got in and the horses set off at a gallop. The shouts and curses of Anfisa Petrovna resounded for a long way after us, and unknown faces suddenly poked out of all the windows of the house and stared after us with wild curiosity.

There were five of us now in the carriage, but Mizintchikov got on to the box, giving up his former seat to Mr. Bahtcheyev, who had now to sit directly facing Tatyana Ivanovna. The latter was greatly relieved that we had taken her away, but she was still crying.

My uncle consoled her as best he could. He was himself sad and brooding; it was evident that Anfisa Petrovna’s frantic words about Nastenka were echoing painfully and bitterly in his heart. Our return journey would, however, have ended without any disturbance if only Mr. Bahtcheyev had not been with us.

Sitting opposite Tatyana Ivanovna, he seemed not himself, he could not look indifferent, he shifted in his seat, turned as red

as a crab, and rolled his eyes fearfully, particularly when my uncle began trying to console Tatyana Ivanovna. The fat man was absolutely beside himself, and growled like a bulldog when it is teased. My uncle looked at him apprehensively. At last Tatyana Ivanovna, noticing the extraordinary state o'f mind of her vis-a-vis, began watching him intently; then she looked at us, smiled, and all at once picking up her parasol gracefully gave Mr. Bahtcheyev a light tap on the shoulder.

“Crazy fellow!” she said with a most enchanting playfulness, and at once hid her face in her fan.

This sally was the last straw.

“Wha-a-at?” roared the fat man. “What’s that, madam? So you are after me now!”

“Crazy fellow! crazy fellow!” repeated Tatyana Ivanovna, and she suddenly burst out laughing and clapped her hands.

“Stop!” cried Bahtcheyev to the coachman, “stop!”

We stopped. Bahtcheyev opened the door, and hurriedly began clambering out of the carriage.

“Why, what is the matter, Stepan Alexyevitch? Where are you off to?” cried my uncle in astonishment.

“No, I have had enough of it,” answered the fat man, trembling with indignation. “Deuce take it all! I am too old, madam, to be besieged with amours. I would rather die on the high road! Good-bye, madam. Comment vous portez-vous?”

And he actually began walking on foot. The carriage followed him at a walking pace.

“Stepan Alexyevitch!” cried my uncle, losing all patience at last. “Don’t play the fool, come, get in! Why, it’s time we were home.”

“Bother you!” Stepan Alexyevitch brought out, breathless with walking, for owing to his corpulence he had quite lost the habit of exercise.

“Drive on full speed,” Mizintchikov shouted to the coachman.

“What are you doing? Stop!” my uncle cried out as the carriage dashed on.

Mizintchikov was not out in his reckoning, the desired result followed at once.

“Stop! Stop!” we heard a despairing wail behind us. “Stop, you ruffian! Stop, you cut-throat ...”

The fat man came into sight at Inst, half dead with exhaustion, with drops of sweat on his brow, untying his cravat and taking off his cap. Silently and gloomily he got into the carriage, and this time I gave him my seat; he was not anyway sitting directly opposite Tatyana Ivanovna, who all through this scene had been gushing with laughter and clapping her hands.

She could not look gravely at Stepan Alexyevitch all the rest of the journey. He for his part sat without uttering a single word all the way home, staring intently at the hind wheel of the carriage.

It was midday when we got back to Stepantchikovo. I went straight to my lodge, where Gavrila immediately made his appearance with tea. I flew to question the old man, but my uncle walked in almost on his heels and promptly sent him away.

Chapter II

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

“I HAVE come to you for a minute, dear boy,” he began, “I was in haste to tell you. ... I have heard all about everything. None of them have even been to mass to-day, except Ilyusha, Sasha and Nastenka. They tell me mamma has been in convulsions.

They have been rubbing her, it was all they could do to bring her to by rubbing. Now it has been settled for us all to go together to Foma, and I have been summoned. Only I don't know whether to congratulate Forna on the name-day or not — it's an important point! And in fact how are they going to take this whole episode? It's awful, Seryozha, I foresee it. . .

“On the contrary, uncle,” I hastened in my turn to reply, “everything is settling itself splendidly. You see you can't marry Tatyana Ivanovna now — that's a great deal in itself. I wanted to make that clear to you on our way.”

“Oh, yes, my dear boy. But that's not the point; there is the hand of Providence in it no doubt, as you say, but I wasn't thinking of that. . . . Poor Tatyana Ivanovna! What adventures happen to her, though! . . . Obnoskin's a scoundrel, a scoundrel! Though why do I call him 'a scoundrel'? Shouldn't I have been doing the same if I married her? . . . But that, again, is not what I have come about. . . . Did you hear what that wretch Anfisa Petrovna shouted about Nastenka this morning?”

“Yes, uncle. Haven't you realised now that you must make haste?”

“Certainly, at all costs!” answered my uncle. “It is a solemn moment. Only there is one thing, dear boy, which we did not think of, but I was thinking of it afterwards all night. Will she marry me, that’s the point?”

“Mercy on us, uncle! After she told you herself that she loves you ...”

“But, my dear boy, you know she also said at once that nothing would induce her to marry me.”

“Oh, uncle, that’s only words; besides, circumstances are different to-day.”

“Do you think so? No, Sergey, my boy, it’s a delicate business, dreadfully delicate! H’m. . . . But do you know, though I was worrying, yet my heart was somehow aching with happiness all night. Well, good-bye, I must fly. They are waiting for me; I am late as it is. I only ran in to have a word with you. Oh, my God!” he cried, coming back, “I have forgotten what is most important! Do you know what? I have written to him, to Foma!”

“When?”

“In the night, and in the morning, at daybreak, I sent the letter by Vidoplyasov. I put it all before him on two sheets of paper, I told him everything truthfully and frankly, in short that I ought, that is, absolutely must — do you understand — make Nastenka an offer. I besought him not to say a word about our meeting in the garden, and I have appealed to all the generosity of his heart to help me with mamma. I wrote a poor letter, of course, my boy, but I wrote it from my heart and, so to say, watered it with my tears. ...”

“Well? No answer?”

“So far no; only this morning when we were getting ready to set off, I met him in the hall in night attire, in slippers and nightcap — -he sleeps in a nightcap — he had come out of his room. He didn’t say a word, he didn’t even glance at me. I peeped up into his face, not a sign.”

“Uncle, don’t rely on him; he’ll play you some dirty trick.”

“No, no, my boy, don’t say so!” cried my uncle, gesticulating. “I am sure of him. Besides, you know, it’s my last hope. He will understand, he’ll appreciate it. He’s peevish, he’s capricious, I don’t deny it; but when it comes to a question of nobility, then he shines out like a pearl. . . .

Yes, like a pearl. You think all that, Sergey, because you have never seen him yet when he is most noble . . . but, my God! if he really does spread abroad my secret of yesterday, then ... I don’t know what will happen then, Sergey! What will be left me in the world that I can believe in? But no, he cannot be such a scoundrel. I am not worth the sole of his shoe. Don’t shake your head, my boy; it’s true — I am not.”

“Yegor Ilyitch! Your mamma is anxious about you.” We hear from below the unpleasant voice of Miss Perepelitsyn, who had probably succeeded in hearing the whole of our conversation from the open window. “They are looking for you all over the house, and cannot find you.”

“Oh, dear, I am late! How dreadful!” cried my uncle in a fluster. “My dear boy, for goodness’ sake dress and come too. Why, it was just for that I ran in, so that we might go together. ... I fly, I fly! Anna Nilovna, I fly!”

When I was left alone, I recalled my meeting with Nastenka that morning and was very glad I had not told my uncle of it; I should have upset him even more. I foresaw a great storm, and could not imagine how my uncle would arrange his plans and make an offer to Nastenka.

I repeat: in spite of my faith in his honour, I could not help feeling doubtful of his success.

However, I had to make haste. I considered myself bound to assist him, and at once began dressing; but as I wanted to be as well-dressed as possible, I was not very quick in spite of my haste. Mizintchikov walked in.

“I have come for you,” he said. “Yegor Ilyitch begs you to come at once.”

“Let us go!”

I was quite ready, we set off.

“What news there?” I asked on the way.

“They are all in Foma’s room, the whole party,” answered Mizintchikov. “Foma is not in bad humour, but he is somewhat pensive and doesn’t say much, just mutters through his teeth. He even kissed Uyusha, which of course delighted Yegor Ilyitch. He announced beforehand through Miss Perepelitsyn that they were not to congratulate him on the nameday, and that he had only wanted to test them. . . .

Though the old lady keeps sniffing her smelling-salts, she is calm because Foma is calm. Of our adventure no one drops a hint, it is as though it had never happened; they hold their tongues because Foma holds his. He hasn’t let anyone in all the morning, though.

While we were away the old lady implored him by all the saints to come that she might consult him, and indeed she hobbled down to the door herself; but he locked himself in and answered that he was praying for the human race, or something of the sort. He has got something up his sleeve, one can see that from his face. But as Yegor Ilyitch is incapable of seeing anything from anyone's face, he is highly delighted now with Foma's mildness; he is a regular baby! Ilyusha has prepared some verses, and they have sent me to fetch you."

"And Tatyana Ivanovna?"

"What about Tatyana Ivanovna?"

"Is she there? With them?"

"No; she is in her own room," Mizintchikov answered dryly.

"She is resting and crying. Perhaps she is ashamed too. I believe that . . . governess is with her now. I say! surely it is not a storm coming on? Look at the sky!"

"I believe it is a storm," I answered, glancing at a storm-cloud that looked black on the horizon.

At that moment we went up on to the terrace.

"Tell me, what do you think of Obnoskin, eh?" I went on, not able to refrain from probing Mizintchikov on that point.

"Don't speak to me of him! Don't remind me of that blackguard," he cried, suddenly stopping, flushing red and stamping. "The fool! the fool! to ruin such a splendid plan, such a brilliant idea! Listen: I am an ass, of course, for not having detected what a rogue he is! — I admit that solemnly, and perhaps that admission is just what you want. But I swear if he

had known how to carry it through properly, I should perhaps have forgiven him. The fool! the fool!

And how can such people be allowed in society, how can they be endured! How is it they are not sent to Siberia, into exile, into prison! But that's all nonsense, they won't get over me! Now I have experience anyway, and we shall see who gets the best of it.

I am thinking over a new idea now. . . . You must admit one can't lose one's object simply because some outside tool has stolen one's idea and not known how to set about it. Why, it's unjust! And, in fact, this Tatyana will inevitably be married, that's her predestined fate. And if no one has put her into a madhouse up to now, it was just because it is still possible to marry her. I will tell you my new idea. ..."

"But afterwards, I suppose," I interrupted him, "for here we are."

"Very well, very well, afterwards/" Mi/intclukov answered, twisting his lips into a spasmodic smile. "And now. . . . But where are you going? I tell you, straight to Foma Fomitch's room! Follow me; you have not been there yet. You will see another farce. . . . For it has really come to a farce."

Chapter III

ILYUSHA'S NAMEDAY

FOMA occupied two large and excellent rooms; they were even better decorated than any other of the rooms in the house. The great man was surrounded by perfect comfort. The fresh and handsome wall-paper, the parti-coloured silk curtains on the

windows, the rugs, the pier-glass, the fireplace, the softly upholstered elegant furniture — all testified to the tender solicitude of the family for Foma's comfort.

Pots of flowers stood in the windows and on little marble tables in front of the windows. In the middle of the study stood a large table covered with a red cloth and littered with books and manuscripts. A handsome bronze inkstand and a bunch of pens which Vidoplyasov had to look after — all this was to testify to the severe intellectual labours of Foma Fomiich.

I will mention here by the way that though Foma had sat at that table for nearly eight years, he had composed absolutely nothing that was any good. Later on, when he had departed to a better world, we went through his manuscripts; they all turned out to be extraordinary trash.

We found, for instance, the beginning of an historical novel, the scene of which was laid in Novgorod, in the seventh century; then a monstrous poem, "An Anchorite in the Churchyard", written blank verse; then a meaningless meditation on the significance and characteristics of the Russian peasant, and how he should be treated; and finally "The Countess Vlonsky", a novel of aristocratic life, also unfinished.

There was nothing else. And yet Foma Fomitch had made my uncle spend large sums every year on books and journals. But many of them were actually found uncut. Later on, I caught Foma Fomitch more than once reading Paul de Kock, but he always slipped the book out of sight when people came in. In the further wall of the study there was a glass door which led to the courtyard of the house.

They were waiting for us. Foma Fomitch was sitting in a comfortable arm-chair, wearing some sort of long coat that reached to his heels, but yet he wore no cravat. He certainly was silent and thoughtful. When we went in he raised his eyebrows slightly and bent a searching glance on me. I bowed; he responded with a slight bow, a fairly polite one, however. Grandmother, seeing that Foma Fomitch was behaving graciously to me, gave me a nod and a smile.

The poor woman had not expected in the morning that her paragon would take the news of Tatyana Ivanovna's "escapade" so calmly, and so she was now in the best of spirits, though she really had been in convulsions and fainting fits earlier in the day. Behind her chair, as usual, stood Miss Perepelitsyn, compressing her lips till they looked like a thread, smiling sourly and spitefully and rubbing her bony hands one against the other.

Two always mute lady companions were installed beside Madame la Generate. There was also a nun of sorts who had strayed in that morning, and an elderly lady, a neighbour who had come in after mass to congratulate Madame la Generate on the nameday and who also sat mute. Aunt Praskovya Ilyinitchna was keeping in the background somewhere in a corner, and was looking with anxiety at Foma Fomitch and her mother.

My uncle was sitting in an easy-chair, and his face was beaming with a look of exceptional joy. Facing him stood Ilyusha in his red holiday shirt, with his hair in curls, looking like a little angel. Sasha and Nastenka had in secret from everyone taught him some verses to rejoice his father on this auspicious day by his progress in learning.

My uncle was almost weeping with delight. Foma's unexpected mildness, Madame la Generale's good humour, Ilyusha's name-day, the verses, all moved him to real enthusiasm, and with a solemnity worthy of the occasion he had asked them to send for me that I might hasten to share the general happiness and listen to the verses. Sasha and Nastenka, who had come in just after us, were standing near Ilyusha.

Sasha was continually laughing, and at that moment was as happy as a little child. Nastenka, looking at her, also began smiling, though she had come into the room a moment before pale and depressed. She alone had welcomed Tatyana Ivanovna on her return from her excursion, and until then had been sitting upstairs with her. The rogue Ilyusha seemed, too, as though he could not keep from laughing as he looked at his instructresses.

It seemed as though the three of them had prepared a very amusing joke which they meant to play now. ... I had forgotten Bahtcheyev. He was sitting on a chair at a little distance, still cross and red in the face; holding his tongue, sulking, blowing his nose and altogether playing a very gloomy part at the family festivity.

Near him Yezhevikin was fidgeting about; he was fidgeting about everywhere, however, kissing the hands of Madame la Générale and of the visitors, whispering something to Miss Perepelitsyn, showing attention to Foma Fomitch, in fact he was all over the place. He, too, was awaiting Ilyusha's verses with great interest, and at my entrance flew to greet me with bows as a mark of the deepest respect and devotion. Altogether there was nothing to show that he had come to

protect his daughter, and to take her from Stepantchikovo for ever.

“Here he is!” cried my uncle gleefully on seeing me. “Ilyusha has got a poem for us, that’s something unexpected, a real surprise! I am overpowered, my boy, and sent for you on purpose, and have put off the verses till you came. . . . Sit down beside me! Let us listen. Foma Fomitch, confess now, it must have been you who put them all up to it to please an old fellow like me. I’ll wager that is how it is!”

Since my uncle was talking in such a tone and voice in Foma’s room one would have thought that all must be well. But unluckily my uncle was, as Mizintchikov expressed it, incapable of reading any man’s face. Glancing at Foma’s face, I could not help admitting that Mizintchikov was right and that something was certainly going to happen. ...

“Don’t trouble about me, Colonel,” Foma answered in a faint voice, the voice of a man forgiving his enemies. “I approve of the surprise, of course; it shows the sensibility and good principles of your children . . . Poetry is of use, too, even for the pronunciation. . . . But I have not been busy over verses this morning, Yegor Ilyitch; I have been praying . . .

you know that. ... I am ready to listen to the verses, however.”
Meanwhile I had congratulated Ilyusha and kissed him.

“Quite so, Foma, I beg your pardon I Kiss him once more, though I am sure of your affection, Foma! Kiss him once more, Seryozha! Look what a fine big boy! Come, begin, Ilyusha! What is it about? I suppose it is something solemn from Lomonosov?”

And my uncle drew himself up with a dignified air. He could scarcely sit still in his seat for impatience and delight.

“No, papa, not from Lomonosov,” said Sashenka, hardly able to suppress her laughter; “but as you have been a soldier and fought the enemy, Ilyusha has learnt a poem about warfare. . . The siege of Pamba, papa!”

“The siege of Pamba! I don’t remember it. . . . What is this Pamba, do you know, Ilyusha? Something heroic, I suppose.” And my uncle drew himself up again.

“Begin, Ilyusha!” Sasha gave the word of command.

Ilyusha began in a little, clear, even voice, without stops or commas, as small children generally recite verses they have learned by heart —

“Nine long years Don Pedro Gomez Has besieged the fort of Pamba, On a diet of milk supported. And Don Pedro’s gallant warriors, Brave Castilians, full nine thousand, All to keep the vow they’ve taken Taste no bread nor other victuals, Milk they drink and milk alone.”

“What? What’s that about milk?” cried my uncle, looking at me in perplexity.

“Go on reciting, Ilyusha!” cried Sashenka.

“Every day Don Pedro Gomez, In his Spanish cloak enveloped, Bitterly his lot bewails. Lo, the tenth year is approaching; Still the fierce Moors are triumphant; And of all Don Pedro’s army Only nineteen men are left. ...”

“Why, it’s a regular string of nonsense!” cried my uncle uneasily. “Come, that’s impossible. Only nineteen men left out

of a whole army, when there was a very considerable corps before? What is the meaning of it, my boy?"

But at that point Sasha could not contain herself, and went off into the most open and childish laughter; and though there was nothing very funny, it was impossible not to laugh too as one looked at her.

"They are funny verses, papa," she cried, highly delighted with her childish prank. "The author made them like that on purpose to amuse everybody."

"Oh! Funny!" cried my uncle, with a beaming face. "Comic, you mean! That's just what I thought. . . . Just so, just so, funny! And very amusing, extremely amusing: he starved all his army on milk owing to some vow. What possessed them to take such a vow? Very witty, isn't it, Foma? You see, mamma, these are jesting verses, such as authors sometimes do write, don't they, Sergey? Extremely amusing. Well, well, Ilyusha, what next?"

"Only nineteen men are left! Them Don Pedro doth assemble
And says to them: 'Noble Nineteen! Let us raise aloft our
standards! Let us blow on our loud trumpets! And with clashing
of our cymbals Let us from Pamba retreat! Though the fort we
have not taken, Yet with honour still untarnished We can swear
on faith and conscience That our vow we have not broken; Nine
long years we have not eaten, Not a morsel have we eaten,
Milk we've drunk and milk alone!'"

"What a noodle! What comfort was it for him that he had drunk milk for nine years?" my uncle broke in again. "What is there virtuous in it? He would have done better to have eaten a whole sheep, and not have been the death of people I Excellent! capital!"

I see, I see now: it's a satire on . . . what do they call it? an allegory, isn't it? And perhaps aimed at some foreign general," my uncle added, addressing me, knitting his brows significantly and screwing up his eyes, "eh? What do you think? But of course a harmless, good, refined satire that injures nobody! Excellent! excellent, and what matters most, it is refined. Well, Ilyusha, go on. Ah, you rogues, you rogues!" he added with feeling, looking at Sasha and stealthily also at Nastenka, who blushed and smiled.

"And emboldened by that saying, Those nineteen Castilian warriors, Each one swaying in his saddle, Feebly shouted all together: 'Sant' Iago Compostello! Fame and glory to Don Pedro I Glory to the Lion of Castile!'

And his chaplain, one Diego, Through his teeth was heard to mutter: 'But if I had been commander, I'd have vowed to eat meat only, Drinking good red wine alone.'"

"There! Didn't I tell you so?" cried my uncle, extremely delighted. "Only one sensible man was found in the whole army, and he was some sort of a chaplain. And what is that, Sergey: a captain among them, or what?"

"A monk, an ecclesiastical person, uncle."

"Oh, yes, yes. Chaplain! I know, I remember. I have read of it in Radcliffe's novels. They have all sorts of orders, don't they. . . . Benedictines, I believe? . . . There are Benedictines, aren't there?"

"Yes, uncle."

"H'm! ... I thought so. Well, Ilyusha, what next? Excellent! capital!"

“And Don Pedro overhearing, With loud laughter gave the order: ‘Fetch a sheep and give it to him! He has jested gallantly!’”

‘What a time to laugh! What a fool! Even he saw it was funny at last! A sheep! So they had sheep; why did he not eat some himself! Well, Ilyusha, go on. Excellent! capital! Extraordinarily cutting!’

“But that’s the end, papa!”

“Oh, the end. Indeed there wasn’t much left to be done — was there, Sergey? Capital, Ilyusha! Wonderfully nice. Kiss me, darling. Ah, my precious! Who was it thought of it: you, Sasha?”

“No, it was Nastenka. We read it the other day. She read it and said: ‘What ridiculous verses! It will soon be Ilyusha’s nameday, let us make him learn them and recite them. It will make them laugh!’”

“Oh, it was Nastenka? Well, thank you, thank you,” my uncle muttered, suddenly flushing like a child. “Kiss me again, Ilyusha. You kiss me too, you rogue,” he said, embracing Sashenka and looking into her face with feeling. “You wait a bit, Sashenka, it will be your nameday soon,” he added, as though he did not know what to say to express his pleasure.

I turned to Nastenka and asked whose verses they were.

“Yes, yes, whose are the verses?” my uncle hurriedly chimed in. “It must have been a clever poet who wrote them, mustn’t it, Foma?”

“H’m . . .” Foma grunted to himself.

A biting sarcastic smile had not left his face during the whole time of the recitation of the verses.

“I have really forgotten,” said Nastenka, looking timidly at Foma Fomitch.

“It’s Mr. Kuzma Prutkov wrote it, papa; it was published in the Contemporary/” Sashenka broke in.

“Ku/ma Prutkov! I don’t know his name,” said my uncle.

“Pushkin I know! . . . But one ran see he a gifted poet — isn’t he, Sergey? And what’s more, a man ot refined qualities, that’s as clear as twice two! Perhaps, indeed, he is an officer. ...

I approve of him. And the Contemporary is a first-rate magazine. We certainly must take it in if poets like that are among the contributors. ... I like poets! They are fine fellows! They picture everything in vcr^e Do you know, Sergey, I met a literary man at your rooms in Petersburg. He had rather a peculiar nose, too . . . really! . . . What did you say, Foma?”

Foma Fomitch, who was getting more and more worked up, gave a loud snigger.

“No, I said nothing . . .,” he said, as though hardly able to suppress his laughter. “Co on, Yegor Ilyitch, go on! I will say my word later. . . . Stepan Alexycvitch is delighted to hear how you made the acquaintance of literary men in Petersburg.”

Stepan Alexyevitch, who had been sitting apart all the time lost in thought, suddenly raised his head, reddened, and turned in his chair with exasperation.

“Don’t you provoke me, Foma, but leave me in peace,” he said, looking wrathfully at Foma, with his little bloodshot eyes.

“What is your literature to me? May God only give me good

health," he muttered to himself, "and plague take them all. . . and their authors too. . . . Voltairians, that's what they are!"

"Authors are Voltairians?" said Yezhevikin immediately at his side. "Perfectly true what you have been pleased to remark, Stepan Alexyevitch. Valentin Ignatyitch was pleased to express the same sentiments the other day. He actually called me a Voltairian, upon my soul he did! And yet, as you all know, I have written very little so far. . . . If a bowl of milk goes sour — it's all Voltaire's fault! That's how it is with everything here."

"Well, no," observed my uncle with dignity, "that's an error, you know! Voltaire was nothing but a witty writer; he laughed at superstitions; and he never was a Voltairian! It was his enemies spread that rumour about him. Why were they all against him, really, poor fellow? . . ."

Again the malignant snigger of Foma Fomitch was audible. My uncle looked at him uneasily and was perceptibly embarrassed.

"Yes, Foma, I am thinking about the magazine, you see," he said in confusion, trying to put himself right somehow. "You were perfectly right, my dear Foma, when you said the other day that we ought to subscribe to one. I think we ought to, myself. H'm . . . after all, they do assist in the diffusion of enlightenment; one would be a very poor patriot if one did not support them. Wouldn't one, Sergey. H'm . . . Yes . . . The Contemporary, for instance. But, do you know, Seryozha, the most instruction, to my thinking, is to be found in that thick magazine — what's its name? — in a yellow cover . . ."

"Notes of the Fatherland, papa."

"Oh, yes, Notes of the Fatherland, and a capital title, Sergey, isn't it? It is, so to say, the whole Fatherland sitting writing

notes. ... A very fine object. A most edifying magazine. And what a thick one! What a job to publish such an omnibus! And the information in it almost makes one's eyes start out of one's head. I came in the other day, the volume was lying here, I took it up and from curiosity opened it and reeled off three pages at a go. It made me simply gape, my dear! And, you know, there is information about everything; what is meant, for instance, by a broom, a spade, a ladle, an ovenrake. To my thinking, a broom is a broom and an ovenrake an ovenrake!

No, my boy, wait a bit. According to the learned, an ovenrako turns out not an ovenrake, but an emblem or something mythological; I don't remember exactly, but something of the sort. . . . So that's how it is! They have gone into everything!"

I don't know what precisely Foma was preparing to do after this fresh outburst from my uncle, but at that moment Gavril appeared and stood with bowed head in the doorway. Foma Fomitch glanced at him significantly.

"Ready, Gavril?" he asked in a faint but resolute voice.

"Yes, sir," Gavril answered mournfully, and heaved a sigh.

"And have you put my bundle on the cart?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, I am ready too!" said Foma, and he deliberately got up from his easy-chair. My uncle looked at him in amazement. Madame la Générale jumped up from her seat and looked about her uneasily.

"Allow me, Colonel," Foma began with dignity, "to ask you to leave for a moment the interesting subject of literary oven-

rakes; you can continue it after I am gone. As I am taking leave of you for ever, I should like to say a few last words to you — Every listener was spellbound with alarm and amazement.

“Foma! Foma! but what is the matter with you? Where are you going?” my uncle cried at last.

“I am about to leave your house, Colonel,” Foma brought out in a perfectly composed voice. “I have made up my mind to go where fortune takes me, and so I have hired at my own expense a humble peasant’s cart. My bundle is lying in it already, it is of no great dimensions’ a few favourite books, two changes of linen — that is all! I am a poor man, Yegor Ilyitch, but nothing in the world would induce me now to take your gold, which I refused even yesterday!”

“But for God’s sake, Foma, what is the meaning of it?” cried my uncle, turning as white as a sheet.

Madame la Générale uttered a shriek and looked in despair at Foma Fomitch, stretching out her hands to him. Miss Perepelitsyn flew to support her. The lady companions sat petrified in their chairs. Mr. Bahtcheyev got up heavily from his seat.

“Well, here’s a pretty to-do!” Mizintchikov whispered beside me.

At that moment a distant rumble of thunder was heard, a storm was coming on.

Chapter IV

THE EXPULSION

“YOU ask me, I believe, Colonel, what is the meaning of this?” Foma brought out with a solemn dignity, as though enjoying the general consternation. “I am surprised at the question I will you on your side explain how it is you can bring yourself to look me in the face now? Explain to me this last psychological problem in human shamelessness, and then I shall depart, the richer for new knowledge of the depravity of the human race.”

But my uncle was not equal to answering him. With open mouth and staring eyes he gazed at Foma, alarmed and annihilated.

“Merciful heavens! What passions!” hissed Miss Perepelitsyn.

“Do you understand, Colonel,” Foma went on, “that you had better let me go now, simply without asking questions? In your house even I, a man of years and understanding, begin to feel the purity of my morals gravely endangered. Believe me, that your questions can lead to nothing but putting you to shame.” “Foma! Foma!” cried my uncle, and a cold perspiration came out on his forehead.

“And so allow me without further explanation to say a few farewell words at parting, my last words in your house, Yegor Ilyitch. The thing is done and there is no undoing it! I hope that you understand to what I am referring. But I implore you on my knees: if one spark of moral feeling is left in your heart, curb your unbridled passions! And if the noxious poison has not yet caught the whole edifice, then, as far as possible, extinguish the fire!”

“Foma, I assure you that you are in error!” cried my uncle, recovering himself little by little and foreseeing with horror the climax.

“Moderate your passions,” Foma continued in the same solemn voice, as though he had not heard my uncle’s exclamation, “conquer yourself. ‘If thou would’st conquer all the world — conquer thyself.’ That is my invariable rule. You are a landowner; you ought to shine like a diamond in your estate, and what a vile example of unbridled passion you set your inferiors! I have been praying for you the whole night, and trembled as I sought for your happiness. I did not find it, for happiness lies in virtue. . .

“But this is impossible, Foma!” my uncle interrupted him again. “You have misunderstood and what you say is quite wrong.” “And so remember you are a landowner,” Foma went on, still regardless of my uncle’s exclamations. “Do not imagine that repose and sensuality are the destined vocation of the land-owning class. Fatal thought! Not repose, but zealous work, zealous towards God, towards your sovereign, and towards your country! Hard work, hard work is the duty of the landowner, he should work as hard as the poorest of his peasants!”

“What, am I to plough for the peasant, or what?” growled Bahtcheyev. “Why, I am a landowner, too. ...”

“I turn to you now, servants of the house,” Foma went on, addressing Gavrila and Falaley, who had appeared in the doorway. “Love your master and his family, and obey them humbly and meekly, and they will reward you with their love. And you, Colonel, be just and compassionate to them. A fellow-man — the image of God — like a child of tender years, so to say, is entrusted to you by your sovereign and your country. Great is the duty, but great also is the merit.”

“Foma Fomitch, my dear man, what notion is this?” cried Madame la Générale in despair, almost swooning with horror. “Well, that is enough, I think,” Foma concluded, paying no attention even to Madame la Generale. “Now to lesser things; they may be small, but they are essential, Yegor Ilyitch. Your hay on the Harinsky waste has not been cut yet. Do not be too late with it: mow it and mow it quickly. That is my advice. . . .”

“But, Foma . . .”

“You meant to cut down the Zyryanovsky copse, I know; don’t cut it — that’s a second piece of advice. Preserve forest land, for trees retain humidity on the surface of the earth. It is a pity that you have sown the spring corn so late; it’s amazing how late you have been in sowing the spring corn! . . .”

“But, Foma . . .”

“But enough! One cannot convey everything, and indeed there is not time I will send you written instructions in a special book. Well, good-bye, good-bye all, God be with you, and the Lord bless you. I bless you too, my child,” he went on, turning to Ilyusha; “and may God keep you from the noxious poison of your passions. I bless you too, Falaley; forget the Komarinsky! . . . And all of you. . . . Remember Foma. . . . Well, let us go, Gavril! Come and help me in, old man.”

And Foma turned towards the door. Madame la Générale gave a piercing shriek and flew after him.

“No, Foma, I will not let you go like this,” cried my uncle, and overtaking him, he seized him by the hand.

“So you mean to have resort to force?” Foma asked haughtily.

“Yes, Foma. . . even to force,” answered my uncle, quivering with emotion. “You have said too much, and must explain your words! You have misunderstood my letter, Foma! . . .”

“Your letter!” squealed Foma, instantly flaring up as though he had been awaiting that minute for an explosion; “your letter! Here it is, your letter! Here it is. I tear this letter, I spit upon it! I trample your letter under my foot, and in doing so fulfil the most sacred duty of humanity. That is what I will do if you compel me by force to an explanation! Look! Look! Look!”

And scraps of paper flew about the room.

“I repeat, Foma, you have misunderstood it,” cried my uncle, turning paler and paler. “I am making an offer of marriage, Foma, I am seeking my happiness.”

“Marriage! You have seduced this young girl, and are trying to deceive me by offering her marriage, for I saw you with her last night in the garden, under the bushes.”

Madame la Generate uttered a scream and fell fainting into an arm-chair. A fearful hubbub arose. Poor Nastenka sat deathly pale. Sasha, frightened, clutched Ilyusha and trembled as though she were in a fever.

“Foma!” cried my uncle in a frenzy, “if you divulge that secret you are guilty of the meanest action on earth!”

“I do divulge that secret,” squealed Foma, “and I am performing the most honourable action! I am sent by God Himself to unmask your villainies to all the world. I am ready to clamber on some peasant’s thatched roof and from there to proclaim your vile conduct to all the gentlemen of the neighbourhood and all the passers-by. . . . Yes, let me tell you all, all of you, that yesterday in the night I found him in the

garden, under the bushes with this young girl whose appearance is so innocent. ...”

“Oh, what a disgrace!” piped Miss Perepelitsyn.

“Foma! Don’t be your own destruction!” cried my uncle, with clenched fists and flashing eyes.

“He,” squealed Foma, “he, alarmed at my having seen him, had the audacity to try with a lying letter to persuade me into conniving at his crime — yes, crime! ... for you have turned a hitherto innocent young girl into a . . .”

“Another insulting word to her and I will kill you, Foma, I swear! ...”

“I say that word, since you have succeeded in turning the most innocent young girl into a most depraved girl.”

Foma had hardly uttered this last word when my uncle seized him by the shoulder, turned him round like a straw, and flung him violently at the glass door, which led from the study into the courtyard. The shock was so violent that the closed door burst open, and Foma, flying head over heels down the stone steps, fell full length in the yard. Bits of broken glass were scattered tinkling about the steps.

“Gavrila, pick him up!” cried my uncle, as pale as a corpse. “Put him in the cart, and within two minutes let there be no trace of him in Stepantchikovo!”

Whatever Foma’s design may have been, he certainly had not expected such a climax.

I will not undertake to describe what happened for the first minutes after this episode. The heart-rending wail of Madame la Générale as she rolled from side to side in an arm-chair; the

stupefaction of Miss Perepelitsyn at this unexpected behaviour of my hitherto submissive uncle; the sighs and groans of the lady companions; Nastenka almost fainting with fright while her father hovered over her; Sashenka terror-stricken; my uncle in indescribable excitement pacing up and down the room waiting for his mother to come to herself; and lastly, the loud weeping of Falaley in lamentation over the troubles of his betters — all this made up an indescribable picture. I must add, too, that at this moment a violent storm broke over us; peals of thunder were more and more frequent, and big drops of rain began pattering on the window.

“Here’s a nice holiday!” muttered Mr. Bahtcheyev, bowing his head and flinging wide his arms.

“It’s a bad business,” I whispered to him, beside myself with excitement too. “But anyway they have turned Foma out, and he won’t come back again.”

“Mamma! Are you conscious? Are you better? Can you listen to me at last?” asked my uncle, stopping before the old lady’s arm-chair.

She raised her head, clasped her hands, and looked with imploring eyes at her son, whom she had never in her life before seen moved to such wrath.

“Mamma,” he went on, “it was the last straw, you have seen for yourself. It was not like this that I meant to approach this subject, but the hour has come, and it is useless to put it off. You have heard the calumny, hear my defence. Mamma, I love this noble and high-minded girl, I have loved her a long while, and I shall never cease to love her. She will make the happiness of my children, and will be a dutiful daughter to you. And so now, before you, and in the presence of my friends and my

family, I solemnly plead at her feet, and beseech her to do me infinite honour by consenting to be my wife.”

Nastenka started, then flushed crimson all over and got up from her seat. Madame la Générale stared some time at her son as though she did not understand what he was saying to her, and all at once with a piercing wail flung herself on her knees.

“Yegorushka, my darling, bring Foma Fomitch back,” she cried. “Bring him back at once, or without him I shall die before night.”

My uncle was petrified at the sight of his self-willed and capricious old mother kneeling before him. His painful distress was reflected in his face. At last, recovering himself, he flew to raise her up and put her back in her chair.

“Bring Foma Fomitch back, Yegorushka,” the old lady went on wailing. “Bring him back darling! I cannot live without him!” “Mamma,” my uncle cried sorrowfully, “have you heard nothing of what I have just said to you? I cannot bring Foma back — understand that. I cannot and I have not the right to after his low and scoundrelly slander on this angel of honour and virtue. Do you understand, mamma, that it is my duty, that my honour compels me now to defend virtue? You have heard: I am asking this young lady to be my wife, and I beg you to bless our union.”

Madame la Generate got up from her seat again and fell on her knees before Nastenka.

“My dear girl!” she wailed, “do not marry him. Do not marry him, but entreat him, my dear, to fetch back Foma Fomitch. Nastasya Yevgrafovna, darling! I will give up every-

thing, I will sacrifice everything if only you will not marry him. Old as I am, I have not spent everything, I had a little left me when my poor husband died. It's all yours, my dear, I will give you everything, and Yegorushka will give you something too, but do not lay me living in my grave, beg him to bring back Foma Fomitch."

And the old woman would have gone on wailing and diiveiling if Miss Perepelitsyn and all the lady companions had not, with shrieks and moans, rushed to lift her up, indignant that she should be on her knees before a hired governess. Nastenka was so frightened that she could hardly stand, while Miss Perepelitsyn positively shed tears of fury.

"You will be the death of your mamma," she screamed at my uncle. "You will be the death of her. And you, Nastasva Yevgrafovna, ought not to make dissension between mother and son; the Lord has forbidden it. . . ."

"Anna Nilovna, hold your tongue!" cried my uncle. "I have put up with enough!"

"Yes, and I have had enough to put up with from you too. Why do you reproach me with my friendless position? It is easy to insult the friendless. I am not your slave yet. I am the daughter of a major myself. You won't see me long in your house, this very day ... I shall be gone. ..."

But my uncle did not hear her; he went up to Nastenka and with reverence took her by the hand.

"Nastasya Yevgrafovna! You have heard my offer?" he said, looking at her with anguish, almost with despair.

“No, Yegor Ilyitch, no! We had better give it up,” said Nastenka, utterly dejected too. “It is all nonsense,” she said, pressing his hand and bursting into tears. “You only say this because of yesterday . . . but it cannot be. You see that yourself. We have made a mistake, Yegor Ilyitch. . . . But I shall always think of you as my benefactor and ... I shall pray for you always, always! ...”

At this point tears choked her. “My poor uncle had evidently foreseen this answer; he did not even think of protecting, or insisting. He listened, bending down to her, still holding her hand, crushed and speechless. There were tears in his eyes.

“I told you yesterday,” Nastya went on, “that I could not be your wife. You see that I am not wanted here . . . and I foresaw all this long ago; your mamma will not give you her blessing . . . others too. Though you would not regret it afterwards, because you are the most generous of men, yet you would be made miserable through me . . . with your soft-heartedness. ...”

“Just because of your soft-heartedness! Just because you are so soft-hearted! That’s it, Nastenka, that’s it!” chimed in her old father, who was standing on the other side of her chair. “That’s just it, that’s just the right word.”

“I don’t want to bring dissension into your house on my account,” Nastenka went on. “And don’t be uneasy about me, Yegor Ilyitch; no one will interfere with me, no one will insult me ... I am going to my father’s . . . this very day. . . . We had better say good-bye, Yegor Ilyitch, . . .”

And poor Nastenka dissolved into tears again.

“Nastasya Yevgrafovna! Surely this not not your final answer!” said my uncle, looking at her in unutterable despair. “Say only one word and I will sacrifice everything for you! . . .”

“It is final, it is final, Yegor Ilyitch . . .” Yezhevikin put in again, “and she has explained it all very well to you, as I must own I did not expect her to. You are a very soft-hearted man, Yegor Ilyitch, yes, very soft-hearted, and you have graciously done us a great honour!

A great honour, a great honour! . . . But all the same we are not a match for you, Yegor Ilyitch. You ought to have a bride, Yegor Ilyitch, who would be wealthy and of high rank, and a great beauty and with a voice too, who would walk about your rooms all in diamonds and ostrich feathers. . . .

Then perhaps Foma Fomitch would make a little concession and give his blessing! And you will bring Foma Fomitch back! It was no use, no use your insulting him. It was from virtue, you know, from excess of fervour that he said too much, you know.

You will say yourself that it was through his virtue — you will see! A most worthy man. And here he is getting wet through now. It would be better to fetch him back now. . . . For you will have to fetch him back, you know. . . .”

“Fetch him back, fetch him back!” shrieked Madame la Generale. “What he says is right, my dear! . . .”

“Yes,” Yezhevikin went on. “Here youi* illustrious parent has upset herself about nothing. . . . Fetch him back! And Nastaya and I meanwhile will be on the march. . . .”

“Wait a minute, Yevgraf Larionitch!” cried my uncle, “I entreat you. There is one thing more must be said, Yevgraf, one thing only. . . .”

Saying this, he walked away, sat down in an arm-chair in the corner, bowed his head, and put his hands over his eyes as though he were thinking over something.

At that moment a violent clap of thunder sounded almost directly over the house. The whole building shook. Madame la Générale gave a scream, Miss Perepelitsyn did the same, the lady companions, and with them Mr. Bahtcheyev, all stupefied with terror, crossed themselves.

“Holy Saint, Elijah the prophet!” five or six voices murmured at once.

The thunder was followed by such a downpour that it seemed as though the whole lake were suddenly being emptied upon Stepantchikovo.

“And Foma Fomitch, what will become of him now out in the fields?” piped Miss Perepelitsyn.

“Yegorushka, fetch him back!” Madame la Générale cried in a voice of despair, and she rushed to the door as though crazy. Her attendant ladies held her back; they surrounded her, comforted her, whimpered, squealed. It was a perfect Bedlam!

“He went off with nothing over his coat. If he had only taken an overcoat with him!” Miss Perepelitsyn went on. “He did not take an umbrella either. He will be struck by lightning! . . .”

“He will certainly be struck!” Bahtcheyev chimed in. “And he will be soaked with rain afterwards, too.”

“You might hold your tongue!” I whispered to him.

“Why, he is a man, I suppose, or isn’t he?” Bahtcheyev answered wrathfully. “He is not a dog. I bet you wouldn’t go

out of doors yourself. Come, go and have a bath for your plaisir.”

Foreseeing how it might end and dreading the possibility, I went up to my uncle, who sat as though chained to his chair.

“Uncle,” I said, bending down to his ear, “surely you won’t consent to bring Foma Fomitch back? Do understand that that would be the height of unseemliness, at any rate as long as Nastasya Yevgrafovna is here.”

“My dear,” answered my uncle, raising his head and looking at me resolutely, “I have been judging myself at this moment and I know what I ought to do. Don’t be uneasy, there shall be no offence to Nastenka, I will [^]ce to that. . . .”
He got up from his seat and went to his mother.

“Mamma,” he said, “don’t worry yourself, I will bring Foma Fomitch back, I will overtake him; he cannot have gone far yet.

But I swear he shall come back only on one condition, that here publicly in the presence of all who were witnesses of the insult he should acknowledge how wrong he has been, and solemnly beg the forgiveness of this noble young lady.

I will secure that, I will make him do it! He shall not cross the threshold of this house without it! I swear, too, mamma, solemnly, that if he consents to this of his own free will, I shall be ready to fall at his feet, and will give him anything, anything I can, without injustice to my children.

I myself will renounce everything from this very day. The star of my happiness has set. I shall leave Stepantchikovo. You must all live here calmly and happily. I am going back to my regiment,

and in the turmoil of war, on the field of battle, I will end my despairing days. . . . Enough! I am going!”

At that moment the door opened, and Gavril, soaked through and incredibly muddy, stood facing the agitated company. “What’s the matter? Where have you come from? Where is Foma?” cried my uncle, rushing up to Gavril.

Everyone followed him, and with eager curiosity crowded round the old man, from whom dirty water was literally trickling in streams. Shrieks, sighs, exclamations accompanied every word Gavril uttered.

“I left him at the birch copse, a mile away,” he began in a tearful voice. “The horse took fright at the lightning and bolted into a ditch.”

“Well? ..,” cried my uncle.

“The cart was upset. ...”

“Well? ... and Foma?”

“He fell into the ditch.”

“And then? Tell us, you tantalising old man!”

“He bruised his side and began crying. I unharnessed the horse, got on him and rode here to tell you.”

“And Foma remained there?”

“He got up and went on with his stick,” Gavril concluded; then he heaved a sigh and bowed his head.

The tears and sobs of the tender sex were indescribable.

“Polkan!” cried my uncle, and he flew out of the room. Polkan was brought, my uncle leapt on him barebacked, and a minute later the thud of the horse’s hoofs told us that the pursuit of

Foma Fomitch had begun. My uncle had actually galloped off without his cap.

The ladies ran to the windows. Among the sighs and groans were heard words of advice. There was talk of a hot bath, of Foma Fomitch being rubbed with spirits, of some soothing drink, of the fact that Foma Fomitch “had not had a crumb of bread between his lips all day and that he is wet through on an empty stomach.”

Miss Perepehtsyn found his forgotten spectacles in their case, and the find produced an extraordinary effect: Madame la Générale pounced on them with tears and lamentations, and still keeping them in her hand, pressed up to the window again to watch the road. The suspense reached the utmost pitch of intensity at last. In another corner Sashenka was trying to comfort Nastya; they were weeping in each other’s arms.

Nastenka was holding Ilyusha’s hand and kissing him from time to time. Ilyusha was in floods of tears, though he did not yet know why. Yezhevikin and Mizintchikov were talking of something aside. I fancied that Bahtcheyev was looking at the girls as though he were ready to blubber himself. I went up to him.

“No, my good sir,” he said to me, “Foma Fomitch may leave here one day perhaps, but the time for that has not yet come; they haven’t got gold-horned bulls for his chariot yet. Don’t worry yourself, sir, he’ll drive the owners out of the house and stay there himself!”

The storm was over, and Mr. Bahtche\ev had evidently changed his views.

All at once there was an outcry: "They are bringing him, they are bringing him," and the ladies ran shrieking to the door. Hardly ten minutes had passed since my uncle set off; one would have thought it would have been impossible to bring Foma Fomitch back so quickly; but the enigma was very soon explained later on.

When Foma Fomich had let Gavrila go he really had "set off walking with his stick", but finding himself in complete solitude in the midst of the storm, the thunder, and the pouring rain, he was ignominiously pained-stricken, turned back towards Stepantchikovo and ran after Gavrila. He was already in the village when my uncle came upon him.

A passing cart was stopped at once; some peasants ran up and put the unresisting Foma Fomitch into it. So they conveyed him straight to the open arms of Madame la Generale, who was almost beside herself with horror when she saw the condition he was in.

He was even muddier and wetter than Gavrila. There was a terrific flurry and bustle; they wanted at once to drag him upstairs to change his linen; there was an outcry for elder-flower tea and other invigorating beverages, they scurried in all directions without doing anything sensible; they all talked at once. . . .

But Foma seemed to notice nobody and nothing. He was led in, supported under the arms. On reaching his easy-chair, he sank heavily into it and closed his eyes. Someone cried out that he was dying; a terrible howl was raised, and Falaley was the loudest of all, trying to squeeze through the crowd of ladies up to Foma Fomitch to kiss his hand at once. . . .

Chapter V

FOMA FOMITCH MAKES EVERYONE HAPPY

"J HERE have they brought me?" Foma articulated at VV last, in the voice of a man dying in a righteous cause.

"Damnable humbug!" Mizintchikov whispered beside me. "As though he didn't see where he had been brought! Now he will give us a fine exhibition!"

"You are among us, Foma, you are in your own circle!" cried my uncle. "Don't give way, calm yourself! And really, Foma, you had better change your things, or you will be ill. . . . And won't you take something to restore you, eh? Just something ... a little glass of something to warm you. ..."

"I could drink a little Malaga," Foma moaned, closing his eyes again.

"Malaga? I am not sure there is any," my uncle said, anxiously looking towards Praskovya Ilyinitchna.

"To be sure there is!" the latter answered. "There are four whole bottles left." And jingling her keys she ran to fetch the Malaga, followed by exclamations of the ladies, who were clinging to Foma like flies round jam. On the other hand, Mr Bahtcheyev was indignant in the extreme.

"He wants Malaga!" he grumbled almost aloud. "And asks for a wine that no one drinks. Who drinks Malaga nowadays but rascals like him? Tfoo, you confounded fellow! What am I standing here for? What am I waiting for?"

“Foma,” my uncle began, stumbling over every word, “you see now . . . when you are rested and are with us again . . . that is, I meant to say, Foma, that I understand how accusing, so to say, the most innocent of beings ...”

“Where is it, my innocence, where?” Foma interrupted, as though he were feverish and in delirium. “Where are my golden days? Where art thou, my golden childhood, when innocent and lovely I ran about the fields chasing the spring butterflies? Where are those days? Give me back my innocence, give it me back! ...”

And Foma, flinging wide his arms, turned to each one of us in succession as though his innocence were in somebody’s pocket. Bahtcheyev was ready to explode with wrath.

“Ech, so that’s what he wants!” he muttered in a fury. “Give him his innocence! Does he want to kiss it, or what? Most likely he was as great a villain when he was a boy as he is now! I’ll take my oath he was.”

“Foma!” . . . my uncle was beginning again.

“Where, where are they, those days when I still had faith in love and loved mankind?” cried Foma; “when I embraced man and wept upon his bosom? But now where am I? Where am I?”

“You are with us, Foma, calm yourself,” cried my uncle. “This is what I wanted to say to you, Foma. ...”

“You might at least keep silent now,” hissed Miss Perepelitsyn, with a spiteful gleam in her vipcnsh eyes.

“Where am I?” Foma went on. “Who are about me? They are bulls and buffaloes turning their horns against me. Life, what art thou? If one lives one is dishonoured, disgraced, humbled, crushed; and when the earth is scattered on one’s coffin, only

then men will remember one and pile a monument on one's poor bones!"

"Holy saints, he is talking about monuments!" whispered Yezhevikin, clasping his hands.

"Oh, do not put up a monument to me," cried Foma, "do not! I don't need monuments. Raise up a monument to me in your hearts, I want nothing more, nothing more!"

"Foma," my uncle interposed, "enough, calm yourself! There is no need to talk about monuments. Only listen. You see, Foma, I understand that you were perhaps, so to say, inspired with righteous fervour when you reproached me, but you were carried away, Foma, beyond the limit of righteousness — I assure you you were mistaken, Foma. . . ."

"Oh, will you give over?" hissed Miss Perepelitsyn again. "Do you want to murder the poor man because he is in your hands? ..."

After Miss Perepelitsyn, Madame la Générale made a stir, and all her suite followed her example; they all waved their hands at my uncle to stop him.

"Anna Nilovna, be silent yourself, I know what I am saying!" my uncle answered firmly. "This is a sacred matter! A question of honour and justice. Foma! you are a sensible man, you must at once ask the forgiveness of the virtuous young lady whom you have insulted."

"What young lady? What young lady have I insulted?" Foma articulated in amazement, staring round at everyone as though he had entirely forgotten everything that had happened, and did not know what was the matter.

“Yes, Foma; and if now of your own accord you frankly acknowledge you have done wrong, I swear, Foma, I will fall at your feet and then ...”

“Whom have I insulted?” wailed Foma. “What young lady? Where is she? Where is the young lady? Recall to me something about the young lady! ...”

At that instant, Nastenka, confused and frightened, went up to Yegor Ilyitch and pulled him by the sleeve.

“No, Yegor Ilyitch, leave him alone, there is no need of an apology. What is the object of it all?” she said in an imploring voice. “Give it up!”

“Ah, now I begin to remember,” cried Foma. “My God, I understand. Oh, help me, help me to remember!” he implored, apparently in great excitement. “Tell me, is it true that I was turned out of this house, like the mangiest of curs? Is it true that I was struck by lightning? Is it true that I was kicked down the steps? Is it true? Is that true?”

The weeping and wailing of the fair sex were the most eloquent reply to Foma Fomitch.

“Yes, yes,” he repeated, “I remember ... I remember now that after the lightning and my fall I was running here, pursued by the thunder, to do my duty and then vanish for ever! Raise me up! Weak as I may be now, I must do my duty.”

He was at once helped up from his chair. Foma stood in the attitude of an orator and stretched out his hands.

“Colonel,” he cried, “now I have quite recovered. The thunder has not extinguished my intellectual capacities; it has left, it is true, -a deafness in my right ear, due perhaps not so much to

the thunder as to my fall down the steps, but what of that? And what does anyone care about Foma's right ear!"

Foma threw such a wealth of mournful irony into these last words, and accompanied them with such a pathetic smile, that the groans of the deeply-moved ladies resounded again. They all looked with reproach, and some also with fury, at my uncle, who was beginning to be crushed by so unanimous an expression of public opinion. Mizintchikov, with a curse, walked away to the window. Bahtcheyev kept prodding me more and more violently with his elbow; he could hardly stand still.

"Now listen to my whole confession!" yelled Foma, turning upon all a proud and determined gaze, "and at the same time decide the fate of poor Opiskin! Yegor Ilyitch, for a long time past I have been watching over you, watching over you with a tremor at my heart, and I have seen everything, everything, while you were not suspecting that I was watching over you. Colonel! Perhaps I was mistaken, but I knew your egotism, your boundless vanity, your phenomenal sensuality, and who would blame me for trembling for the honour of an innocent young person?"

"Loma, ioma! . . . you need not enlarge on it, Foma," cried my uncle, looking uneasily at Nastenka's suffering face.

"What troubled me was not so much the innocence and trustfulness of the person in question as her inexperience," Foma went on, as though he had not heard my uncle's warning. "I saw that a tender feeling was blossoming in her heart, like a rose in spring, and I could not help recalling Petrarch's saying, 'Innocence is often but a hair's breadth from ruin.'

I sighed, I groaned, and though I was ready to shed the last drop of my blood to safeguard that pure pearl of maidenhood, who could answer to me for you, Yegor Ilyitch? I know the unbridled violence of your passions, and knowing that you are ready to sacrifice everything for their momentary gratification, I was plunged in the depths of alarm and apprehension for the fate of the noblest of girls. ...”

“Foma! Could you really imagine such a thing?” cried my uncle.

“With a shudder at my heart I watched over you. And if you want to know what I have been suffering, go to Shakespeare: in his Hamlet he describes the state of my soul. I became suspicious and terrible.

In my anxiety, in indignation, I saw everything in the blackest colour and that not the ‘black colour’ sung of in the well-known song — I can assure you. That was the cause of the desire you saw in me to remove her far away from this house: I wanted to save her; that was why you have seen me of late irritable and bitter against the whole human race.

Oh! who will reconcile me with humanity? I feel that I was perhaps over-exacting and unjust to your guests, to your nephew, to Mr. Bahtcheyev, when I expected from him a knowledge of astronomy; but who will blame me for my state of mind at the time? Going to Shakespeare again, I may say that the future looked to my imagination like a gloomy gulf of unfathomed depth with a crocodile lying at the bottom.

I felt that it was my duty to prevent disaster, that I was destined, appointed for that purpose — and what happened? You did not understand the generous impulse of my heart, and

have been repaying me all this time with anger, with ingratitude, with jeers, with slights ...”

“Foma! If that is so ... of course I feel ..,” cried my uncle, in extreme agitation.

“If you really do feel it, Colonel, be so kind as to listen and not interrupt me. I will continue. My whole fault lay in the fact, therefore, that I was too much troubled over the fate and the happiness of this child; for compared with you she is a child. It was the truest love for humanity that turned me all this time into a fiend of wrath and suspicion. I was ready to fall on people and tear them to pieces.

And you know, Yegor Ilyitch, all your actions, as though of design, made me more suspicious every hour, and confirmed my fears. You know, Yegor Ilyitch, when you showered your gold upon me yesterday to drive me from you, I thought: ‘He is driving away in my person his conscience, so as more easily to perpetrate this wickedness. ...”

“Foma, Foma, can you have thought that yesterday?” my uncle cried out with horror. “Merciful heavens! and I hadn’t the faintest suspicion ...”

“Heaven itself inspired those suspicions,” Foma went on. “And judge for yourself: what could I suppose when chance led me that very evening to that fatal seat in the garden? What were my feelings at that moment — oh, my God! — when I saw with my own eyes that all my suspicions were justified in the most flagrant manner?”

But I had still one hope left, a faint one indeed, but still it was a hope, and — this morning you shattered it into dust and ashes!

You sent me your letter, you alleged your intention to marry; you besought me not to make it public. . . . 'But why?'

I wondered. 'Why did he write now after I have found him out and not before? Why did he not run to me before, happy and comely — for love adorns the countenance — why did he not fly to my embrace, why did he not weep upon my bosom tears of infinite bliss and tell me all about it, all about it?' Or am I a crocodile who would have devoured you instead of giving you good advice?

Or am I some loathsome beetle who would only have bitten you and not assisted your happiness? 'Am I his friend or the most repulsive of insects?' that was the question I asked myself this morning. 'With what object,' I asked myself, 'with what object did he invite his nephew from Petersburg and try to betroth him to this girl, if not to deceive us and his involotts nephew, and meanwhile in secret to persist in his criminal designs?'

Yes, Colonel, if anyone confirmed in me the thought that your mutual love was criminal, it was you yourself and you only! What is more, you have behaved like a criminal to this young girl; for through your tactlessness and selfish mistrustfulness you have exposed her, a modest and high-principled girl, to slander and odious suspicions."

My uncle stood silent with bowed head, Foma's eloquence was evidently getting the better of his convictions, and he was beginning to regard himself as a complete criminal. Madame la Générale and her followers were listening to Foma in awestruck silence, while Miss Perepelitsyn looked with spiteful triumph at poor Nastenka.

“Overwhelmed, nervously exhausted and shattered/” Foma went on, “I locked myself in this morning and prayed, and the Lord showed me the right path. At last I decided: for the last time and publicly to put you to the test.

I may have gone about it with too much fervour, I may have given way too much to my indignation; but foi my well-meaning effort, you flung me out of the window! As I fell out of the window I thought to myself: ‘This is how virtue is rewarded all the world over.’ Then I struck the earth, and I scarcely remember what happened to me afterwauK”

Shrieks and groans interrupted Foma Fomitth at this tragic recollection. Madame la Générale made a dash at him with a bottle of Malaga in her hand, which she had just snatched from Praskovya Uymitchna, but Foma majestically waved aside the hand and the Malaga and Madame la Générale herself.

“Let me alone,” he shouted, “I must finish. What happened after my fall — I don’t know. I know one thing only, that now, wet through and on the verge of fever, I am standing here to secure your mutual happiness.

Colonel! From many signs which I do not wish now to partieularise, I am convinced at last that your love was pure and even exalted, though at the same time criminally distrustful. Beaten, humiliated, suspected of insulting a young lady in defence of whose honour I am ready like a medieval knight to shed the last drop of my blood, I have made up my mind to show you how Foma Opiskin revenges an injury. Give me your hand, Colonel!”

“With pleasure, Foma!” cried my uncle. “And since you have now fully cleared the honour of this young lady from every aspersion, why ... of course . . . here is my hand, Foma, together with my regrets. ...”

And my uncle gave him his hand warmly, not yet suspecting what was to come of it.

“Give me your hand too,” went on Foma in a faint voice, parting the crowd of ladies who were pressing round him and appealing to Nastenka.

Nastenka was taken aback and confused, she looked timidly at Foma.

“Approach, approach, my sweet child! It is essential for your happiness,” Foma added caressingly, still holding my uncle’s hand in his.

“What’s he up to now?” said Mizintchikov.

Nastenka, frightened and trembling, went slowly up to Foma and timidly held out her hand.

Foma took her hand and put it in my uncle’s.

“I join your hands and bless you,” he pronounced in the most solemn voice. “And if the blessing of a poor sorrow-stricken sufferer may avail you, be happy. This is how Foma Opiskin takes his revenge! Hurrah!”

The amazement of everyone was immense. The conclusion was so unexpected that everyone was struck dumb. Madame la Générale stood rooted to the spot, with her mouth open and the bottle of Malaga in her hand. Miss Perepelitsyn turned pale and trembled with fury. The lady companions clasped their

hands and sat petrified in their seats. My uncle trembled and tried to say something, but could not.

Nastya turned deathly pale and timidly murmured that “it could not be” . . . but it was too late. Bahtcheyev was the first — we must do him that credit — to second Foma’s hurrah. I followed suit, and after me Sashenka shouted at the top of her ringing voice as she flew to embrace her father; then Ilyusha joined in, then Yezhevikin, and last of all Mizintchikov.

“Hurrah!” Foma cried once more; “hurrah! And on your knees, children of my heart, on your knees before the tenderest of mothers! Ask her blessing, and if need be I will kneel before her by your side. ...”

My uncle and Nastya, not looking at each other, and seeming not to understand what was being done to them, fell on their knees before Madame la Generale, the whole company flocked round them; but the old lady seemed to be stupefied, not knowing what to do. Foma came to the rescue at this juncture too; he plumped down himself before his patroness. This at once dispelled all her hesitation. Dissolving into tears, she said at last that she consented. My uncle jumped up and clasped Foma in his arms.

“Foma, Foma! . . .,” he began, but his voice broke and he could not go on.

“Champagne!” bawled Mr. Bahtcheyev. “Hurrah!”

“No, sir, not champagne,” Miss Perepelitsyn caught him up. She had by now recovered herself, and realised the position and at the same time its consequences. “Put up a candle to God, pray

to the holy image and bless with the holy image, as is done by all godly people. ...”

At once all flew to carry out the sage suggestion; a fearful bustle followed. They had to light the candle. Mr. Bahtcheyev drew up a chair and got up on it to put the candle before the holy image, but immediately broke the chair and came down heavily on the floor — still on his feet, however.

Not in the least irritated by this, he at once respectfully made way for Miss Perepelitsyn. The slender Miss Perepelitsyn had done the job in a flash: the candle was lighted. The nun and the lady companions began crossing themselves and bowing down to the ground.

They took down the image of the Saviour and carried it to Madame la Generale. My uncle and Nastya went down on their knees again and the ceremony was carried out under the pious instructions of Miss Perepelitsyn, who was saying every minute: “Bow down to her feet, kiss the image, kiss your mamma’s hand.” Mr. Bahtcheyev thought himself bound to kiss the image after the betrothed couple, and at the same time he kissed the hand of Madame la Generale.

“Hurrah!” he shouted again. “Come, now we will have some champagne.”

Everyone, however, was delighted. Madame la Générale was weeping, but it was now with tears of joy. Foma’s blessing had at once made the union sanctified and suitable, and what mattered most to her was that Foma Fomitch had distinguished himself and that now he would remain with her for ever.

All the lady companions, in appearance at least, shared the general satisfaction. My uncle at one moment was on his knees kissing his mother's hands, at the next was flying to embrace me, Bahtcheyev, Mizintchikov and Yezhevikin.

Ilyusha he almost smothered in his embraces. Sasha ran to hug and kiss Nastenka. Praskovya Ilyinitchna dissolved into tears. Bahtcheyev, noticing this, went up to kiss her hand. Poor old Yezhevikin was completely overcome, he was weeping in a corner and was wiping his eyes with the same check handkerchief.

In another corner Gavriila was whimpering and gazing reverently at Foma Fomitch, and Falaley was sobbing loudly and going up to each of the company in turn, kissing his hand. All were overwhelmed with feeling; no one yet had begun to talk, or explain things; it seemed as though everything had been said; nothing was heard but joyful exclamations.

No one understood yet how all this had been so quickly arranged. They knew one thing only, that it had all been arranged by Foma Fomitch, and that this was a solid fact which could not be changed.

But not five minutes had passed after the general rejoicing, when suddenly Tatyana Ivanovna made her appearance among us. In what way, by what intuition could she, sitting in her own room upstairs, have so quickly divined love and marriage below? She fluttered in with a radiant face, with tears of joy in her eyes, in a fascinating and elegant get-up (she had had time to change her dress before coming down), and flew straight to embrace Nastenka with loud exclamations.

“Nastenka, Nastenka! You loved him and I did not know!” she cried. “Goodness! They loved each other, they suffered in silence! They have been persecuted. What a romance! Nastya, darling, tell me the whole truth: do you really love this crazy fellow?”

By way of reply Nastya hugged and kissed her.

“My goodness, what a fascinating romance!” And Tatyana Ivanovna clapped her hands in delight. “Nastya, listen, my angel: all these men, all, every one, are ungrateful wretches, monsters, and not worthy of our love. But perhaps he is the best of them. Come to me, you crazy fellow!” she cried, addressing my uncle and clutching him by the arm. “Are you really in love? Are you really capable of loving?”

Look at me, I want to look into your eyes, I want to see whether those eyes are lying or not? No, no, they are not lying; there is the light of love in them. Oh, how happy I am! Nastenka, my dear, you are not rich — I shall make you a present of thirty thousand roubles. Take it, for God’s sake.

I don’t want it, I don’t want it; I shall have plenty left. No, no, no,” she cried, waving her hand as she saw Nastenka was meaning to refuse. “Don’t you speak, Yegor Ilyitch, it is not your affair.

No, Nastya, I had made up my mind already to give you the money; I have been wanting to make you a present for a long time, and was only waiting for you to be in love. ... I shall see your happiness. You will wound me if you don’t take it; I shall cry, Nastya. No, no, no and no!”

Tatyana Ivanovna was so overjoyed that for the moment at least it was impossible, it would have been a pity indeed, to cross her. They could not bring themselves to do it, but put it off. She flew to kiss Madame la Generale, Miss Perepelitsyn and all of us. Mr. Bahtcheyev squeezed his way up to her very respectfully and asked to kiss her hand.

“My dear, good girl! Forgive an old fool like me for what happened this morning. I didn’t know what a heart of gold you had.”

“Crazy fellow! I know you,” Tatyana Ivanovna lisped with gleeful playfulness. She gave Mr. Bahtcheyev a flick on the nose with her glove, and swishing against him with her gorgeous skirts, fluttered away like a zephyr.

The fat man stepped aside respectfully.

“A very worthy young lady!” he said with feeling. “They have stuck a nose on to the German! You know!” he whispered to me confidentially, looking at me joyfully.

“What nose? What German?” I asked in surprise.

“Why, the one I ordered, the German kissing his lady’s hand while she is wiping away a tear with her handkerchief. Only yesterday my Yevdokem mended it; and when we came back from our expedition this morning I sent a man on horseback to fetch it. . . . They will soon be bringing it. A superb thing.”

“Foma!” cried my uncle in a frenzy of delight. “It is you who have made our happiness. How can I reward you?”

“Nohow, Colonel,” replied Foma, with a sanctimonious air.

“Continue to pay no attention to me and be happy without Foma.”

He was evidently piqued; in the general rejoicing he seemed, as it were, forgotten.

“It is all due to our joy, Foma,” cried my uncle. “I don’t know whether I am on my head or my feet. Listen, Foma, I have insulted you. My whole blood is not enough to atone for my wrong to you, and that is why I say nothing and do not even beg your pardon.

But if ever you have need of my head, my life, if you ever want someone to throw himself over a precipice for your sake, call upon me, and you shall see. . . . I will say nothing more, Foma.”

And my uncle waved his hand, fully recognising the impossibility of adding anything that could more strongly express his feeling. He only gazed at Foma with grateful eyes full of tears.

“See what an angel he is!” Miss Perepelitsyn piped in her turn in adulation of Foma.

“Yes, yes,” Sashenka put in. “I did not know you were such a good man, Foma Fomitch, and I was disrespectful to you. But forgive me, Foma Fomitch, and you may be sure I will love you with all my heart. If you knew how much I respect you now!”

“Yes, Foma,” Bahtcheyev chimed in. “Forgive an old fool like me too. I didn’t know you, I didn’t know you. You are not merely a learned man, Foma, but also — simply a hero. My whole house is at your service.

But there, the best of all would be, if you would come to me the day after to-morrow, old man, with Madame la Générale too, and the betrothed couple — the whole company, in fact.

And we will have a dinner, I tell you. I won't praise it beforehand, but one thing I can say, you will find everything you want unless it is bird's milk. I give you my word of honour."

In the midst of these demonstrations, Nastenka, too, went up to Foma Fomitch and without further words warmly embraced him and kissed him.

"Foma Fomitch," she said, "you have been a true friend to us, you have done so much for us, that I don't know how to repay you for it all; but I only know that I will be for you a most tender and respectful sister . . ."

She could say no more, she was choked by tears. Foma kissed her on the head and grew tearful.

"My children, the children of my heart," he said. "Live and prosper, and in moments of happiness think sometimes of the poor exile. For myself, I will only say that misfortune is perhaps the mother of virtue. That, I believe, is said by Gogol, a frivolous writer, but from whom one may sometimes glean fruitful thoughts. Exile is a misfortune. I shall wander like a pilgrim with my staff over the face of the earth, and who knows? — perchance my troubles will make me more righteous yet! That thought is the one consolation left me!"

"But . . . where are you going, Foma?" my uncle asked in alarm. All were startled, and pressed round Foma.

"Why, do you suppose I can remain in your house after your behaviour this morning?" Foma inquired with extraordinary dignity.

But he was not allowed to finish, outcries from all the company smothered his voice. They made him sit down in an easy-chair,

they besought him, they shed tears over him, and I don't know what they didn't do.

Of course he hadn't the faintest intention of leaving "this house", just as he had not earlier that morning, nor the day before, nor on the occasion when he had taken to digging in the garden. He knew now that they would reverently detain him, would clutch at him, especially since he had made them all happy, since they all had faith in him again and were ready to carry him on their shoulders and to consider it an honour and a happiness to do so. But most likely his cowardly return, when he was frightened by the storm, was rankling in his mind and egging him on to play the hero in some way.

And above all, there was such a temptation to give himself airs; the opportunity of talking, of using line phrases and laying it on thick, of blowing his own trumpet, was too good for any possibility of resisting the temptation.

He did not resist it; he tore himself out of the grasp of those who held him. He asked for his staff, besought them to let him have his freedom, to let him wander out into the wide wide world, declared that in that house he had been dishonoured, beaten, that he had only come back to make everyone happy, and, he asked, could he remain in this "house of ingratitude and eat *oup, sustaining, perhaps, but seasoned with blows?" At last he left off struggling. He was reseated in his chair, but his eloquence was not arrested.

"Have I not been insulted here?" he cried. "Have I not been taunted? Haven't you, you yourself, Colonel, have you not every hour pointed the finger of scorn and made the long nose of derision at me, like the ignorant children of the working class

in the streets of the town? Yes, Colonel, I insist on that comparison, because if you have not done so physically it has yet been a moral long nose, and in some cases a moral long nose is more insulting than a physical one. I say nothing of blows . . .”

“Foma, Foma,” cried my uncle, “do not crush me with these recollections. I have told you already that all my blood is not enough to wash out the insults. Be magnanimous! Forgive, forget, and remain to contemplate our happiness I Your work, Foma ...”

“I want to love my fellow-man, to love him,” cried Foma, “and they won’t give me him, they forbid me to love him, they take him from me. Give me, give me my fellow-man that I may love him! Where is that fellow-man? Where is he hidden?

Like Diogenes with his candle, I have been looking for him all my life and cannot find him; and I can love no one, to this day I cannot find the man. Woe to him who has made me a hater of mankind! I cry: give me my fellow-man that I may love him, and they thrust Falaley upon me! Am I to love Falaley? Do I want to love Falaley? Could I love Falaley, even if I wanted to? No. Why not? Because he is Falaley. Why do I not love humanity?

Because all on earth are Falaleys or like Falaley. I don’t want Falaley, I hate Falaley, I spit on Falaley, I trample Falaley under my feet. And if I had to choose I would rather love Asmodeus than Falaley. Come here, come here, my everlasting torment, come here,” he cried, suddenly addressing Falaley, who was in the most innocent way standing on tiptoe, looking over the crowd that was surrounding Foma Fomitch. “Come here.

I will show you, Colonel,” cried Foma, drawing towards him Falaley, who was almost unconscious with terror, “I will show you the truth of my words about the everlasting long nose and finger of scorn! Tell me, Falaley, and tell the truth: what did you dream about last night? Come, Colonel, you will see your handiwork! Come, Falaley, tell us!”

The poor boy, shaking with terror,, turned despairing eyes about him, looking for someone to rescue him; but everyone was in a tremor waiting for his answer.

“Come, Falaley, I am waiting.”

Instead of answering, Falaley screwed up his face, opened his mouth wide, and began bellowing like a calf.

“Colonel! Do you see this stubbornness? Do you mean to tell me it’s natural? For the last time I ask you, Falaley, tell me: what did you dream of last night?”

“O-of . . .”

“Say you dreamed of me,” said Bahtcheyev.

“Of your virtue, sir,” Yezhevikin prompted in his other ear. Falaley merely looked about him.

“O-of ... of your vir . . . of a white bu-ull,” he roared at last, and burst into scalding tears.

Everyone groaned. But Foma Fomitch was in a paroxysm of extraordinary magnanimity.

“Anyway, I see your sincerity, Falaley/” he said. “A sincerity I do not observe in others. God bless you! If you are purposely mocking at me with that dream at the instigation of others, God will repay you and those others. If not, I respect your truthfulness; for even in the lowest of creatures like you it is my

habit to discern the image and semblance of God. . . . I forgive you, Falaley. Embrace me, my children. I will remain with you.”

“He will remain!” they all cried in delight.

“I will remain and I will forgive. Colonel, reward Falaley with some sugar, do not let him cry on such a day of happiness for all.”

I need hardly say that such magnanimity was thought astounding. To take so much thought at such a moment, and for whom? For Falaley. My uncle flew to carry out his instruction in regard to the sugar. Immediately a silver sugar-basin — I don’t know where it came from — appeared in the hands of Praskovya Ilyinitchna. My uncle was about to take out two pieces with a trembling hand, then three, then he dropped them, at last, seeing he was incapable of doing anything from excitement.

“Ah!” he cried, “for a day like this! Hold out your coat, Falaley,” and he poured into his coat all the Contents of the sugar-basin. “That’s for your truthfulness,” he said, by way of edification.

“Mr. Korovkin!” Vidoplyasov announced, suddenly appearing in the doorway.

A slight flutter of consternation followed — Korovkin’s visit was obviously ill-timed. They all looked inquiringly at my uncle.

“Korovkin!” cried my uncle, in some embarrassment. “Of course I am delighted . . .,” he added, glancing timidly towards Foma; “but really I don’t know whether to ask him in at such a moment. What do you think, Foma?”

“Oh, yes, why not,” said Foma amicably. “Invite Korovkin too; let him, too, share in the general rejoicing.”

In short, Foma Fomitch was in an angelic frame of mind.

“I most respectfully make bold to inform you,” observed Vidoplyasov, “that the gentleman is not quite himself.”

“Not quite himself? How? What nonsense are you talking?” cried my uncle.

“It is so, indeed; he is not quite in a sober condition.”

But before my uncle had time to open his mouth, flush red, and show his alarm and extreme embarrassment, the mystery was explained. Korovkin appeared in the doorway, pushed Vidoplyasov aside and confronted the astonished company.

He was a short, thick-set gentleman of forty, with dark hair touched with grey and closely cropped, with a round purple face and little bloodshot eyes, wearing a high horsehair cravat, fastened at the back with a buckle, an extraordinarily threadbare swallow-tail coat covered with fluff and hay and disclosing a bad rent under the arm, and unspeakable trousers, and carrying an incredibly greasy cap which he was holding out at arm’s length.

This gentleman was completely drunk. Advancing into the middle of the room, he stood still, staggering, nodding his head as though he were pecking at something with his nose in drunken hesitation; then he slowly grinned from ear to ear.

“Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen,” he began, “I . . . er . . .” (here he gave a tug at his collar) “got ‘em!”

Madame la Générale immediately assumed an air of offended dignity. Foma, sitting in his easy-chair, ironically looked the eccentric visitor up and down. Bahtcheyev stared at him in perplexity, through which some sympathy was, however,

apparent. My uncle's embarrassment was incredible; he was deeply distressed on Korovkin's account.

"Korovkin," he began. "Listen."

"Attendcz!" Korovkin interrupted him. "Let me introduce myself: a child of nature. . . . But what do I see? There are ladies here. . . . Why didn't you tell me, you rascal, that you had ladies here?" he added with a roguish smile. "Never mind! Don't be shy. Let us be presented to the fair sex. Charming ladies," he began, articulating with difficulty and stumbling over every word, "you see a luckless mortal . . . who . . . and so on. . . . The rest must remain unsaid. . . . Musicians! A polka!"

"Wouldn't you like a nap?" asked Mizintchikov, quietly going up to Korovkin.

"A nap? You say that to insult me?"

"Not at all. You know a little sleep is a good thing after a journey ..."

"Never!" Korovkin answered with indignation. "Do you think I am drunk? — not a bit. But where do they sleep here?"

"Come along, I'll take you at once."

"Where? In the coach-house? No, my lad, you won't take me in I I have spent a night there already. . . . Lead the way, though. Why not go along with a good fellow. ... I don't want a pillow. A military man does not want a pillow. . . . But you produce a sofa for me, old man ... a sofa. And, I say," he added, stopping, "I see you are a jolly fellow; produce something else for me . . . you know? A bit of the rummy, enough to drown a lly in, only enough for that, only one little glass, I mean."

"Very well, very well!" answered Mizintchikov.

“Very well. But you wait a bit, I must say good-bye. Adieu, mcsdames and mcsdemoiselles. You have, so to speak, smitten. . . . But there, never mind! We will talk about that afterwards . . . only do wake me when it begins ... or even five minutes before it begins . . . don't begin without me! Do you hear? Don't begin! . . .”

And the merry gentleman vanished behind Mizintchikov.

Everyone was silent. The company had not got over their astonishment. At last Foma without a word began noiselessly chuckling, his laughter grew into a guffaw. Seeing that, Madame la Generale, too, was amused, though the expression of insulted dignity still remained on her face. Irrepressible laughter arose on all sides. My uncle stood as though paralysed, flushing almost to tears, and was for some time incapable of uttering a word.

“Merciful heavens!” he brought out at last. “Who could have known this? But you know . . . you know it might happen to anyone. Foma, I assure you that he is a most straightforward, honourable man, and an extremely well-read man too, Foma . . . you will see! . . .”

“I do see, I do see,” cried Foma, shaking with laughter, “extraordinarily well-read. Well-read is just the word.”
“How he can talk about railways!” Yezhevikin observed in an undertone.

“Foma,” my uncle was beginning, but the laughter of all the company drowned his words. Foma Fomitch was simply in fits, and looking at him, my uncle began laughing too.

“Well, what does it matter?” he said enthusiastically. “You are magnanimous, Foma, you have a great heart; you have made me happy . . . you forgive Korovkin too.”

Nastenka was the only one who did not laugh. She looked with eyes full of love at her future husband, and looked as though she would say —

“How splendid, how kind you are, the most generous of men, and how I love you!”

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

FOMA’S triumph was complete and beyond attack.

Certainly without him nothing would have been settled, and the accomplished fact stifled all doubts and objections. The gratitude of those he had made happy was beyond all bounds. My uncle and Nastya waved me off when I attempted to drop a faint hint at the process by which Foma’s consent to their marriage had been obtained. Sashenka cried: “Good, kind Foma Fomitch; I will embroider him a cushion in woolwork!” and even reproached me for my hard-heartedness.

I believe that Bahtecheyev in the fervour of his conversion would have strangled me if I had ventured to say anything disrespectful about Foma Fomitch. He followed Foma about like a little dog, gazed at him with devout reverence, and at every word the latter uttered he would exclaim: “You are a noble man, Foma. You are a learned man, Foma.”

As for Yezhevikin, he was highly delighted. The old man had for a long time past seen that Nastenka had turned Yegor Ilyitch's head, and from that time forward his one dream, waking and sleeping, was to bring about this marriage. He had clung to the idea to the last, and had only given it up when it had been impossible not to do so.

Foma had changed the aspect of the affair. I need hardly say that in spite of his delight the old man saw through Foma; in short, it was clear that Foma Fomitch would be supreme in that household for ever, and that there would be no limit to his despotism. We all know that even the most unpleasant and ill-humoured people are softened, if only for a time, when their desires are gratified.

Foma Fomitch, on the contrary, seemed to grow stupider when he was successful, and held his nose higher in the air than ever. Just before dinner, having changed all his clothes, he settled down in an arm-chair, summoned my uncle, and in the presence of the whole family began giving him another lecture.

"Colonel," he began, "you are about to enter upon holy matrimony. Do you realise the obligation ..."

And so on and so on. Imagine ten pages of the size of the *Journal des Debats*, of the smallest print, filled with the wildest nonsense, in which there was absolutely nothing dealing with the duties of marriage, but only the most shameful eulogies of the intellect, mildness, magnanimity, manliness and disinterestedness of himself, Foma Fomitch.

Everyone was hungry, they all wanted their dinners; but in spite of that no one dared to protest, and everyone heard the

twaddle reverently to the end. Even Bahtcheyev, in spite of his ravenous appetite, sat without stirring, absolutely respectful. Gratified by his own eloquence, Foma Fomitch grew livelier, and even drank rather heavily at dinner, proposing the most extraordinary toasts.

He proceeded to display his wit by being jocose, at the expense of the happy pair, of course. Everybody laughed and applauded. But some of the jokes were so gross and suggestive that even Bahtcheyev was embarrassed by them. At last Nastenka jumped up from the table and ran away, to the indescribable delight of Foma Fomitch, but he immediately pulled himself up.

Briefly but in strong terms he dwelt upon Nastenka's virtues, and proposed a toast to the health of the absent one. My uncle, who a minute before had been embarrassed and unhappy, was ready to hug Foma Fomitch again.

Altogether the betrothed pair seemed somewhat ashamed of each other and their happiness — and I noticed that they had not said a word to each other from the time of the blessing, they even seemed to avoid looking at one another. When they got up from dinner, my uncle vanished, I don't know where. I strolled out on to the terrace to look for him.

There I found Foma sitting in an easy-chair, drinking coffee and holding forth, extremely exnilarated. Only Yezhevikin, Bahtcheyev and Mizmtchikov were by him. I stopped to listen.

“Why,” asked Foma, “am I ready at this moment to go through fire for my convictions? And why it it that none of you are capable of going through fire? Why is it? Why is it?”

“Well, but it’s unnecessary, Foma Fomitch, to go through fire,” Yezhevikin said bantenngly. “Why, what’s the sense of it? In the first place it would hurt, and in the second it would burn — what would be left?”

“What would be left? Noble ashes would be left. But how should you understand, how should you appreciate me? To you, no great men exist but perhaps some Caesar or Alexander of Macedon. And what did your Caesars do? Whom did they make happy?

What did your vaunted Alexander of Macedon do? He conquered the whole earth? But give me such a phalanx and I could be a conqueror too, and so could you, and so could he. . . . On the other hand, he killed the virtuous Clitus, but I have not killed the virtuous Clitus. . . . A puppy, a scoundrel! He ought to have had a thrashing, and not to have been glorified in universal history . . . and Caesar with him!”

“You might spare Caesar, anyway, Foma Fomitch!”

“I won’t spare the fool!” cried Foma.

“No, don’t spare him!” Bahtcheyev, who had also been drinking, backed him up. “There is no need to spare them, they are all flighty fellows, they care for nothing but pirouetting on one leg! Sausage-eaters! Here, one of them was wanting to found a scholarship just now — and what is a scholarship?

The devil only knows what it means! I bet it’s some new villainy! And here is another who in honourable society is staggering about and asking for rum. I have no objection to drinking. But one should drink and drink and then take a rest, and afterwards, maybe, drink again. It’s no good sparing them!

They are all scoundrels. You are the only enlightened one among them, Foma!”

If Bahtcheyev surrendered to anyone he surrendered unconditionally and absolutely without criticism.

I looked for my uncle in the garden, by the pond in the most secluded spot. He was with Nastenka. Seeing me, Nastenka shot into the bushes as though she were in fault. My uncle came to meet me with a beaming face; there were tears of happiness in his eyes. He took both my hands and warmly pressed them.

“My dear,” he said, “I still cannot believe in my happiness. . . . Nastya feels the same. We only marvel and glorify the Almighty. She was crying just now. Would you believe it, I hardly know what I am doing yet, I am still utterly beside myself, and don’t know whether to believe it or not! And why has this come to me? Why? What have I done? How have I deserved it?”

“If anyone deserves anything, it is you, uncle,” I said with conviction. “I have never seen such an honest, such a fine, such a kind-hearted man as you.”

“No, Seryozha, no, it is too much,” he answered, as it were with regret. “What is bad is that we are kind (I am talking only about myself really) when we are happy; but when we are unhappy it is best not to come near us! Nastenka and I were only just talking of that.

Though I was dazzled by Foma, up to this very day perhaps, would you believe it, I did not quite believe in him, though I did assure you of his perfection; even yesterday I did not believe in him when he refused such a present! To my shame I say it. My

heart shudders at the memory of this morning, but I could not control myself. . . . When he spoke of Nastya something seemed to stab me to the very heart. I did not undei stand and behaved like a tiger. . . .”

“Well, uncle, perhaps that was only natural.”

My uncle waved away the idea.

“No, no, my boy, don’t say so. The fact of it is, all this comes from the depravity of my nature, from my being a gloomy and sensual egoist and abandoning myself to my passions without restraint. That’s what Foma says.” (What could one answer to that?) “You don’t know, Seryozha,” he went on with deep feeling, “how often I have been irritable, unfeeling, unjust, haughty, and not only to Foma.

Now it has all come back to my mind, and I feel ashamed that I have done nothing hitherto to deserve such happiness. Nastya has just said the same thing, though I really don’t know what sins she has, as she is an angel, not a human being! She has just been saying that we owe a terrible debt of gratitude to God; that we must try now to be better and always to be doing good deeds. . . . And if only you had heard how fervently, how beautifully she said all that! My God, what a wonderful girl!”

He stopped in agitation. A minute later he went on.

“We resolved, my dear boy, to cherish Foma in particular, mamma and Tatyana Ivanovna. Tatyana Ivanovna! What a generous-hearted creature! Oh, how much I have been to blame towards all of them! I have behaved badly to you too. . . . But if anyone ihould dare to insult Tatyana Ivanovna now, oh!

then. . . . Oh, well, never mind! . . . We must do something for Mizintchikov too.”

“Yes, uncle, I have changed my opinion of Tatyana Ivanovna now. One cannot help respecting her and feeling for her.”

“Just so, just so,” my uncle assented warmly. “One can’t help respecting her! Now Korovkin, for instance, no doubt you laugh at him,” he added, glancing at me timidly, “and we all laughed at him this afternoon. And yet, you know, that was perhaps unpardonable. . . . You know, he may be an excellent, good-hearted man, but fate ... he has had misfortunes. . . . You don’t believe it, but perhaps it really is so.”

“No, uncle, why shouldn’t I believe it?”

And I began fervently declaring that even in the creature who has fallen lowest there may still survive the finest human feelings; that the depths of the human soul are unfathomable; that we must not despise the fallen, but on the contrary ought to seek them out and raise them up; that the commonly accepted standards of goodness and morality were not infallible, and so on, and so on; in fact I warmed up to the subject, and even began talking about the realist school. In conclusion I even repeated the verses: ‘When from dark error’s subjugation’ ...”

My uncle was extraordinarily delighted.

“My dear, my dear,” he said, much touched, “you understand me fully, and have said much better than I could what I wanted to express. Yes, yes! Good heavens! Why is it man is wicked? Why is it that I am so often wicked when it is so splendid, so fine to be good? Nastya was saying the same thing just now. . . .

But look, though, what a glorious place this is," he added, looking round him.

"What scenery! What a picture! What a tree! Look: you could hardly get your arms round it. What sap! What foliage! What sunshine! How gay everything is, washed clean after the storm! . . . One would think that even the trees understand something, have feeling and enjoyment of life. ... Is that out of the question — eh? What do you think?"

"It's very likely they do, uncle, in their own way, of course. ..."

"Oh, yes, in their own way, of course. . . . Marvellous, marvellous is the Creator! You must remember all this garden very well, Seryozha; how you used to race about and play in it when you were little! I remember, you know, when you were little," he added, looking at me with an indescribable expression of love and happiness. "You were not allowed to go to the pond alone. But do you remember one evening dear Katya called you to her and began fondling you. . . ."

You had been running in the garden just before, and were flushed; your hair was so fair and curly. . . . She kept playing with it, and said: 'It is a good thing that you have taken the little orphan to live with us!' Do you remember?"

"Faintly, uncle."

"It was evening, and you were both bathed in the glow of sunset, I was sitting in a corner smoking a pipe and watching you. ... I drive into the town every month to her grave. ...," he added, dropping his voice, which quivered with suppressed tears. "I was just speaking to Nastya about it; she said we would go together. ..."

My uncle paused, trying to control his emotion. At that instant Vidoplyasov came up to us.

“Vidoplyasov!” said my uncle, starting. “Have you come from Foma Fomitch?”

“No, I have come more on my own affairs.”

“Oh, well, that’s capital. Now we shall hear about Korovkin. I wanted to inquire. ... I told him to look after him — Korovkin I mean. What’s the matter, Vidoplyasov?”

“I make bold to remind you,” said Vidoplyasov, “that yesterday you were graciously pleased to refer to my petition and to promise me your noble protection from the daily insults I receive.”

“Surely you are not harping on your surname again?” cried my uncle in alarm.

“What can I do? Hourly insults ...”

“Oh, Vidoplyasov, Vidoplyasov! What am I to do with you?” said my uncle in distress. “Why, what insults can you have to put up with? You will simply go out of your mind. You will end your days in a madhouse!”

“I believe I am in my right mind ...” Vidoplyasov was beginning. “Oh, of course, of course,” my uncle interposed. “I did not say that to offend you, my boy, but for your good. Why, what sort of insults do you complain of? I am ready to bet that it is only some nonsense.”

“They won’t let me pass.”

“Who interferes with you?”

“They all do, and chiefly owing to Matryona. My life is a misery through her. It is well known that all discriminating people who have seen me from my childhood up have said that I am exactly like a foreigner, especially in the features of the face. Well, sir, now they won’t let me pass on account of it. As soon as I go by, they all shout all sorts of bad words after me; even the little children, who ought to be whipped, shout after me. ... As I came along here now they shouted. . . . I can’t stand it. Defend me, sir, with your protection!”

“Oh, Vidoplyasov! Well, what did they shout? No doubt it was some foolishness that you ought not to notice.”

“It would not be proper to repeat.”

“Why, what was it?” *

“It’s a disgusting thing to say.”

“Well, say it!”

“Grishka the dandy has eaten the candy.”

“Foo, what a man! I thought it was something serious! You should spit, and pass by.”

“I did spit, they shouted all the more.”

“But listen, uncle,” I said. “You see he complains that he can’t get on in this house; send him to Moscow for a time, to that calligrapher. You told me that he was trained by a calligrapher.”

“Well, my dear, that man, too, came to a tragic end.”

“Why, what happened to him?”

“He had the misfortune,” Vidoplyasov replied, “to appropriate the property of another, for which in spite of his talent he was put in prison, where he is ruined irrevocably.”

“Very well, Vidoplyasov, calm yourself now, and I will go into it all and set it right,” said my uncle, “I promise! Well, what news of Korovkin? Is he asleep?”

“No, sir, his honour has just gone away. I came to tell you.”

“What? Gone away! What do you mean? How could you let him go?” cried my uncle.

“Through the kindness of my heart, sir, it was pitiful to see him, sir. When he came to himself and remembered all the proceedings, he struck himself on the forehead and shouted at the top of his voice ...”

“At the top of his voice! . . .”

“It would be more respectful to express it, he gave utterance to many varied lamentations. He cried out: how could he present himself now to the fair sex? And then he added: ‘I am unworthy to be a man!’ and he kept talking so pitifully in choice language.”

“A man of refined feeling! I told you, Sergey. . . . But how could you let him go, Vidoplyasov, when I told you particularly to look after him? Oh, dear! oh, dear!”

“It was through the pity of my heart. He begged me not to tell you. His cabman fed the horses and harnessed them. And for the sum lent him three days ago, he begged me to thank you most respectfully and say that he would send the money by one of the first posts.”

“What money is that, uncle?”

“He mentioned twenty-five silver roubles,” answered Vidoplyasov.

“I lent it him at the station, my dear; he hadn’t enough with him. Of course he will send it by the first post. . . . Oh, dear,

how sorry I am! Shouldn't we send someone to overtake him, Seryozha?"

"No, uncle, better not send."

"I think so too. You see, Seryozha, I am not a philosopher of course, but I believe there is much more good in every man than appears on the surface. Korovkin now: he couldn't face the shame of it. . . . But let us go to Foma! We have lingered here a long time; he may be wounded by our ingratitude, and neglect. . . . Let us go. Oh, Korovkin, Korovkin!"

My story is ended. The lovers were united, and their good genius in the form of Foma Fomitch held undisputed sway. I might at this point make very many befitting observations; but in reality all such observations are now completely superfluous. Such, anyway, is my opinion. I will instead say a few words about the subsequent fortunes of all the heroes of my tale. As is well known, no story is finished without this, and indeed it is prescribed by the rules.

The wedding of the couple who had been so graciously "made happy" took place six weeks after the events I have described. It was a quiet family affair, without much display or superfluous guests. I was Nastenka's best man, Mizintchikov was my uncle's. There were some visitors, however. But the foremost, the leading figure, was of course Foma Fomitch. He was made much of; he was carried on their shoulders. But it somehow happened that on this one occasion he was overcome by champagne.

A scene followed, with all the accompaniment of reproaches, lamentations and outcries. Foma ran off to his room, locked himself in, cried that he was held in contempt, that now "new

people had come into the family and that he was therefore nothing, not more than a bit of rubbish that must be thrown away." My uncle was in despair; Nastenka wept; Madame la Generate, as usual, had an attack of hysterics. . . . The wedding festival was like a funeral.

And seven years of living like that with their benefactor, Foma Fomitch, fell to the lot of my poor uncle and poor Nastenka-. Up to the time of his death (Foma Fomitch died a year ago), he was sulky, gave himself airs, was ill-humoured and quarrelsome; but the reverence for him of the couple he had "made happy", far from diminishing, actually increased every day with his caprices. Yegor Ilyitch and Nastenka were so happy with each other that they were actually afraid of their happiness, and thought that God had given them too much, that they were not worthy of such blessings; and were inclined to expect that their latter days would be spent in hardship and suffering to atone for them.

It will be readily understood that in this meek household, Foma Fomitch could do anything that took his fancy. And what did he not do in those seven years! One could never imagine to what unbridled absurdities his pampered, idle soul led him in inventing the most perverse, morally Sybaritic caprices. My grandmother died three years after my uncle's marriage. Foma was stricken with despair at his bereavement. His condition at the time is described with horror in my uncle's household to this day.

When they were throwing earth into the grave, he leapt into it, shouting that he would be buried in it too. For a whole month they would not give him a knife or fork; and on one occasion four of them forced open his mouth and took out of it a pin

which he was trying to swallow. An outsider who witnessed the conflict, observed that Foma Fomitch might have swallowed the pin a thousand times over during the struggle, but did not, however, do so. But everyone heard this criticism with positive indignation, and at once charged the critic with hard-heartedness and bad manners. Only Nastenka held her peace and gave a faint smile, while my uncle looked at her with some uneasiness.

It must be observed that though Foma gave himself airs, and indulged his whims in my uncle's house as before, yet the insolent and despotic presumption with which he used to rail at my uncle was now a thing of the past. Foma complained, wept, blamed, reproached, cried shame, but did not scold as he had done — there was never another scene like the one concerned with “your Excellency”, and this, I think, was due to Nastenka. Almost imperceptibly she compelled Foma to yield some points and to recognise some limits. She would not see her husband humiliated, and insisted on her wishes being respected. Foma perceived clearly that she almost understood him.

I say almost, for Nastenka, too, humoured Foma and even seconded her husband whenever he sang the praises of his mentor. She tried to make other people, too, respect everything in her husband, and so publicly justified his devotion to Foma Fomitch. But I am sure that Nastenka's pure heart had forgiven all the insults of the past; she forgave Foma everything when he brought about her marriage. And what is more, I believe she seriously with all her heart entered into my uncle's idea that too much must not be expected from a “victim” who had once been a buffoon, but on the contrary, balm must be poured on his wounded heart. Poor Nastenka had herself been

one of the humiliated, she had suffered and she remembered it.

A month after the death of his old patroness, Foma became quieter, even mild and friendly; but on the other hand, he began to have quite sudden attacks of a different sort — he would fall into a sort of magnetic trance, which alarmed everyone extremely.

Suddenly, for instance, the sufferer, while saying something, or even laughing, would in one instant become unconscious and rigid, and rigid in the very position, he happened to be in a moment before the attack. If, for instance, he was laughing, he would remain with a smile on his lips; if he were holding something, a fork for instance, the fork would remain in his raised hand. Later on, of course, the hand would drop, but Foma Fomitch felt nothing and knew nothing of its dropping.

He would sit, stare, even blink, but would say nothing, hear nothing, and understand nothing. This would last sometimes for a whole hour. Of course everyone in the house nearly died of fright, held their breath, walked about on tiptoe and shed tears.

At last Foma would wake up feeling terribly exhausted, and would declare that he had seen and heard absolutely nothing all that time. The man must have been so perverse, so eager to show off, that he endured whole hours of voluntary agony, solely in order to say afterwards: “Look at me, I even feel more intensely than you.” Finally Foma cursed my uncle for the “hourly slights and insults” he received from him, and went to stay with Mr. Bahtcheyev.

The latter, who had quarrelled with Foma Fomitch many times since my uncle's marriage, but always ended by begging his pardon, on this occasion took the matter up with extraordinary warmth; he welcomed Foma with enthusiasm, stuffed him with good things, and at once resolved on a formal breach with my uncle, and even on lodging a complaint against him.

There was a bit of land in dispute between them, though they never disputed about it, for my uncle had yielded all claim to it and had freely given it to Mr. Bahtcheyev. Without saying a word to anyone, Mr. Bahtcheyev ordered out his carriage, drove off! to the town, there scribbled off a petition and handed it in, appealing to the court to adjudge him the land formally with compensation for loss and damage and so to punish contumacy and robbery.

Meanwhile next day Foma Fomitch, getting bored at Mr. Bahtcheyev's, forgave my uncle, who came to apologise, and went back to Stepantchikovo. The wrath of Mr. Bahtcheyev, when he returned from the town and did not find Foma, was terrible; but three days later, he turned up at Stepantchikovo to apologise, begged my uncle's pardon with tears in his eyes, and quashed his petition.

My uncle made the peace between him and Foma Fomitch the same day, and Bahtcheyev followed Foma Fomitch about like a little dog, and again said at every word: "You are a clever fellow, Foma! You are a learned man, Foma!"

Foma Fomitch is now lying in his grave near his old patroness; over him stands an expensive monument of white marble covered with lamentations and eulogistic inscriptions. Yegor Ilyitch and Nastenka sometimes go for a walk to the cemetery

to pay reverent homage to his memory. They cannot even now speak of him without great feeling; they recall all his sayings, what he ate, what he liked. His things have been preserved as priceless treasures.

Feeling so bereaved, my uncle and Nastya grew even more attached to each other. God has not granted them children; they grieve over this, but dare not repine. Sashenka has long been married to an excellent young man. Ilyusha is studying in Moscow. And so my uncle and Nastya are alone together, and are devoted to each other.

Their anxiety over each other is almost morbid. Nastya prays unceasingly. If one of them dies first, I think the other will not survive a week. But God grant them long life. They receive everyone with a most cordial welcome, and are ready to share all they have with anyone who is unfortunate.

Nastenka is fond of reading the lives of the saints, and says with compunction that to do ordinary good work is not enough, that one ought to give everything to the poor and be happy in poverty.

But for his concern for Ilyusha and Sashenka, my uncle would have done this long ago, for he always agrees with his wife in everything. Praskovya Ilyinitchna lives with them, and enjoys looking after their comfort; she superintends the management of the place. Mr. Bahtcheyev made her an offer of marriage very soon after my uncle's wedding, but she refused him point-blank.

It was concluded from that that she would go into a nunnery, but that did not come off either. Therp is one striking

peculiarity about Praskovya Ilyinitchna's character: the craving to obliterate herself completely for the sake of those she loves, to efface herself continually for them, to watch for their every inclination, to humour all their caprices, to wait upon them and serve them.

Now, on the death of her mother, she considers it her duty not to leave her brother, and to take care of Nastenka in every way. Old Yc/hevikin is still living, and has taken to visiting his daughter more and more frequently of late. At first he drove my uncle to despair by absenting himself from Stcpantchikovo almost entirely, and also keeping away his "small fry" (as he called his children).

All my uncle's invitations were in vain; he was not so much proud as sensitive and touchy. His over-sensitive amour-propre sometimes approached morbidity. The idea that he, a poor man, should be entertained in a wealthy house from kindness, that he might be regarded as an intrusive and unwelcome guest, was too much for him; he sometimes even declined Nastenka's help, and only accepted what was absolutely essential. From my uncle he would take absolutely nothing. Nastenka was quite mistaken when she told me that time in the garden that her father played the fool for her sake.

It was true that he was extremely eager at that time to marry Nastenka to Yegor Ilyitch; but he acted as he did simply through an inner craving to give vent to his accumulated malice. The impulse to jeer and mock was in his blood. He posed as the most abject, grovelling flatterer, but at the same time made it perfectly clear that he was only doing this for show; and the more cringing his flattery, the more malignantly and openly apparent was the mockery behind it. It was his way. All his

children were successfully placed in the best scholastic establishments in Moscow and Petersburg.

But this was only after Nastenka had made it perfectly clear to him that it was being paid for out of her own pocket, that is, out of the thirty thousand given her by Tatyana Ivanovna. That thirty thousand she had actually never taken from Tatyana Ivanovna; but not to grieve and mortify her, they appeased her by promising to appeal to her at any sudden emergency. What they did was this: to satisfy her, considerable sums were borrowed from her on two occasions.

But Tatyana Ivanovna died three years ago, and Nastya received her thirty thousand all the same. The death of poor Tatyana Ivanovna was sudden. The whole family were getting ready for a ball given by a neighbour, and she had hardly decked herself out in her ball-dress and put on a fascinating wreath of white roses, when she suddenly felt giddy, sat down in a easy-chair and died. They buried her in the wreath.

Nastya was in despair. Tatyana Ivanovna had been cherished and looked after like a little child in the house. She astonished everyone by the good sense of her will. Apart from Nastenka's thirty thousand, her whole fortune of three hundred thousand was devoted to the education of poor orphan girls and the provision of a sum of money for each on leaving the institution.

In the year that she died Miss Perepelitsyn was married; on the death of Madame la Générale she had remained in the family in the hope of ingratiating herself with Tatyana Ivanovna. Meanwhile the petty official who had bought Mishino, the little village in which our scene with Obnoskin and his mother over Tatyana Ivanovna took place, was left a widower. This

individual was terribly fond of going to law, and had six children.

Supposing that Miss Perepelitsyn had money, he began making proposals to her through a third person and she promptly accepted them. But Miss Perepelitsyn was as poor as a hen, her whole fortune was three hundred silver roubles, and that was given her by Nastenka on her wedding day. Now the husband and wife are quarrelling from morning till night.

She pulls his children's hair, and boxes their ears; as for him, she scratches his face (so people say), and is constantly throwing her superior station as a major's daughter in his face. Mizintchikov has also established himself.

He very sensibly gave up all his hopes of Tatyana Ivanovna, and began little by little to learn farming. My uncle recommended him to a wealthy count, who had an estate of three thousand serfs, sixty miles from Stepantchikovo, and who occasionally visited his property.

Observing Mizin-tchikov's abilities, and influenced by my uncle's recommendation of him, the count offered him the post of steward on his estate, dismissed his former German steward, who in spite of the vaunted German honesty stripped his master like a lime tree. Five years later the estate was unrecognisable: the peasants were prosperous; the farming was developed in ways previously impossible; the returns were almost doubled; in fact the new steward distinguished himself, and was talked of for his abilities as a farmer all over the province.

Great was the amazement and chagrin of the count when at the end of the five years Mizintchikov insisted on giving up his situation in spite of all protests and offers of increased salary. The count imagined that he had been lured away by a rival landowner in his own neighbourhood or in another province.

And everyone was astonished when, two months after giving up his post, Mizintchikov acquired an excellent estate of a hundred serfs, about thirty miles from the count's, purchased from a hussar, a friend of his who had squandered all his fortune! The hundred serfs he promptly mortgaged, and a year later he had acquired another property of sixty serfs in the neighbourhood. Now he is a landowner, and the management of his estate is unequalled. Everyone wonders how he came by the money all at once.

Some people shake their heads. But Mizintchikov is perfectly self-possessed, and feels that he is absolutely right. He has sent for his sister from Moscow, the sister who gave him her last three roubles to buy boots when he was setting off for Stepantchikovo — a very sweet girl, no longer in her first youth, gentle and loving, well-educated, but extremely timid.

She had been all the time dragging out a miserable existence in Moscow as a companion to some charitable lady. Now she worships her brother, and keeps house for him; she regards his will as law and thinks herself happy.

Her brother does not spoil her, he makes her work rather hard, but she does not notice it. She has become a great favourite at Stepantchikovo, and I am told that Mr. Bahtcheyev is not indifferent to her. He would make her an offer, but is afraid of

being refused. We hope, however, to give a fuller account of Mr. Bahtcheyev's doings in another story.

Well, I think I have dealt with all the characters of Stepantchikovo. ... Oh! I had forgotten: Gavrila has greatly aged and completely forgotten his French; Falaley has made a very decent coachman; while poor Vidoplyasov was for many years in a madhouse and, I believe, died there. In a few days I am going to Stepantchikovo, and will certainly inquire about him from my uncle.

The End