



The Snowstorm, Leo Tolstoy

The Snowstorm

Translated by Robert Nisbet Bain 1901

I

At seven o'clock in the evening, after drinking tea I departed from a post-station, the name of which I don't remember, but I recollect it was somewhere in the military district of the Don, near Novochirkask. It was already dark when, wrapped up in my furs, I sat down with Alec in the sledge. In the shelter of the post-station it seemed warm and still. Although there was no snow above us, not a single tiny star was visible above our heads, and the sky appeared to be extraordinarily low and black in comparison with the pure snowy plain stretching out before us.

We had scarce passed the dark figures of the mills — one of which was clumsily waving one of its huge wings — and got clear of the station when I observed that the road was heavier and more obstructed, and the wind began to blow upon my left side more violently and beat upon the flank, tail, and mane of the horse and regularly raise and carry away the snow torn up by the curved shafts of the sledge and the hoofs of the horses. The little sledge-bell began to be silent, a current of cold air began to flow from some opening into my sleeve and down my back, and the advice of the inspector not to go at all, lest I should wander about the whole night and be frozen to death on the road, at once occurred to me.

“Haven't we lost our way?” I said to the driver; and receiving no answer, I repeated the question in a still plainer form: “Do you think we shall reach the post-station, driver, or shall we lose our way?” “God knows!” he replied, without turning his head, “it's only human to go astray, and the road is nowhere visible, my little master!” “Will you tell me whether you think we shall get to the post-station or not?” I continued to ask. “Shall we get there, I say?”

“We ought to get there,” said the driver, and he murmured something else which I could not quite catch because of the wind.

I didn't want to turn back, but to wander about all night in the frost and snow in the absolutely barren steppe as this Part of the military district of the Don really is, was also not a very pleasant prospect to contemplate. Moreover, although I was unable to examine him very well in the darkness, my driver, somehow or other, did not please me, nor did he inspire me with confidence.

He sat squarely instead of sideways; his body was too big; his voice had too much of a drawl; his hat, somehow or other, was not a driver's hat — it was too big and bulgy; he did not urge on the horses as he should have done; he held the reins in both hands as a lacquey does who sits on the box behind the coachman and, above all, I did not believe in him because his ears were tied round with a cloth. In a word, I did not like the look of him, and that serious hunched back of his bobbing up and down before me boded no good.

“In my opinion it would be better to turn back,” said Alec; “it is no joke to get lost.”

“My little master, you see what sort of driving it is: no road to be seen, and your eyes all bunged up!” growled the driver.

We hadn't gone a quarter of an hour when the driver stopped the horses, gave the reins to Alec, clumsily disengaged his legs from their sitting position and, trampling over the snow in his big boots, went to try and find the road.

“I say, where are you?” I cried, “have we gone astray, or what?”

But the driver did not answer, me and turning his face in the opposite direction to that in which the wind was blowing — it had cut him in the very eyes — went away from the sledge.

“Well, what is it?” I asked when he had turned back again.

“Nothing at all,” said he with sudden impatience and anger, as if it was my fault that he had lost the road, and slowly thrusting his big boots into the front Part of the sledge again, he slowly grasped the reins together with his frozen mittens.

“What shall we do?” I asked when we had again moved forward.

“Do? Why, go whither God allows us!” And on we went at the same jig-trot, obviously across country, sometimes over snow piled up bushels high, sometimes over brittle, naked ice.

Notwithstanding the cold, the snow on our collars thawed very quickly; the snow drift below increased continually, and fine dry flakes began to fall from above.

It was plain we were going God only knew whither, for after going along for another quarter of an hour we did not see a single verst post.

“What do you think, eh?” I said again to the driver; “do you think we shall get to the station?”

“To which station? We may get back, if the horses take it into their heads to try, they’ll take us right enough, but as to reaching the other station, scarcely, we might perish, that’s all.”

“Then turn back by all means,” said I, “at any rate. . .”

“Turn the horses round, do you mean?”

“Yes, turn ’em round!”

The driver let go the reins. The horses began to run more quickly, and although I observed that we had turned round, yet the wind had changed too, and soon, through the snow the windmills were visible. The driver took heart again and began to be loquacious.

“The Anudiuses got into the drifts and turned back just in the same way when they came from this station,” said he, “and passed the night by the haystacks; they only got in by morning. They were only too thankful for the shelter of the haystacks; they might have easily frozen to death. It was cold, and one of them did have his legs frostbitten, so that he died of it three weeks later.”

“But now you see it is not so cold, and it has grown quieter; might not we drive on now, eh?”

“It’s fairly warm, warm, oh yes! and the snow’s coming down. Now we’ll turn back, as it seems easier going and the snow comes down thicker. You might drive if you had a courier, but you’ll do it at your

own risk. Are you joking? Why, you'd be frozen! And what should I say who am responsible for your honour?"

II.

Just then there was a sound of little bells behind us, the bells of some troika, a three-horse sledge, which was rapidly overtaking us.

"That is a courier's bell," said my driver; "there's one such courier at every post-station."

And, indeed, the little bell of the front troika, the sound of which was now plainly borne to us by the wind, was an extraordinarily welcome sound to hear: a pure, musical, sonorous, and slightly droning sound. As I afterwards ascertained, it was a hunter's arrangement of three little bells — one big one in the centre and two little ones adjusted to tierce. The sound of this tierce and the droning quinte, resounding through the air, was extraordinarily penetrating and strangely pleasant in that vast and voiceless steppe.

"The post is in haste," said my driver when the foremost of the three horses was level with us.

"What sort of a road, eh? Can one get through?" cried he to the hindmost driver; but the fellow only shouted to his horses and didn't answer him.

The sound of the little bells quickly died away on the wind as soon as the post-car had passed us.

My driver must now have felt a bit ashamed, I fancy.

"We'll go on, sir," said he; "these people have gone on before us and have left a fresh track, which we can now follow."

I agreed, and again we turned towards the wind and crawled along a bit through the deep snow. I kept a side-long glance upon the road so as to see that we did not wander away from the track made by the sledge. For two versts the track was plainly visible, after that the only thing observable was a very slight unevenness under the curved sides of the sledge, and I began to look straight in front of me. The third verst pole we could still make out, but the fourth we could not find at all.

As before, we were driving both against and with the wind, both left and right, and at last it got to such a pass that the driver said we had

deviated to the right. I said we had gone to the left, while Alec proved that we were absolutely going back again. Once more we stopped for a while, the driver extricated his big feet and crawled out to find the road; but it was all in vain. I also made up my mind to get out for once and see for myself whether that was not the road which I saw glimmering indistinctly; but scarcely had I taken six steps forward, with the utmost difficulty, against the wind and persuaded myself that everywhere were the selfsame uniform white layers of snow and that the road existed only in my imagination — than I no longer saw the sledge.

“Driver! Alec!” I cried, but my voice! — well I felt that the wind snatched it right out of my mouth and carried it in the twinkling of an eye away from me. I have a very distinct recollection of the loud, penetrating, and even desperate voice with which I once more yelled: “Driver!” when he was only two good paces distant from me. His black figure, whip in hand, and with his large hat perched on one side, suddenly grew up in front of me. He led me to the sledge.

“Still warm, thank goodness!” said he, “but it’s bad if the frost does catch you, my little master!” said he.

“Let the horses go; we must go back,” said I, taking my seat on the sledge. “I suppose you can guide them, driver?”

“I must guide them.”

He threw aside the reins, struck the saddle of the thill horse thrice with his whip and again we went on somewhither for a bit. We went along for about half an hour. Suddenly we again heard in front of us the, to me, familiar little hunting-bell and two more besides; but this time they were coming towards us. It was the same three troikas returning to the post-station after delivering the mails, with the fresh horses fastened on behind. The couriers troika, with its three powerful horses with the hunting bells came rapidly forward. A single driver sat on the box, shouting lustily. Behind, in the middle of the empty sledge, sat a couple of drivers. I could hear their loud and merry discourse. One of them was smoking a pipe, and the sparks, kindled by the wind, lit up Part of his face.

As I looked at them I began to be ashamed that I had been afraid to go on, and my driver must have experienced much the same sensation, for we said with one voice: "Let us go after them."

III.

The hindmost troikas had not yet passed when my driver turned clumsily and struck the attached horses with the sledge shafts. One of the troika team thereupon fell heavily, tearing away the traces and plunging to one side.

"You cock-eyed devil, don't you see where you're going, driving over people like that? Devil take you!" began one of the drivers in a hoarse, quavering voice.

He was smallish and an old fellow, as far as I could judge from his voice and his position. He had been sitting in the hinder troika, but now leaped quickly out of the sledge and ran to the horses, never ceasing the whole time to curse my driver in the most coarse and cruel manner. But the horses would not be pacified. The driver ran after them, and in a minute both horses and driver had vanished in the white mist of the snowstorm.

"Vas-il-y! bring the chestnut hither, we shall never get them else," his voice still resounded.

One of the drivers, a very tall man, got out of the sledge, silently detached his three horses," saddled and bridled one of them, and, crunching the snow beneath him, disappeared in the direction of his comrade. We, with the two other horses, went after the courier's troika, which, ringing its bell, set off in front at full gallop; we just let ourselves go without troubling any more about the road, "A pretty way of catching them !" said my driver, alluding to the other driver, who had gone off after the horses; "he'll never catch' em, and he's leading the spare horse to a place he'll never get him out of again."

Ever since my driver had begun to go back, he had become in better spirits and more inclined to be talkative, which I, of course, did not fail to take advantage of as, so far, I had no desire to sleep. I began to ask him all about himself and whence he came, and soon found out that he

was a fellow countryman, hailing from Tula country, being a small proprietor in the village of Kirpechny; that their land was of very little good to them and had quite ceased to produce grain since the cholera visitation; that there were two brothers at home, while a third had enlisted as a soldier; that the supply of bread would not hold out till Christmas, and they had to hire themselves out to make more money; that the younger brother was master in the house because he was married, while my friend was a widower; that an artel, or society of drivers, went forth from their village every year; that though he was not a coachman by profession he served at the post-station in order to be of some help to his brother; that he lived here, thank God, on 120 paper roubles a year, of which he sent a hundred home to his family, and that he had a pretty good time of it, but that couriers were veritable beasts, and that the people he had to do with here were always cursing him.

“That driver, for instance, why should he curse me? my little master! Did I overturn his horses on purpose? Why, I wouldn’t do any harm to anyone! And why should he go scurrying after them? They would be sure to come back of their own accord. And now, he’ll only make the horses starve to death besides coming to grief himself” repeated the God-fearing little muzhik.

“But what is that black thing yonder?” said I, observing some black objects just in front of us.

“A train of wagons! — a nice way of going along, I must say,” continued he when we had come abreast with the huge wagons covered with mats, going one after another on wheels. “Look! not a soul to be seen; they are all asleep. The horse is the wisest of them all. He knows very well what he is about. Nothing in the world will make him miss the road. We too will go alongside of them and then we shall be all right,” added he, “and know where we are going.”

It really was a curious sight. There were those huge wagons covered with snow from the matting atop to the wheels below, moving along absolutely alone. Only in the front corner the snow-covered mat was raised a couple of inches for a moment as our little bells resounded

close to the wagons and a hat popped up. The big piebald horse, with outstretched neck and straining back, deliberately proceeded along the absolutely hidden road, monotonously shaking his shaggy head beneath the whitening shaft and pricking up one snow-covered ear as we came abreast of him.

After we had gone on for another half-hour the driver again turned to me.

“What do you think, sir; we are going nicely along now, eh?”

“I don’t know,” I replied.

“Before, the wind was anyhow, but now we are going right in the midst of the storm. No, we shall not get there; we too have lost our way,” he concluded with the utmost calmness.

Evidently, although a great coward, and afraid of his own shadow, he had become quite tranquil as soon as there were a good many of us together and he was not obliged to be our guide and responsible for us. With the utmost sang froid he criticised the mistakes of the driver in front of us as if it had anything whatever to do with him.

I observed indeed that now and then the troika in front was sometimes in profile, from my point of view, to the left and sometimes to the right, and it also seemed to me as if we were encircling a very limited space. However, it might have been an optical delusion, as also the circumstance that, occasionally, it seemed to me as if the troika in front was climbing up a mountain, or going along a declivity, or under the brow of a hill, whereas the steppe was everywhere uniformly level.

After we had proceeded for some time longer I observed, or so it seemed to me, far away, on the very horizon, a long, black, moving strip of something; but in a moment it became quite plain to me that this was the very same train of wagons which we had overtaken and outstripped. Just the same creaking wheels, some of them no longer turning, enveloped in snow; just the same people asleep beneath their mats, and just the same leading piebald horse, with steaming, distended nostrils, smelling out the road and pricking up his ears.

“Look, we have gone round and round and are coming out by this train of wagons again!” said my driver in a sulky tone. “The courier’s horses

are good ones, though he drives them villainously, but ours are so-so and always stopping, just as if we had been driving all night long.”

He coughed a bit.

“Shall we turn off somewhere, sir, for our sins?”

“Why? We are bound to arrive somewhere as it is.”

“Arrive somewhere! We shall have to make a night of it in the steppe: that’s what we shall do. How it is snowing, my little master!”

Although it did seem strange to me that the driver in front of us, who had obviously lost his road and had no idea of the direction in which he was going, took no trouble to find it again, but continued to drive at full tilt, cheerily shouting to his horses, I did not want to separate from him all the same.

“Follow after them!” I said.

The driver went on, but he drove along even more unwillingly than before and no longer conversed with me.

IV.

The snowstorm was growing more and more violent. The flakes descended fine and dry, apparently it was freezing hard. My nose and cheeks grew numb with cold, currents of cold air penetrated my furs more and more frequently and it was necessary to huddle up in them more closely. Occasionally the sledge bumped up against a bare, ice-clad hummock, from which it scattered the snow in every direction.

As I had travelled some score or so of versts without a night’s rest, notwithstanding the fact that I was very much interested in the issue of our wanderings, I involuntarily shut my eyes and dozed off. All at once, when I opened my eyes again, I was struck by what seemed to me in the first moment a bright light illuminating the white plain; the horizon had considerably widened, the low, black sky had suddenly disappeared; in every direction were visible white oblique lines of falling snow; the figures of the troika people in front appeared more plainly, and when I looked upwards it seemed to me for the first moment as if the clouds had parted and that only the falling snow covered the sky. Whilst I had been slumbering the moon had arisen and

threw her cold and clear light through the scattered clouds and falling snow.

The one thing I saw clearly was my sledge, the horses, the driver, and the three troikas going on in front: the first troika, the courier's, on the box of which one of the drivers was still sitting urging his horses on at a good round pace; the second, in which sat the two other drivers, who had thrown the reins aside and made themselves a shelter against the wind out of their armyaks never ceasing to smoke their pipes the whole time, as was clear from the sparks proceeding from that quarter, and the third troika, in which nobody was visible — presumably the driver was sleeping in the middle of it. Before I went to sleep, however, the leading driver had at rare intervals stopped his horses and tried to find the way.

Then, every time we stopped, the howling of the wind became more audible and the enormous quantity of snow suspended in the air more strikingly visible. I now saw by the light of the moon, half obscured by the snowstorm, the small, squat figure of the driver, with the big whip in his hand, with which he flicked at the snow in front of him, moving backwards and forwards in the bright mist and coming back again to the sledge, leaping sideways on to the box seat, and amidst the monotonous whistling of the wind the alert, sonorous ringing and clanging of the little bells was audible once more. Every time the driver in front leaped out to look for the road or the verst posts one could hear the brisk, self-confident voice of one of the drivers shouting to the driver in front:

“Do you hear, Ignashka! take the road to the left! You'll find more shelter to the right!” Or, “Why are you going round and round like a fool? Go by the snow; take the lee of it, and you'll come out all right!” Or, “A little more to the right, a little more to the right, my brother! Don't you see there's something black yonder — some sign-post or other?” Or, “Where are you going? Where are you going? Loose the piebald nag and go on in front and he'll guide you to the road straight away. It'll be much better if you do that!”

This selfsame person, who was so fond of giving advice, not only did not loose the side-horse and go over the snow to look for the road, but did not even so much as thrust his nose from out of his arnyak, and when Ignashka, the driver in front, in reply to one of his counsels, shouted to him to go in front himself if he knew where to go so well, the counsellor replied that if he had been travelling with courier's horses he would have gone on and led them to the right road straight away, "but our horses cannot go on in front in snow-drifts, not such nags as these, anyway."

"Then you can hold your jaw!" replied Ignashka, cheerily whistling to his horses.

The other driver, sitting in the same sledge with the counsellor, said not a word to Ignashka, and in fact did not interfere at all, although he was not asleep either, at least I assumed as much from the fact that his pipe continued unextinguished, and also from the circumstance that whenever we stopped I heard his measured, uninterrupted narration. He was telling some tale or other. Only when Ignashka suddenly halted for the sixth or seventh time, this other driver plainly became very angry at being interrupted by such leisurely procedure, and he shouted at him:

"What! stopping again! You want to find the road, eh? It's a snowstorm we're in, and there's an end of it! Why, even a land-surveyor wouldn't be able to find the road now. Go on as long as the horses can drag us! Never fear; we shan't freeze to death! Go on, I say!"

"Never fear, indeed! Last year a postilion was frozen to death!" observed my driver.

The driver of the third troika did not wake the whole time, only once, during a stoppage, the counsellor shouted:

"Philip! I say, Philip!" and receiving no answer observed: "I wonder if he's frozen? You might go and see, Ignashka!"

Ignashka, who hastened to do everyone's bidding, went to the sledge and began to shake the sleeper.

"Why, he's drunk as drunk — like a log!" said he, "I say! you! are you frozen?" he said, shaking him violently.

The sleeper babbled something or other and cursed him.

“He’s alive, all right, my brother!” said Ignashka; and again he ran forward and again we went on, and so quickly indeed, this time, that the little brown side horse attached to my troika, constantly lashed up from behind, more than once broke into a clumsy gallop.

V.

I think it must have been almost midnight when we were joined by the little old man and Vas-il-y, who had been in pursuit of the stampeded horses. They had found the horses and pursued and overtaken us; but how they had done so in the dark, blinding snowstorm, in the midst of the barren steppe, has always remained unintelligible to me. The little old man, moving his elbows and legs, rode up at a gallop on the brown horse. The two other horses were attached to the collar: in the snowstorm it was impossible to leave the horses to themselves. On coming up to his, the old fellow began attacking my driver again.

“Look here, you cock-eyed devil, really if . . .”

“Hie, Uncle Matvich!” shouted the tale-teller from the second sledge, “alive, eh? Crawl in here I” But the old man did not answer him, but went on with his cursing. When it appeared to him that he had cursed enough, he did go to the second sledge.

“Caught ’em all?” they said to him from that quarter.

“Of course! Why not?”

And his diminutive figure, on the trot, with the upper Part of his body bobbing up and down on the back of the horse, after leaping out on to the snow, ran forward without stopping behind the sledge, and scrambled in to where they were, with his legs sticking up in the air as he forced his way through the orifice. Tall Vas-il-y, as before, took his seat in silence on the box seat in the foremost sledge alongside Ignashka, whom he helped to look for the road.

“You see what a curser he is, my little master!” murmured my driver.

We went along for some time after this, without stopping, over the white wilderness, in the cold, trans-parent, and quivering light of the snowstorm. Every time I opened my eyes, there in front of me was the

selfsame clumsy hat and back, covered with snow; there, too, was the selfsame low shaft-bow, beneath which, between the tightly drawn leather reins, and always the same distance off, the head of the brown horse with the black mane deliberately bending in the direction of the wind, moved slowly up and down. Behind its back one could also see, to the right, the bay side-horse, with its tail tied up into a bunch, occasionally bumping against the front board of the sledge. Look down — and there was the selfsame snow thumping against the sides of the sledge, which the wind stubbornly lifted and carried off in one direction.

In front, always at the same distance, the leading troika ran steadily along; on the right and on the left everything was white and twinkling. In vain the eye sought for some new object: not a post, not a rick, not a fence — nothing at all was visible. Everywhere everything was white, white and mobile; sometimes the horizon seemed incomprehensibly far off, sometimes compressed within two paces distance in every direction. Sometimes a high white wall would grow up suddenly on the right and run alongside the sledge, then it would as suddenly disappear and grow up in front only to run further and further off and again disappear.

If you looked up it would appear quite light the first instant, and you would seem to see little stars through the mist; but the little stars vanished from your view ever higher and higher, and all you saw was the snow, which fell past your eyes on to your face and into the collar of your furs; the sky was identically bright everywhere, identically white, colourless, uniform, and constantly mobile. The wind seemed to be perpetually shifting.

Now it blew right against you and blinded your eyes, now it blew teasingly sideways and flung the collar of your fur coat over your head and mockingly flapped it in your face, now it would howl from behind through some unprotected crevice. Audible throughout was the faint, miserable crunching of hoofs and sledge-boards over the snow and the expiring tinkle of the little bells when we passed over deep snow.

Only very rarely, when we drove against the wind, and over naked, frozen, stony ground, did the energetic whistling of Ignaty and the thrilling sound of the little bell with the resonant, droning quinte come flying, plainly audible, towards us, and then these sounds would immediately and pleasantly disturb the melancholy character of the wilderness, subsequently falling into a monotonous melody persisting with intolerable fidelity always on one and the same motif, which I involuntarily imagined to myself as I listened to them. One of my feet presently began to grow numb, and when I turned about a bit in order the better to shelter it, the snow which had accumulated on my collar and hat plunged down my neck and made me shiver; but, on the whole, I was still warm enough in my well-warmed furs, and a feeling of drowsiness came over me.

VI.

Recollections and ideas alternated with the most strenuous rapidity in my imagination.

The counsellor also kept on bawling out of the second sledge — I wondered what sort of a yokel he might be. No doubt a rufus, well set up, with short legs, I thought to myself, something in the style of Theodor Filipovich, our old waiter. And then I saw before me the staircase of our big house, and four of the men-servants in linen suits, walking heavily and dragging the pianoforte out of one of the wings. Theodor Filipovich, with the sleeves of his nankeen surtout turned up, and carrying a pedal, was running on in front, unloosening the bars and bolts, and there he stood, tugging away at a napkin, bustling about, insinuating himself between their legs and making a mess of everything, never ceasing all the time to screech with a funny voice: “This way, this way, you fellows in front! Like this, tail up, up, up, up, I say, carry it through the door! Like this! “

“We can manage it; leave us alone, Theodor Filipovich!” timidly observed the gardener, clinging to the balustrade, all red with the exertion and supporting one corner of the grand-piano with all his remaining strength.

But Theodor Filipovich would not be quiet.

“What an idea?” I thought as I deliberated about it. Does he fancy he is useful, indispensable, or is he simply glad because God has given him the self-confident, convincing eloquence which he dispenses with such sweet satisfaction? It must be so.” And then I saw somewhere or other a pond, a lot of tired men-servants up to their knees in water dragging a fishing-net, and there again was Theodor Filipovich with a watering-can, running along the bank and shouting at them, but only very rarely approaching the water’s edge in order to touch with his hands some golden carp and pour away the dirty water and fill his can with fresh. And then it was midday in the month of July. I was walking along somewhere, over some quite newly mown garden grass, beneath the burning, perpendicular rays of the sun; I was still very young; there was something I lacked, something I very much wanted. I was going to a pond, to my favourite spot, between beds of wild eglantine and an avenue of birch trees, and I lay down to sleep.

I remember the feeling with which I lay down: I looked through the pretty, prickly branches of the eglantine at the black, dry hummocks of earth and at the translucent, bright-blue mirror of the pond. It was a sort of feeling of naive self-satisfaction and melancholy. Everything around me was so exceedingly beautiful, and this beauty had such a strong effect upon me that it seemed to me as if I also were good, and the only vexatious thing was that nobody admired me.

It was hot; I tried to sleep in order to get some rest, but the flies, the intolerable flies, gave me no respite even here, and they began to collect around me, and doggedly, thickly, like so many little pebbles, they darted about from my temples to my arms. The bees were humming not far from me, in the sun-burnt patches of the grass, and yellow-winged butterflies, as if wearied by the sultriness, were flitting from blade to blade of grass. I looked up: it pained my eyes — the sun shone too strongly through the bright leaves of the thick-foliaged birch tree loftily, but very gently, rocking its branches above my head, and it seemed hotter than ever. I covered my face with a pocket handkerchief.

I felt oppressed, and the flies regularly stuck to my arms, on which a light sweat burst forth. The sparrows were busy in the dog-rose hedges. One of them hopped along the ground a few yards from me, pretended once or twice to be pecking the ground energetically, and making the tiny twigs crackle beneath his feet and chirping merrily, flew out of the bosque; another sparrow also perched upon the ground, trimmed his tail, glanced around him, and then, like a dart, flew chirping after the first sparrow. The blows of the mangling stick on the wet linen were audible from the pond, and the sound of these blows was borne downwards and carried along the surface of the pond. Audible also were the laughter, talking, and splashing of the bathers.

The breeze shook noisily the summits of those birches that were further from me; nearer at hand I heard it begin to flutter the grass, and now the leaves of the dog-rose bosque fell a-quivering and rustled upon their branches, and now, raising the corner of the handkerchief and tickling my perspiring face, the fresh current of air careered right up to me. Through the opening made by the lifted 'kerchief flew a fly and buzzed terror-stricken round my moist mouth. An odd piece of dried twig insinuated itself under my back. No, lying down was impossible. Suppose I went and had a refreshing bath. But at that very moment I hear quite close to the bosque hastening footsteps and a terrified female voice saying:

“Alas Batyushka! What is to be done? There’s not a man in sight!”

“What is it? what is it?” I ask, running out into the sun to the maid-servant who ran past me crying and wailing. She only looked round at me, waved her hands and ran on further. And now there appears old Martha, who is seventy years of age, holding a handkerchief in her hand which she had torn from her head, bounding along and dragging one leg after her in a woollen stocking and hastening to the pond. Two little girls were also running, holding each other by the hand, and a boy of ten, in his father’s surtout, holding on to the skirt of one of them, hastened on behind.

“What’s the matter?” I asked them.

“A muzhik has been drowned.”

“Where?”

“In the pond.”

“One of our people, eh?”

“No, a vagabond.”

Ivan, the coachman, shuffling with his big slippers over the mown grass, and the fat messenger Yakov, breathing with difficulty, were also running to the pool, and I ran after them.

I remember the feeling within me, which said to me: “Go ahead! throw yourself into the pond and drag out the muzhik; save him and they’ll all admire you so,” which was what I desired above all.

“Where is he? where is he?” I inquired of the crowd of house-servants collected round the shores of the pond.

“There he is, right at the bottom, over yonder, near to the bathing-place,” said a washerwoman, placing her wet linen on a drying pole. “I saw him go under, and then he appeared somewhere else, and then he disappeared, and then he came up again once more; and how he shrieked, ‘I’m sinking, Batyushka!’ and down below he went again, and only bubbles came up after him; and as soon as I saw that a muzhik was drowning I cried out, ‘Batyushka, there’s a muzhik drowning!’”

And the washerwoman, throwing the yoke-beam over her shoulder, waddled along the narrow path away from the pond.

“It is a sin and a shame!” said Yakov Ivanov, the steward, with a despairing voice; “what a to-do the County Court will make about it! There will be no end to it!”

At last a muzhik, with a scythe in his hand, forced his way through the crowd of women, children and old men, elbowing each other on the shore, and hanging his scythe on the branch of a cytisus, very deliberately began to pull off his boots.

“Where was it? Where was he drowned?” I kept on asking, wishing to pitch myself in there and do something or other out of the way. But they only pointed out to me the smooth surface of the pond, which was rarely ruffled by a passing breeze. It was incomprehensible to me how he could have got drowned; the water, as smooth, beautiful, and indifferent as ever, stood above him, glistening like gold in the midday

sun, and it seemed to me as if I could do nothing and astonish nobody, especially as I swam but awkwardly; but the muzhik had already drawn his shirt over his head and flung himself into the water straight away. They all kept looking at him with confidence and intense expectation; but when he had got up to his shoulders in the water the muzhik deliberately turned back again and put on his shirt: he did not know how to swim.

People came running together; the crowd grew denser and denser; the old women held on to each other, but none rendered the slightest assistance. Those who had only just arrived at once began to give advice, made a fuss, and their faces wore an expression of fear and despair; of those who had been there sometime already, some becoming tired of standing, sat down on the grass, and others turned back and went away. Old Matrena inquired of her daughter whether she had closed the door of the stove; the little boy in his father's surtout violently flung stones into the water.

But now, barking loudly and looking back doubtfully, Trezerka, the dog of Theodor Filipovich, came running down the hill, and presently the form of Theodor himself, also running down the hill and bawling something or other, emerged from behind the dog-rose hedge. "What's up?" he cried, taking off his surtout as he came along, "A man drowned and all of you stand gaping here! Give me a rope!" They all gazed upon Theodor Filipovich with hope and terror, while he, resting one hand on the shoulder of one of the house-servants, worked off the boot on his right leg with the toe of his left foot.

"Over yonder, where the crowd is, on the right side of the willow, that's the spot, Theodor Filipovich, just there," someone said to him. "I know," he answered, and frowning, no doubt in response to the indications of shamefacedness visible in the mob of women, he took off his shirt and little cross, which latter he gave to the gardener's little boy, who stood before him in a cringing attitude, and energetically strutting over the mown grass, drew near to the pond.

Trezerka, who, in doubt as to the meaning of the rapid movements of his master, had stopped close to the crowd and, sitting down on the bank, snapped off several blades of grass, now looked inquiringly at him, and suddenly, with a joyful yelp, plunged into the water with his master. During the first moment nothing was visible except foam and water drops, which flew right over to where we stood; but presently Theodor Filipovich, gracefully waving his arms and rhythmically raising and lowering his back, was seen swimming briskly towards the shore.

Trezerka too, snorting and choking, was also coming rapidly back, shaking himself in the midst of the crowd and rolling on his back on the shore to dry himself. At the selfsame moment when Theodor Filipovich swam up to the shore two coachmen came running up to the willow with a net wound round a pole. Theodor Filipovich, for some reason or other, lifted up his hands, sneezed once, twice, thrice, each time spurting a jet of water out of his mouth, shaking his hair neatly and making no answer to the questions which showered down upon him from all sides. At last he emerged on to the bank and, as far as I could make out, he was occupying himself solely with the proper adjustment of the net. They drew out the net, but at the bottom of it there was nothing but mud and a few little carp swimming about in it. Just as the net was being dragged in a second time I arrived on that side of the pond.

The only sounds audible were the voice of Theodor Filipovich distributing commands, the splashing in the water of the net-rope, and groans of horror.

“Now, then, put some heart into it and pull all together!” cried the voice of Theodor Filipovich.

“There’s something this time! it drags heavily, my brethren!” cried a voice.

But now the net, in which two or three carp were floundering, all wet, and crushing the grass beneath it, was dragged ashore. And then dimly seen through the thin agitated layer of turbid water, something white was apparent in the extended net. A groan of horror, not loud but penetratingly audible in the death-like silence, ran through the crowd.

“Put a little more heart into it; drag it on to the dry ground!” sounded the authoritative voice of Theodor Filipovich; and the doomed man was dragged by main force over the cropped stalks of the burdocks and thistles right up to the willow tree.

And now I see before me my dear old aunt in her white dress; I see her fringed lilac sunshade so utterly out of place in this picture of death so horrible from its very simplicity, and I see her face ready at that very instant to burst into tears. I remember the expression of disenchantment in her face at the idea that these drag-nets were altogether useless, and I remember the sick, sorrowing feeling I experienced when she said to me with the naive egoism of love: “Let us go, my friend! Ah! how horrible it is! And you to go and bathe and swim all alone as you do, too!”

I remember how bright and sultry the sun was; how it burnt up the dry, crumbling earth beneath our feet; how it played on the surface of the pond; how gigantic carp were hurrying and scurrying near the banks; how the smoothness of the centre of the pond was disturbed by shoals of fishes; how high in the sky a vulture was wheeling right above some ducks, who, quacking and splashing, were making for the middle of the pond through the reeds; how threatening, white, curly clouds were collecting on the horizon; how the mud, dragged ashore by the net, was gradually being trampled into the ground; and how, walking along the dyke, I again heard the stroke of a paddle resounding over the pond.

But this paddle was now ringing just as if the sound of the paddles was blending together into a tierce; and this sound tormented and wearied me all the more because I knew that this paddle was a bell and Theodor Filipovich could not make it keep quiet. And this paddle, like an instrument of torture, was pressing my leg, which was freezing, and I awoke.

It seemed to me as if I had been awakened by a sudden jolt and by two voices speaking close beside me.

“Hillo! Ignat! Ignat, I say!” cried the voice of my driver, “take a passenger ! It’s all one to you, and it’s no use my trying to keep up. Take one, I say!”

The voice of Ignat answered close beside me:

“Why should I be responsible for a passenger? You’ve got half a stoop yet, haven’t you?”

“Half a stoop, indeed ! There’s a quarter of a stoop, already!”

“A quarter of a stoop! What an idea!” screeched the other voice.

“Fancy plaguing a horse for the sake of a quarter of a stoop!”

I opened my eyes. Always the same unendurable, quivering snow blizzard in one’s eyes, and the selfsame drivers and horses, but close beside me I saw a sledge. My driver had caught up Ignat, and we had been going on side by side for some time. Notwithstanding that the voice from the other sledges had advised my driver not to take in less weight than a half stoop, Ignat had suddenly stopped the troika.

“Let us change about then! A good job for you! Put in a quarter stoop, as we shall arrive to-morrow. How much do you make it, eh?”

My driver, with unusual vivacity, leaped out into the snow, bowed down before me, and begged me to transfer myself to Ignat. I was quite willing to do so, but it was clear that the God-fearing little muzhik was so satisfied with the new arrangement that he must needs pour forth his joy and gratitude on some one or other; he bowed down before me and thanked me and Alec and Ignashka.

“Well, there you are now, thank God. And I tell you what it is, my little master, we have been wandering about half the night, without knowing whither. That chap there will bring us in all right, my little master, and my horses are done up already.”

And he transferred my things with energetic officiousness.

While they were transferring the things I, following the direction of the wind, which carried me along, as it were, went to the second sledge. The sledge, especially on that side on which the armyak was hung up over the heads of the two drivers, was a quarter covered with snow, but behind the armyak it was quiet and comfortable. The little old man was lying there with his legs stretched wide apart, and the tale-teller was going on with his tale: “At the very time when the general, in the King’s name, you know, came, you know, to Mary in the dungeon, at

that very time Mary said to him: General, I have no need of you and I cannot love you and, you know, you cannot be my lover, but my lover is the Prince himself.

“At that very time,” he was going on, but perceiving me, he was silent for a moment and began to puff away at his pipe.

“What, sir, come to listen to the tale too?” said the other, whom I have called the Counsellor.

“You are having a rare fine time of it,” said I. “It passes the time anyhow and prevents one from brooding.”

“But tell me, do you know where we are now?”

This question did not appear to please the drivers.

“Where? Who can make that out? We may be going right away to the Calmucks,” answered the Counsellor.

“But what shall we do then?”

“Do? We must go on, and perhaps we shall get through,” said he surlily.

“And what if we don’t get through, and the horses stop in the snow? What then?”

“What then? Why, nothing.”

“We might be frozen.”

“It’s possible, certainly, for we cannot see any ricks, which means that we’re going right into the Calmuck country. The first thing to do is to look at the snow.”

“And aren’t you at all afraid of being frozen?” asked the old man, with a tremulous voice.

Notwithstanding that he was making merry with me, it was plain that he was all of a tremble to the very last bone.

“Well, it’s pretty cold,” I said.

“Alas, for you, sir! If you were only like me; no, no, run along, that will make you warm.”

“First of all, we ought to show him how to run after the sledge,” said the Counsellor.

VII.

“Ready if you please,” bawled Alec to me from the sledge in front. The snowstorm was so violent that only with the utmost exertion, bending right forward and grasping with both hands the folds of my mantle, was I able to traverse the few yards which separated me from the sledge, through the shifting snow, which the wind carried away from under my very feet. My former driver was already on his knees in the midst of the empty sledge, but seeing me, he took off his large hat, whereupon the wind furiously lifted his long locks on high, and he began asking me for vodka. He evidently didn’t expect to get it, for he was not a bit offended at my refusal. He even thanked me, put on his hat, and said to me: “ Well, God be with you, sir, and seizing the reins and smacking his lips, he deParted from us immediately afterwards, Ignashka meanwhile waving his arms with all his might and shouting at his horses. Again the crunching of hoofs and the jangling of the little sledge bells superseded the whining of the wind, which was Particularly audible whenever we stopped short.

For a quarter of an hour after the transfer I did not sleep, and amused myself by studying the figures of the new driver and the horses. Ignashka had all the ways of a young man; he was perpetually springing up, waving his arms, with his whip dangling over the horses, shouting at them, shifting from one foot to the other, bending forward from time to time, and readjusting the reins of the thill horse, which had a tendency perpetually to shift to the right. He was not big, but well put together apparently.

Above his short pelisse he wore an ungirdled artnyak, the collar of which was almost entirely thrown back, leaving the neck quite bare; his boots were not of felt but of leather, and his hat, which he was incessantly doffing and setting right, was a smallish one. In all his movements was observable not merely energy, but, as it seemed to me, the longing to stimulate this energy. But the further we went and the more frequently he pulled himself together, and bounded on to the box-seat and fidgeted about with his feet and conversed with me and Alec, the more it seemed to me that at the bottom of his soul he was sore afraid.

And the reason was this: his horses were good, but at every step the road became more and more difficult, and it was obvious that the horses were running unwillingly; already it was necessary to whip them up a bit, and the thill horse, a good, big, shaggy beast, had stumbled once or twice, although, immediately afterwards, terror-stricken, it tore on ahead again, bowing its shaggy head almost lower than the very sledge bell.

The right-hand-side horse, which I watched involuntarily, together with the long leather cluster of the reins, jolting and plunging on the field-side, was visibly breaking away from the traces and required a touch of the whip, but, as is the way with good horses, even when excited, as if sorry for his weakness, he angrily lowered and raised his head, again readjusting the bridle. It was really terrible to see how the snowstorm and the cold were increasing; how the horses were getting weaker. The road was become worse and worse, and we absolutely did not know where we were or whither we were going.

We were no longer sure of reaching, I will not say a posting station, but even a place of refuge — and it was ridiculous and terrible to hear how the sledge-bell kept on tinkling so unconcernedly and merrily, and how Ignashka boisterously and bravely shouted at the horses as if we were rolling away to church on a hard-frozen, sunny, rustic road at midday on the “Feast of the Epiphany,” and especially terrible it was to think that we were driving continually and driving rapidly nobody knew whither, right away from the place where we were. Ignashka began to sing some song or other, in a villainous falsetto indeed, but so sonorously and with such long pauses, during which he fell a-whistling, that it was strange to feel timid while you listened to him.

“Hie, hie! What a throat you’ve got, Ignat!” sounded the voice of the Counsellor; “do stop for a bit.”

“What?”

“Sto-o-o-op!”

Ignat stopped. Again all was silent, and the wind howled and whined, and the whirling snow began to fall more thickly into the sledge. The Counsellor came to us.

“Well, what is it?”

“What, indeed! Whither are we going?”

“Who knows!”

“Our feet are frozen, eh! why are you clapping your hands?”

“We are quite benumbed.”

“And as for you,” this to Ignat, “just turn out and stir your stumps and see if there isn’t a Calmuck encampment about here: it will warm up your feet a bit!”

“All right! hold the horses. Now for it.”

And Ignat ran off in the direction indicated.

“One always ought to look out and pick one’s way, you’ll find it’s all right; and, besides, there’s such a thing as foolish driving,” said the Counsellor to me. “Just see how the horses are steaming.”

All this time Ignat was gone, and this lasted so long that I was beginning to be afraid that he would lose himself altogether. The Counsellor, in the calmest, most self-confident tone of voice, explained to me how people ought to act in a snowstorm; he said that the best thing of all was to outspan the horse and let her go right on, God only knows where, or sometimes it was possible to see and go by the stars, and he added that if he had gone on before as a pioneer, we should long ago have reached the station.

“Well, how is it?” he asked Ignat, who could now be seen returning, walking with the utmost difficulty, being up to his knees in snow.

“Yes, it’s there right enough. I can make out a Calmuck encampment,” answered Ignat, puffing and blowing, “but which it is I don’t know. We ought, my brother, to be going straight towards the Prologovsky Manor House. We ought to go more to the left”

“But why this delay? It must be those encampments of ours which are behind the post-station!” exclaimed the Counsellor. “But I say it is not !”

“What I’ve seen I know: it’ll be what I say and not the Tomushenko lot. We must keep going more to the right all along. We shall be out on the great bridge presently; it is only eight versts off.”

“But I say it is not I tell you I’ve just seen it” answered Ignat angrily.

“Ah, my brother, and you a driver too!”

“Driver be hanged! Go yourself! “

“Why should I go when I know already?”

It was plain that Ignat was very angry. Without answering, he leaped upon the box-seat and drove on further.

“You see how your feet grow numb if you don’t warm them a bit,” he said to Alec, continuing to hug his arms more and more frequently and wipe and shake off the snow which kept pouring into the leg of his boot.

I had a frightful desire to go to sleep.

VIII.

“Can it be possible that I am already freezing to death?” I thought in the midst of my slumbers. Freezing to death always begins during slumber, they say. Why, it would be better to be drowned than to freeze and let myself be drawn out in a net, yet ’tis all one whether I drown or freeze if only this stick — it seems to be a stick — were not beating against my back and I could lose consciousness.

And for a second or so I did lose consciousness.

“Yet, how will all this end?” I suddenly said within my mind, opening my eyes for a moment and glancing at the white expanse; “how will all this end if we do not find the ricks and the horses stop, which will happen pretty soon? We shall all be frozen.” I confess that although a little afraid, the wish that something extraordinary, something tragical, might happen to us was stronger within me than my tiny bit of fear. It seemed to me that it would not be half bad if, by the morning, the horses were to drag us into some distant, unknown village half frozen; or, better still, some of us perhaps might be frozen to death outright.

And in this mood a vision presented itself before me, with extraordinary rapidity and vividness. The horses stopped; the snow heaps grew bigger, and bigger, and now only the shaft-bow and the ears of the horses were visible; but suddenly Ignashka appeared on the

surface with his troika and drove past us. We implored him with shrieks and yells to take us, but our cries were carried away by the wind, and there were no voices at all. Ignashka smoked slightly; shouted at his horses; whistled a bit, and vanished from our eyes into some deep abyss of drifted snow. Then the little old man leaped to the surface and began waving his arms, and wanted to spring off, but could not move from the spot; my old driver, with the large hat, flung himself upon him, dragged him to the ground, and trampled him in the snow. "You old sorcerer," he shrieked, "you curser; we'll sink or swim together." But the little old man burrowed in the snow drift with his head; he was not so much a little old man as a hare, and he slipped away from us.

All the dogs came leaping after him. The counsellor, who was Theodor Filipovich, said that we should all sit round in a circle, and that it didn't matter a bit if the snow covered us, it would make us warm. And, indeed, we were very warm and comfortable, only we wanted something to drink. I got a case bottle, served out rum and sugar to them all, and drank myself with great satisfaction. The tale-teller was telling some tale about the rainbow — and above us, indeed, was a ceiling of snow and rainbow. "And now let each of us take his apartment in the snow and go to sleep," said I. The snow was warm and soft like fur.

I made a room for myself, and was about to go into it, but Theodor Filipovich, who saw some money in my case bottle, said: "Stop, give me the money; it's all one if we die!" and caught me by the leg. I gave him the money, merely asking them to let me out; but they would not believe it was all the money I had, and wanted to kill me. I caught the arm of the old man and, with unspeakable delight, began to kiss it. The arm of the little old man was fresh and smooth.

At first he tore it away from me, but afterwards he let me have it, and even began caressing me with the other arm. But Theodor Filipovich drew near and threatened me. I ran into my room, but it was not a room, but a long white corridor, and something held me by the leg. I tore myself away, but in the hands of him who held me remained my clothing and part of my skin; but I only felt cold and bashful, and all the

more bashful because my aunt, with her sunshade, and with her homoeopathic pharmacopoeia under her arm, was coming towards me with the drowned man. They were laughing, and did not understand the signs I was making to them.

I threw myself into the sledge, and my feet were dragging along the snow; but the little old man pursued me, waving his arms. The little old man was already close to me when I heard two little bells, and knew that I was safe if I could get to them. The little bells sounded more and more violently, but the little old man caught me up, and fell like a beast on my face, so that the bells were scarce audible. I again seized his arm and began to kiss it, but the little old man was not the little, old man, but the man who had been drowned, and he cried out: "Stop, Ignashka, these are the Akhmetkin ricks, I think; go and see!"

This was too terrible; far better to wake up! I opened my eyes. The wind had flapped my face with the corner of Alec's mantle; my knee was uncovered; we were going over a bare, frozen crest of snow, and the tierce of the little bells was very faintly audible in the air, along with the jangling quinte.

I looked to see where the rick was, but instead of the ricks, I saw with my wide-open eyes a house with a balcony and the crenelated wall of a fortress. It interested me very little to look at this house and fortress; my chief desire was to see again the white corridor along which I had run to hear the sound of the church bell, and to kiss the hand of the old man. I again closed my eyes and went to sleep.

IX.

I slept deeply; but the tierce of the bell was audible the whole time, and there appeared to me in my dreams, sometimes in the shape of a dog, which barked and fell upon me; and sometimes as an organ, in which I was one of the pipes; sometimes the shape of French verses which I was composing. Sometimes it seemed to me as if this tierce was some instrument of torture continually squeezing my right heel. This was so violent that I woke, and opened my eyes, rubbing my foot. It was

beginning to be frost-bitten. The night was just the same as before — bright. The selfsame sort of movement was jolting me and the sledge; the selfsame Ignashka was sitting on the box-seat and shuffling about with his feet; the selfsame side horse, distending its neck and scarce lifting its feet, was trotting along over the deep snow; the little tassel of the harness was jumping up and down, and lashing the belly of the horse.

The head of the thill horse, with dishevelled mane, the distended and loosening harness attached to the shaft-bow, was gently rocking up and down. But all this, far more than before, was covered, was loaded with snow. The snow came whirling down from in front, and sideways, was beginning to cover up the sledge-boards; the legs of the horses were up to their knees in snow, and the snow was pouring down from above upon our collars and hats. The wind was now from the right, and now from the left, and played with our collars, with the flap of Ignashka's armyak, and with the mane of the thill horse, and howled above the shaft-bow and in the shafts.

It had become frightfully cold; and scarcely had I wriggled myself free of my collar, than the frozen, dry snow, whirling along, fell full upon my eyelashes, nose, mouth, and flopped down my neck. All round about everything was white, bright, and snowy; there was nothing to be seen anywhere but turbid light and snow. I became seriously alarmed. Aleshka was asleep at my feet in the very bottom of the sledge, the whole of his back was covered by a thick layer of snow. Ignashka I did not see; he was tugging at the reins, shouting to the horses, and shuffling with his feet perpetually. The little bell sounded as strangely as ever. The horses kept snorting, yet on they ran, stumbling more and more frequently, and somewhat more softly. Ignashka again leaped up, waved his sleeves, and began singing his song in a thin, tense voice.

Without finishing it he stopped the troika, threw the reins on to the upper Part of the sledge, and dismounted. The wind was howling furiously, the snow, pouring down as if from a sieve, covered the skirt of his pelisse. I looked around, the third troika was no longer behind us, it had stopped somewhere. Round the second troika, which was visible

through a snowy mist, I could see how the little old man was hopping about from foot to foot. Ignashka took three steps away from the sledge, sat down in the snow, ungirded himself, and set about taking off his shoes.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“I must change my boots, my feet are quite frozen,” he answered, continuing what he was doing.

It had made me cold merely to wriggle my neck free of my collar. I could not bear to look on and see him do this. I sat stiff and upright, looking at the side horse which, drawing back its feet, began wearily, like a sick thing, twitching its tucked-up tail all covered with snow. The jolt which Ignat had given to the sledge, when he leaped upon the sledge-ledge, had awakened me.

“I say, where are we now?” I asked; “shall we ever get anywhere?”

“Be easy, we shall manage it,” he answered; “the great thing is to keep the feet warm. That’s why I’ve changed my boots.”

And off he started. The little bell sounded, the sledge again began to swing along, and the wind whistled beneath the curved sides of the sledge. And once more we set off swimming in a limitless sea of snow.

X.

I slept soundly. When Alec, knocking me with his foot, awoke me, and I opened my eyes, it was already morning. It appeared to me to be colder than in the night. No snow was coming down from above; but a strong, dry wind continued to carry the snow-dust across the plain and especially beneath the hoofs of the horses and the sledge-curves. The sky, to the right, in the east, was heavy and of a dark bluish colour; but bright, orange-red, strips were becoming more and more plainly distinguishable in it. Above our heads, from behind the fugitive, white, faintly tinted clouds, a pale blue was revealing itself; to the left, the masses of cloud were bright, light, and mobile. All around, as far as the eye could reach, lay white, deep snow, distributed in heaps and layers.

In one direction could be seen a greyish heap, over which a fine, dry, snowy dust was doggedly flying. Not a single trace of a sledge, or a human being, or an animal was anywhere visible. The outlines and colours of the back of the driver and the horses showed out clearly, and even sharply, against the white background. The rim of Ignashka's dark blue hat, his collar, his hair, and even his boots were white. The sledges were completely covered. The whole right Part of the head of the dark grey thill horse and his forelock were covered with snow; my side horse was enwrapped in it up to the knees, and his sweating body was all plastered with snowy festoons on the right side.

The tassel was still bobbing up and down as before, beating time to some unimaginable motifs and the side horse was running along just as before, only she had sunk lower in the snow, from which she raised and disengaged her body from time to time. It was plain from her dejected ears what she must be suffering. Only a single new object riveted our attention, and this was a verst post, from which the snow was being strewn on the ground, around which the wind had piled a whole hillock of snow to the right, and was still tearing up and casting the scattering snow from one side to the other.

I was amazed that we had been driving along the whole night with single horses for twenty hours, not knowing whither, and without stopping, and yet had managed somehow to arrive. Our little bell was sounding more merrily than ever. Ignat wrapped himself up tighter, and kept shouting at the horses; behind us neighed the horses and jingled the bells of the troika of the little old man and the counsellor; but the sleeper must have Parted from us in the steppe. After going along for another half verst we came upon the recent track of a sledge and troika, lightly powdered with snow, and, at rare intervals, pink patches of the blood of a horse which, as we could see, had been cruelly whipped.

“That is Philip. It is plain that he has got in before us!” said Ignashka. But there stood a little house with a signboard alone on the road, in the midst of the snow, which reached almost up to the roof and windows. Near the inn stood a troika of three grey horses, crisp with sweat, with

disengaged feet and dejected heads. Around the door the snow had been cleared away, and there stood a shovel, but from the roof the howling wind was still sweeping and whirling the snow.

From out of the door, at the sound of our bells, emerged a big, good-looking, rod-faced driver with a glass of wine in his hand, shouting something. Ignashka turned to me and asked permission to stop. Then for the first time I saw his face.

XI.

His face was not darkish, dry, and straight-nosed, as I had expected, judging from his hair and physique. It was a round, merry, absolutely sun-burnt face, with a large mouth and brightly shining, round blue eyes. His cheeks and neck were as red as rubbed rags; his eyebrows, long eye-lashes, and the hair symmetrically covering the lower part of his face, were clotted with snow and quite white. It was only half a verst to the station, and we stopped.

“Only be as quick as you can,” I said.

“In one moment,” answered Ignashka, and leaping from the box-seat, he ran to Philip.

“Give it here, my brother,” taking off his glove and pitching it in the snow along with his whip, and, throwing back his head, he swallowed the proffered dram of vodka at a single gulp.

The innkeeper, most probably a discharged Cossack, came out of the door with a demi-stoop in his hand.

“Who’s to have it?” said he.

Tall Vas-il-y, a leanish, red-bearded muzhik, with a goatee beard, and the counsellor, a stout, white eye-browed fellow, with a thick white beard framing his red face, both came up and had a glass or two. The little old man would also have liked to have joined the group of drinkers, but he was not invited to have a dram, and he went to his horses, which were tied up behind the troika, and began to stroke them on the back and buttocks. The little old man was just as I had imagined

him, a thin, little fellow with a wrinkled, bluish face, a sparse beard, a sharp nose, and stumpy yellow teeth. He wore a driver's hat, which was quite new, but his meagre little demi-pelisse, threadbare, stained with tar and torn at the shoulder and sides, did not cover his knees, and his hempen lower garment was stuffed into his huge felt boots. He was all bent and wrinkled, and his face and knees were quivering; he was busying himself about the sledge, with the obvious endeavour of getting warm.

"Hillo, Matvich! why don't you have a half pint? fine thing for making you warm!" said the counsellor.

Matvich persisted in what he was doing. He put the harness of his horses to rights, put the low shaft right also and came to me.

"Look here, sir!" said he, taking his hat from off his grey hairs and bowing low, "all night long we've been wandering about with you, seeking the road; if only now you would stand a half pint. Yes, indeed, little father, your excellency! And there's nothing like that for warming one," he added with an obsequious smile.

I gave him a quarter-rouble. The innkeeper brought out a half-pint and handed it to the little old man. He drew off the whip-glove and extended a small, dark, crooked and slightly bluish hand towards the glass; but his thumb, which looked like 'some one else's, refused to obey him; he could not hold the glass, and, spilling the vodka, cast it upon the snow.

All the drivers began to laugh.

"Just look, Matvich is so frost-bitten that he cannot hold his wine."

But Matvich was very angry that the wine was spilled. However, they filled him another glass and poured it into his mouth. Immediately he became very lively and merry, ran into the inn, lighted his pipe, began to simper, and show his worn, yellow teeth, and uttered an oath at every word. After drinking a final dram, the drivers dispersed to their various troikas and we proceeded. The snow was just as white and glaring as ever, so that it stung the eye that gazed at it.

The orange and reddish strips of cloud, mounting higher and higher, and growing ever brighter and brighter, spread over the sky; even the red sphere of the sun appeared on the horizon in the midst of dove-coloured clouds, the azure of the sky grew ever more dazzling and deeper. On the road, near the posting station, the track was clear, precise, and yellowish; here and there were holes; in the frozen, compressed air there was a sensation of pleasant lightness and freshness.

My troika ran very swiftly. The head of the thill horse and her neck, with the mane spread widely over the shaft-bow, bobbed rapidly up and down, almost in one place; beneath sounded the pleasant bells whose tongues no longer beat, but rubbed against their sides. The good side horses, tugging together at the congealed and crooked reins, energetically bounded forward; the tassels kept bumping away beneath their very bellies and hindmost harness.

Occasionally the side horse would stumble into one of the holes in the dilapidated road, and, with its eyes full of snow-dust, would struggle briskly out of it again. Ignashka now shouted to his horses in a merry tenor; the dry frost crackled beneath the sides of the sledges; from behind us came the solemnly sonorous sounds of two sledge-bells and the drunken shouting of the drivers. I glanced back, the grey, shaggy side horses, extending their necks, and breathing methodically, with curving bits, were bounding over the snow. Philip shaking his whip, was adjusting his hat; the little old man, with drawn up legs, was lying at full length, just as before, in the middle sledge.

In two minutes the sledge began to grate upon the well-swept boards of the approach to the posting-station, and Ignashka turned towards me his snowcovered, merry, weather-beaten face.

“We’ve arrived, you see, sir!” said he.

The End