

THE
LITTLE ANGEL
AND OTHER STORIES

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN OF

L. N. ANDREYEV

By W. H. LOWE



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PREFACE

LEONID NIKOLAIVICH ANDREYEV was born in Orel in 1871. After his father's death he was thrown upon his own resources, but managed to study at both Petrograd and Moscow Universities, graduating in Law in 1897. During this period he endured great hardship—often even actual hunger—and was the victim of deep melancholia. His first writings were unsuccessful; and, for a time, he devoted himself to painting. Later he came into touch with the Russian press as police-court reporter for a leading newspaper.

Then "Silence" was published, and brought him immediate recognition. This terrible story may serve as an example of his method. The silence of the frightened girl, dying with her secret, and of her mother, stricken, through shock, with paralysis, crushes the pride of the priest whose training has so stiffened his nature that he cannot express or welcome affection. He cries for help; he entreats them to show him pity. His daughter lies dead; his wife motionless. An abstract idea is the germ of each tale; around it are woven both characters and incident—a process which is in marked contrast to the work of his contemporary Maxim Gorky whose people with their actions come directly from life—mostly, indeed, from his own personal experiences. Sometimes the double note is tragic; oftener, the abstract idea redeems the gloom or horror of the actual tale, as in "The Little Angel" and "In the Basement," for, while the stories of Andreyev are tinged with more than even the ordinary tone of sadness of the Russian writer, there seems to be in his mind a balancing, a search for some kind of compensation, as though he would say, "No man is wholly good or wholly bad." Perhaps it is the weakness of a method by which his characters become the puppets—however real—illustrating an idea; perhaps it is the strength of the author's vision, that makes his people sometimes morbid and unhealthy. They are driven by a relentless creator, as in Masefield's "Nan," to their destiny. Nevertheless, the beauty of his style, the clear imagination, and the perfect form of his stories come not only from an artist but from a philosopher and poet. His work is not for babes. Deep truths are presented not more realistically in the anomalies and terrors of life than in the symbolism of his short stories and, in its more elaborate form, of his plays. Touches of tenderness, beauty, and sympathetic insight are found on every page side by side with brutality and coarseness, for Andreyev draws Life without hiding, without shirking. But, beyond and behind, his mind is working ceaselessly, struggling to coordinate the whole.

His works comprise a large number of stories, including beside the present collection "Judas Iscariot," "The Red Laugh," "The Seven Who Were Hanged," and some powerful studies in madness; and of plays most of which are performed upon the Russian, though not yet upon the English, stage. Among the latter are "The Life of Man," "Anathema," "The Black Maskers," "The Sabine Women,"

and “The Tragedy of Belgium.”

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I

AT times Sashka wished to give up what is called living; to cease to wash every morning in cold water, on which thin sheets of ice floated about; to go no more to the grammar school, and there to have to listen to every one scolding him; no more to experience the pain in the small of his back and indeed over his whole body when his mother made him kneel in the corner all the evening. But, since he was only thirteen years of age, and did not know all the means by which people abandon life at will, he continued to go to the grammar school and to kneel in the corner, and it seemed to him as if life would never end. A year would go by, and another, and yet another, and still he would be going to school, and be made to kneel in the corner. And since Sashka possessed an indomitable and bold spirit, he could not supinely tolerate evil, and so found means to avenge himself on life. With this object in view he would thrash his companions, be rude to the Head, impertinent to the masters, and tell lies all day long to his teachers and to his mother—but to his father only he never lied. If in a fight he got his nose broken, he would purposely make the damage worse, and howl, without shedding a single tear, but so loudly that all who heard him were fain to stop their ears to keep out the disagreeable sound. When he had howled as long as thought advisable, he would suddenly cease, and, putting out his tongue, draw in his copy-book a caricature of himself howling at an usher who pressed his fingers to his ears, while the victor stood trembling with fear. The whole copy-book was filled with caricatures, the one which most frequently occurred being that of a short stout woman beating a boy as thin as a lucifer-match with a rolling pin. Below in a large scrawling hand would be written the legend: “Beg my pardon, puppy!” and the reply, “Won’t! blow’d if I do!”

Before Christmas Sashka was expelled from school, and when his mother attempted to thrash him, he bit her finger. This action gave him his liberty. He left off washing in the morning, ran about all day bullying the other boys, and had but one fear, and that was hunger, for his mother entirely left off providing for him, so that he came to depend upon the pieces of bread and potatoes which his father secreted for him. On these conditions Sashka found existence tolerable.

One Friday (it was Christmas Eve) he had been playing with the other boys, until they had dispersed to their homes, followed by the squeak of the rusty frozen wicket gate as it closed behind the last of them. It was already growing dark, and a grey snowy mist was travelling up from the country, along a dark alley; in a low black building, which stood fronting the end of the alley, a lamp was burning with a reddish, unblinking light. The frost had become more intense, and

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when Sashka reached the circle of light cast by the lamp, he saw that fine dry flakes of snow were floating slowly on the air. It was high time to be getting home.

“Where have you been knocking about all night, puppy?” exclaimed his mother doubling her fist, without, however, striking. Her sleeves were turned up, exposing her fat white arms, and on her forehead, almost devoid of eyebrows, stood beads of perspiration. As Sashka passed by her he recognized the familiar smell of vodka. His mother scratched her head with the short dirty nail of her thick forefinger, and since it was no good scolding, she merely spat, and cried: “Statisticians! that’s what they are!”

Sashka shuffled contemptuously, and went behind the partition, from whence might be heard the heavy breathing of his father, Ivan Savvich, who was in a chronic state of shivering, and was now trying to warm himself by sitting on the heated bench of the stove with his hands under him, palms downwards.

“Sashka! the Svetchnikovs have invited you to the Christmas tree. The housemaid came,” he whispered.

“Get along with you!” said Sashka with incredulity.

“Fact! The old woman there has purposely not told you, but she has mended your jacket all the same.”

“Non—sense,” Sashka replied, still more surprised.

The Svetchnikovs were rich people, who had put him to the grammar school, and after his expulsion had forbidden him their house.

His father once more took his oath to the truth of his statement, and Sashka became meditative.

“Well then, move, shift a bit,” he said to his father, as he leapt upon the short bench, adding:

“I won’t go to those devils. I should prove jolly well too much for them, if I were to turn up. *Depraved boy*,” drawled Sashka in imitation of his patrons. “They are none too good themselves, the smug-faced prigs!”

“Oh! Sashka, Sashka,” his father complained, sitting hunched up with cold, “you’ll come to a bad end.”

“What about yourself, then?” was Sashka’s rude rejoinder. “Better shut up. Afraid of the old woman. Ba! old muff!”

His father sat on in silence and shivered. A faint light found its way through a broad clink at the top, where the partition failed to meet the ceiling by a quarter of an inch, and lay in bright patches upon his high forehead, beneath which the deep cavities of his eyes showed black.

In times gone by Ivan Savvich had been used to drink heavily, and then his wife had feared and hated him. But when he had begun to develop unmistakable signs of consumption, and could drink no longer, she took to drink in her turn, and gradually accustomed herself to vodka. Then she avenged herself for all she had suffered at the hands of that tall narrow-chested man, who used incomprehensible

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words, had lost his place through disobedience and drunkenness, and who brought home with him just such long-haired, debauched and conceited fellows as himself.

In contradistinction to her husband, the more Feoktista Petrovna drank the healthier she became, and the heavier became her fists. Now she said what she pleased, brought men and women to the house just as she chose, and sang with them noisy songs, while he lay silent behind the partition huddled together with perpetual cold, and meditating on the injustice and sorrow of human life. To every one, with whom she talked, she complained that she had no such enemies in the world as her husband and son, they were stuck-up statisticians!

For the space of an hour his mother kept drumming into Sashka's ears:

"But I say you shall go," punctuating each word with a heavy blow on the table, which made the tumblers, placed on it after washing, jump and rattle again.

"But I say I won't!" Sashka coolly replied, dragging down the corners of his mouth with the will to show his teeth—a habit which had earned for him at school the nickname of Wolfkin.

"I'll thrash you, won't I just!" cried his mother.

"All right! thrash away!"

But Feoktista Petrovna knew that she could no longer strike her son now that he had begun to retaliate by biting, and that if she drove him into the street he would go off larking, and sooner get frost-bitten than go to the Svetchnikovs, therefore she appealed to her husband's authority.

"Calls himself a father, and can't protect the mother from insult!"

"Really, Sashka, go. Why are you so obstinate?" he jerked out from the bench. "They will perhaps take you up again. They are kind people." Sashka only laughed in an insulting manner.

His father, long ago, before Sashka was born, had been tutor at the Svetchnikovs', and had ever since looked on them as the best people in the world. At that time he had held also an appointment in the statistical office of the *Zemstvo*, and had not yet taken to drink. Eventually he was compelled through his own fault to marry his landlady's daughter. From that time he severed his connection with the Svetchnikovs, and took to drink. Indeed, he let himself go to such an extent, that he was several times picked up drunk in the streets and taken to the police station. But the Svetchnikovs did not cease to assist him with money, and Feoktista Petrovna, although she hated them, together with books and everything connected with her husband's past, still valued their acquaintance, and was in the habit of boasting of it.

"Perhaps you might bring something for me too from the Christmas tree," continued his father. He was using craft to induce his son to go, and Sashka knew it, and despised his father for his weakness and want of straightforwardness; though he really did wish to bring

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back something for the poor sickly old man, who had for a long time been without even good tobacco.

"All right!" he blurted out; "give me my jacket. Have you put the buttons on? No fear! I know you too well!"

II

The children had not yet been admitted to the drawing-room, where the Christmas tree stood, but remained chattering in the nursery. Sashka, with lofty superciliousness, stood listening to their naïve talk, and fingering in his breeches pocket the broken cigarettes which he had managed to abstract from his host's study. At this moment there came up to him the youngest of the Svetchnikovs, Kolya, and stood motionless before him, a look of surprise on his face, his toes turned in, and a finger stuck in the corner of his pouting mouth. Six months ago, at the instance of his relatives, he had given up this bad habit of putting his finger in his mouth, but he could not quite break himself of it. He had blonde locks cut in a fringe on his forehead and falling in ringlets on his shoulders, and blue, wondering eyes; in fact, he was just such a boy in appearance as Sashka particularly loved to bully.

"Are 'oo weally a naughty boy?" he inquired of Sashka. "Miss said 'oo was. I'm a dood boy."

"That you are!" replied Sashka, considering the other's short velvet trousers and great turndown collars.

"Would 'oo like to have a dun? There!" and he pointed at him a little pop-gun with a cork tied to it. The Wolfkin took the gun, pressed down the spring, and, aiming at the nose of the unsuspecting Kolya, pulled the trigger. The cork struck his nose, and rebounding, hung by the string. Kolya's blue eyes opened wider than ever, and filled with tears. Transferring his finger from his mouth to his reddening nose he blinked his long eyelashes and whispered:

"Bad—bad boy!"

A young lady of striking appearance, with her hair dressed in the simplest and the most becoming fashion, now entered the nursery. She was sister to the lady of the house, the very one indeed to whom Sashka's father had formerly given lessons.

"Here's the boy," said she, pointing out Sashka to the bald-headed man who accompanied her. "Bow, Sashka, you should not be so rude!"

But Sashka would bow neither to her, nor to her companion of the bald head. She little suspected how much he knew. But, as a fact, Sashka did know that his miserable father had loved her, and that she had married another; and, though this had taken place subsequent to his father's marriage, Sashka could not bring himself to forgive what seemed to him like treachery.

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“Takes after his father!” sighed Sofia Dmitrievna. “Could not you, Plutov Michailovich, do something for him? My husband says that a commercial school would suit him better than the grammar school. Sashka, would you like to go to a technical school?”

“No!” curtly replied Sashka, who had caught the offensive word “husband.”

“Do you want to be a shepherd, then?” asked the gentleman.

“Not likely!” said Sashka, in an offended tone.

“What then?”

Now Sashka did not know what he would like to be, but upon reflection replied: “Well, it’s all the same to me, even a shepherd, if you like.”

The bald-headed gentleman regarded the strange boy with a look of perplexity. When his eyes had travelled up from his patched boots to his face, Sashka put out his tongue and quickly drew it back again, so that Sofia Dmitrievna did not notice anything, but the old gentleman showed an amount of irascibility that she could not understand.

“I should not mind going to a commercial school,” bashfully suggested Sashka.

The lady was overjoyed at Sashka’s decision, and meditated with a sigh on the beneficial influence exercised by an old love.

“I don’t know whether there will be a vacancy,” dryly remarked the old man avoiding looking at Sashka, and smoothing down the ridge of hair which stuck up on the back of his head. “However, we shall see.”

Meanwhile the children were becoming noisy, and in a great state of excitement were waiting impatiently for the Christmas tree.

The excellent practice with the pop-gun made in the hands of a boy, who commanded respect both for his stature and for his reputation for naughtiness, found imitators, and many a little button of a nose was made red. The tiny maids, holding their sides, bent almost double with laughter, as their little cavaliers with manly contempt of fear and pain, but all the same wrinkling up their faces in suspense, received the impact of the cork.

At length the doors were opened, and a voice said: “Come in, children; gently, not so fast!” Opening their little eyes wide, and holding their breath in anticipation, the children filed into the brightly illumined drawing-room in orderly pairs, and quietly walked round the glittering tree. It cast a strong, shadowless light on their eager faces, with rounded eyes and mouths. For a minute there reigned the silence of profound enchantment, which all at once broke out into a chorus of delighted exclamation. One of the little girls, unable to restrain her delight, kept dancing up and down in the same place, her little tress braided with blue ribbon beating meanwhile rhythmically against her shoulders. Sashka remained morose and gloomy—something evil was working in his little wounded breast. The tree blinded him with its red, shriekingly insolent glitter of countless candles. It was foreign,

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hostile to him, even as the crowd of smart, pretty children which surrounded it. He would have liked to give it a shove, and topple it over on their shining heads. It seemed as though some iron hand were gripping his heart, and wringing out of it every drop of blood. He crept behind the piano, and sat down there in a corner unconsciously crumpling to pieces in his pocket the last of the cigarettes, and thinking that though he had a father and mother and a home, it came to the same thing as if he had none, and nowhere to go to. He tried to recall to his imagination his little penknife, which he had acquired by a swap not long ago, and was very fond of; but his knife all at once seemed to him a very poor affair with its ground-down blade and only half of a yellow haft. Tomorrow he would smash it up, and then he would have nothing left at all!

But suddenly Sashka's narrow eyes gleamed with astonishment, and his face in a moment resumed its ordinary expression of audacity and self-confidence. On the side of the tree turned towards him—which was the back of it, and less brightly illumined than the other side—he discovered something such as had never come within the circle of his existence, and without which all his surroundings appeared as empty as though peopled by persons without life. It was a little angel in wax carelessly hung in the thickest of the dark boughs, and looking as if it were floating in the air. His transparent dragon-fly wings trembled in the light, and he seemed altogether alive and ready to fly away. The rosy fingers of his exquisitely formed hands were stretched upwards, and from his head there floated just such locks as Kolya's. But there was something here that was wanting in Kolya's face, and in all other faces and things. The face of the little angel did not shine with joy, nor was it clouded by grief; but there lay on it the impress of another feeling, not to be explained in words, nor defined by thought, but to be attained only by the sympathy of a kindred feeling. Sashka was not conscious of the force of the mysterious influence which attracted him towards the little angel, but he felt that he had known him all his life, and had always loved him, loved him more than his penknife, more than his father, more than anything else. Filled with doubt, alarm, and a delight which he could not comprehend, Sashka clasped his hands to his bosom and whispered:

“Dear—dear little angel!”

The more intently he looked the more fraught with significance the expression of the little angel's face became. He was so infinitely far off, so unlike everything which surrounded him there. The other toys seemed to take a pride in hanging there pretty, and decked out, upon the glittering tree, but he was pensive, and fearing the intrusive light purposely hid himself in the dark greenery, so that none might see him. It would be a mad cruelty to touch his dainty little wings.

“Dear—dear!” whispered Sashka.

His head became feverish. He clasped his hands behind his back, and in full readiness to fight to the death to win the little angel, he

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walked to and fro with cautious, stealthy steps. He avoided looking at the little angel, lest he should direct the attention of others towards him, but he felt that he was still there, and had not flown away.

Now the hostess appeared in the doorway, a tall, stately lady with a bright aureole of grey hair dressed high upon her head. The children trooped round her with expressions of delight, and the little girl—the same that had danced about in her place—hung wearily on her hand, blinking heavily with sleepy eyes.

As Sashka approached her he seemed almost choking with emotion.

“Auntie—*auntie!*” said he, trying to speak caressingly, but his voice sounded harsher than ever. “Auntie, dear!”

She did not hear him, so he tugged impatiently at her dress.

“What’s the matter with you? Why are you pulling my dress?” said the grey-haired lady in surprise. “It’s rude.”

“Auntie—*auntie*, do give me one thing from the tree; give me the little angel.”

“Impossible,” replied the lady in a tone of indifference. “We are going to keep the tree decorated till the New Year. But you are no longer a child; you should call me by name—*Maria Dmitrievna*.”

Sashka, feeling as if he were falling down a precipice, grasped the last means of saving himself.

“I am sorry I have been naughty. I’ll be more industrious for the future,” he blurted out. But this formula, which had always paid with his masters, made no impression upon the lady of the grey hair.

“A good thing, too, my friend,” she said, as unconcernedly as before.

“Give me the little angel,” demanded Sashka, gruffly.

“But it’s impossible. Can’t you understand that?”

But Sashka did not understand, and when the lady turned to go out of the room he followed her, his gaze fixed without conscious thought upon her black silk dress. In his surging brain there glimmered a recollection of how one of the boys in his class had asked the master to mark him 3, and when the master refused he had knelt down before him, and putting his hands together as in prayer, had begun to cry. The master was angry, but gave him 3 all the same. At the time Sashka had immortalised this episode in a caricature, but now his only means left was to follow the boy’s example. Accordingly he plucked at the lady’s dress again, and when she turned round, dropped with a bang on to his knees, and folded his hands as described above. But he could not squeeze out a single tear!

“Are you out of your mind?” exclaimed the grey-haired lady, casting a searching look round the room; but luckily no one was present.

“What is the matter with you?”

Kneeling there with clasped hands, Sashka looked at her with dislike, and rudely repeated:

“Give me the little angel.”

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His eyes, fixed intently on the lady to catch the first word she should utter, were anything but good to look at, and the hostess answered hurriedly:

“Well, then, I’ll give it to you. Ah! what a stupid you are! I will give you what you want, but why could you not wait till the New Year?”

“Stand up! And never,” she added in a didactic tone, “never kneel to any one: it is humiliating. Kneel before God alone.”

“Talk away!” thought Sashka, trying to get in front of her, and merely succeeding in treading on her dress.

When she had taken the toy from the tree, Sashka devoured her with his eyes, but stretched out his hands for it with a painful pucker of the nose. It seemed to him that the tall lady would break the little angel.

“Beautiful thing!” said the lady, who was sorry to part with such a dainty and presumably expensive toy. “Who can have hung it there? Well, what do you want with such a thing? Are you not too big to know what to do with it? Look, there are some picture-books. But this I promised to give to Kolya; he begged so earnestly for it.” But this was not the truth.

Sashka’s agony became unbearable. He clenched his teeth convulsively, and seemed almost to grind them. The lady of the grey hair feared nothing so much as a scene, so she slowly held out the little angel to Sashka.

“There now, take it!” she said in a displeased tone; “what a persistent boy you are!”

Sashka’s hands as they seized the little angel seemed like tentacles, and were tense as steel springs, but withal so soft and careful that the little angel might have imagined himself to be flying in the air.

“A-h-h!” escaped in a long *diminuendo* sigh from Sashka’s breast, while in his eyes glistened two little tear-drops, which stood still there as though unused to the light. Slowly drawing the little angel to his bosom, he kept his shining eyes on the hostess, with a quiet, tender smile which died away in a feeling of unearthly bliss. It seemed, when the dainty wings of the little angel touched Sashka’s sunken breast, as if he experienced something so blissful, so bright, the like of which had never before been experienced in this sorrowful, sinful, suffering world.

“A-h-h!” sighed he once more as the little angel’s wings touched him. And at the shining of his face the absurdly decorated and insolently growing tree seemed to be extinguished, and the grey-haired, portly dame smiled with gladness, and the parchment-like face of the bald-headed gentleman twitched, and the children fell into a vivid silence as though touched by a breath of human happiness.

For one short moment all observed a mysterious likeness between the awkward boy who had outgrown his clothes, and the lineaments

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of the little angel, which had been spiritualised by the hand of an unknown artist.

But the next moment the picture was entirely changed. Crouching like a panther preparing to spring, Sashka surveyed the surrounding company, on the look-out for some one who should dare wrest his little angel from him.

"I'm going home," he said in a dull voice, having in view a way of escape through the crowd, "home to Father."

III

His mother was asleep worn out with a whole day's work and vodka-drinking. In the little room behind the partition there stood a small cooking-lamp burning on the table. Its feeble yellow light, with difficulty penetrating the sooty glass, threw a strange shadow over the faces of Sashka and his father.

"Is it not pretty?" asked Sashka in a whisper, holding the little angel at a distance from his father, so as not to allow him to touch it.

"Yes, there's something most remarkable about him," whispered the father, gazing thoughtfully at the toy. And his face expressed the same concentrated attention and delight, as did Sashka's.

"Look, he is going to fly."

"I see it too," replied Sashka in an ecstasy. "Think I'm blind? But look at his little wings! Ah! don't touch!"

The father withdrew his hand, and with troubled eyes studied the details of the little angel, while Sashka whispered with the air of a pedagogue:

"Father, what a bad habit you have of touching everything! You might break it."

There fell upon the wall the shadows of two grotesque, motionless heads bending towards one another, one big and shaggy, the other small and round.

Within the big head strange torturing thoughts, though at the same time full of delight, were seething. His eyes unblinkingly regarded the little angel, and under his steadfast gaze it seemed to grow larger and brighter, and its wings to tremble with a noiseless trepidation, and all the surroundings—the timber-built, soot-stained wall, the dirty table, Sashka—everything became fused into one level grey mass without light or shade. It seemed to the broken man that he heard a pitying voice from the world of wonders, wherein once he had dwelt, and whence he had been cast out forever. There they knew nothing of dirt, of weary quarrelling, of the blindly-cruel strife of egotism, there they knew nothing of the tortures of a man arrested in the streets with callous laughter, and beaten by the rough hand of the night-watchman. There everything is pure, joyful, bright. And all this purity found an asylum in the soul of her whom he loved more than life, and had

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lost—when he had kept his hold upon his own useless life. With the smell of wax, which emanated from the toy, was mingled a subtle aroma, and it seemed to the broken man that her dear fingers touched the angel, those fingers which he would fain have caressed in one long kiss, till death should close his lips forever. This was why the little toy was so beautiful, this was why there was in it something specially attractive, which defied description. The little angel had descended from that heaven which her soul was to him, and had brought a ray of light into the damp room, steeped in sulphurous fumes, and to the dark soul of the man from whom had been taken all: love, and happiness, and life.

On a level with the eyes of the man, who had lived his life, sparkled the eyes of the boy, who was beginning his life, and embraced the little angel in their caress. For them present and future had disappeared: the ever-sorrowful, piteous father, the rough, unendurable mother, the black darkness of insults, of cruelty, of humiliations, and of spiteful grief. The thoughts of Sashka were formless, nebulous, but all the more deeply for that did they move his agitated soul. Everything that is good and bright in the world, all profound grief, and the hope of a soul that sighs for God—the little angel absorbed them all into himself, and that was why he glowed with such a soft divine radiance, that was why his little dragonfly wings trembled with a noiseless trepidation.

The father and son did not look at one another: their sick hearts grieved, wept, and rejoiced apart. But there was a something in their thoughts which fused their hearts in one, and annihilated that bottomless abyss which separates man from man and makes him so lonely, unhappy, and weak. The father with an unconscious motion put his arm around the neck of his son, and the son's head rested equally without conscious volition upon his father's consumptive chest.

"*She* it was who gave it to thee, was it not?" whispered the father, without taking his eyes off the little angel.

At another time Sashka would have replied with a rude negation, but now the only reply possible resounded of itself within his soul, and he calmly pronounced the pious fraud: "Who else? of course she did."

The father made no reply, and Sashka relapsed into silence.

Something grated in the adjoining room, then clicked, and then was silent for a moment, and then noisily and hurriedly the clock struck "One, two, three."

"Sashka, do you ever dream?" asked the father in a meditative tone.

"No! Oh, yes," he admitted, "once I had one, in which I fell down from the roof. We were climbing after the pigeons, and I fell down."

"But I dream always. Strange things are dreams. One sees the whole past, one loves and suffers as though it were reality."

Again he was silent, and Sashka felt his arm tremble as it lay upon

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his neck. The trembling and pressure of his father's arm became stronger and stronger, and the sensitive silence of the night was all at once broken by the pitiful sobbing sound of suppressed weeping. Sashka sternly puckered his brow, and cautiously—so as not to disturb the heavy trembling arm—wiped away a tear from his eyes. So strange was it to see a big old man crying.

“Ah! Sashka, Sashka,” sobbed the father, “what is the meaning of everything?”

“Why, what's the matter?” sternly whispered Sashka. “You're crying just like a little boy.”

“Well, I won't, then,” said the father with a piteous smile of excuse. “What's the good?”

Feoktista Petrovna turned on her bed. She sighed, cleared her throat, and mumbled incoherent sounds in a loud and strangely persistent manner.

It was time to go to bed. But before doing so the little angel must be disposed of for the night. He could not be left on the floor, so he was hung up by his string, which was fastened to the flue of the stove. There it stood out accurately delineated against the white Dutch-tiles. And so they could both see him, Sashka and his father.

Hurriedly throwing into a corner the various rags on which he was in the habit of sleeping, Sashka lay down on his back, in order as quickly as possible to look again at the little angel.

“Why don't you undress?” asked his father as he shivered and wrapped himself up in his tattered blanket, and arranged his clothes, which he had thrown over his feet.

“What's the good? I shall soon be up again.”

Sashka wished to add that he did not care to go to sleep at all, but he had no time to do so, since he fell to sleep as suddenly as though he had sunk to the bottom of a deep swift river.

His father presently fell asleep also. And gentle sleep and restfulness lay upon the weary face of the man who had lived his life, and upon the brave face of the little man who was just beginning his life.

But the little angel hanging by the hot stove began to melt. The lamp, which had been left burning at the entreaty of Sashka, filled the room with the smell of kerosene, and through its smoked glass threw a melancholy light upon a scene of gradual dissolution. The little angel seemed to stir. Over his rosy fingers there rolled thick drops which fell upon the bench. To the smell of kerosene was added the stifling scent of melting wax. The little angel gave a tremble as though on the point of flight, and—fell with a soft thud upon the hot flags.

An inquisitive cockroach singed its wings as it ran round the formless lump of melted wax, climbed up the dragon-fly wings, and twitching its feelers went on its way.

Through the curtained window the grey-blue light of coming day crept in, and the frozen water-carrier was already making a noise in the courtyard with his iron scoop.

AT THE ROADSIDE STATION

IT was early spring when I went to the bungalow. On the road still lay last year's darkened leaves. I was unaccompanied; and alone I wandered through the still empty bungalow, the windows of which reflected the April sun. I mounted the broad bright terraces, and wondered who would live here under the green canopy of birch and oak. And when I closed my eyes I seemed to hear quick, cheerful footsteps, youthful song, and the ringing sound of women's laughter.

I used often to go to the station to meet the passenger trains. I was not expecting any one, for there was no one to come and see me; but I am fond of those iron giants, when they rush past, rolling their shoulders, tearing along the rails with colossal momentum, and carrying some whitherpersons unknown to me, but still my fellow-creatures. They seem to me alive and uncanny. In their speed I recognize the immensity of the world and the might of man, and when they whistle with such abandon and in so imperious a manner, I think how they are whistling in the same way in America, and Asia, maybe in torrid Africa.

The station was a small one, with two short sidings, and when the passenger train had left it became still and deserted. The forest and the streaming sunshine dominated the little low platform and the desolate track, and blended the rails in silence and light. On one of the sidings under an empty sleeping-car fowls wandered about, swarming round the iron wheels, and one could hardly believe, as one watched their peaceful, fussy activity, that it would be much the same in America, in Asia, or in torrid Africa. . . . In a week I became acquainted with all the inhabitants of this little corner, and saluted as acquaintances the watchmen in their blue blouses, and the silent pointsmen with their dull countenances and their brass horns, which glittered in the sun.

Every day I saw at the station a gendarme. He was a healthy, strong fellow, as are they all, with broad back, in a tightly stretched blue uniform, with enormous arms and a youthful countenance, upon which, from behind a severe official dignity, there still looked out the blue-eyed naïvete of the country. At first he used to scan me all over with a gloomy suspicion, and put on a look of unapproachable severity without a touch of indulgence, and when he passed me would clank his spurs in a peculiarly sharp and eloquent manner. But he soon became used to me, just as he had become used to the pillars which supported the roof of the platform, to the desolate track, and to the discarded sleeping-car under which the fowls kept running about. In such quiet corners a habit is soon formed. And when he left off observing me, I perceived that this man was bored—bored as no one else in the world. He was bored with the wearisome station, bored by the absence of thoughts, bored by his strength-devouring inactivity, bored by the exclusiveness of his position, somewhere in the void between

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the stationmaster, who was unapproachable to him, and the lower employés to whom he was himself unapproachable. His soul lived on breaches of the peace, but at this tiny station no one ever committed a breach of the peace, and every time the passenger train departed without any adventure there passed over the face of the gendarme the expression of annoyance and vexation of a person who has been deprived of his due. For some minutes he would stand still in indecision, and then with listless gait walk to the other end of the platform without any aim or object. On his way he might stop for a second in front of some peasant woman who had been waiting for the train—but she was only a peasant woman like any other—and so knitting his brows the gendarme would pass on his way.

Then he would sit down stout and listless, as though he had been boiled soft, and felt how soft and flabby were his useless arms under the cloth of his uniform, and how his powerful body, created for work, grew weary with the torturing fatigue of doing nothing. We are bored only in the head, but he was bored in every part of him, from head to foot: his cap, cocked on one side with youthful lack of purpose, was bored, his spurs were bored and tinkled inharmoniously and irregularly as though muffled. Then he began to yawn. How he yawned! his mouth became contorted, expanded from ear to ear, grew broader and broader, till it swallowed up his whole face, it seemed that in another second, through the ever enlarging aperture, you would be able to see down his throat, choke-full of greasy soup. How he yawned! He went away in a hurry, but for long that awful yawn seemed to put my jaw-bone out of joint, and the trees were broken and bobbing about to my tear-filled eyes.

Once from the mail train they took a passenger travelling without a ticket, and this was a very festival for the bored gendarme. He drew himself up, his spurs jingled with precision and austerity, his face became concentrated and angry; but his happiness was but short-lived. The passenger paid his fare, and with a hasty oath got back into the car, and in the rear the metal rowels of the gendarme's spurs gave a disconcerted and piteous rattle, as his enervated body swayed feebly over them.

And at times when he yawned he became to me something terrible.

For some days workmen had been busy about the station clearing the site, and when I returned from town after a stay of a couple of days, the masons were laying the third row of bricks; a brand-new building was arising. These masons were numerous, and worked quickly and skilfully; and it was a strange pleasure to watch the straight, even wall springing up out of the ground. When they had covered one row with mortar they laid on a second row, adjusting the bricks according to their dimensions, laying them now on the broad side, now on the narrow, and cutting off the corners to make them fit. They worked meditatively, and though the course of their meditation

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was evident enough, and their problem clear, still it gave an additional charm and interest to the work. I was looking at them with enjoyment when an authoritative voice at my elbow shouted:

“Look here, you, What’s your name! Why don’t you put this right?”

It was the voice of the gendarme, squeezing himself through the iron railings, which separated the asphalt platform from the workmen; he was pointing to a certain brick and insisting: “You with the beard! lay that brick properly. Don’t you see, it’s a half-brick?”

The mason with the beard, which was in places whitened with lime, turned round in silence—the gendarme’s face was severe and imposing—in silence he followed the direction of the gendarme’s finger, took up the brick, trimmed it, and in silence put it back in its place. The gendarme gave me a severe look and went away; but the seductive interest in the work was stronger than his sense of dignity. When he had made a couple of turns on the platform, he again came to a standstill in front of the workmen, adopting a somewhat careless and contemptuous pose. But his face no longer showed signs of boredom.

I went to the wood, and when I was returning through the station it was one o’clock, the workmen were resting, and the place was empty as usual. But some one was busying himself about the unfinished wall; it was the gendarme. He was taking up bricks, and finishing the fifth row. I could only catch a sight of his broad, tightly stretched back, but it was expressive of intent thought, and indecision. Evidently the work was more complicated than he had imagined. His unaccustomed eye was playing him false; he stepped back, shook his head, stooped for a fresh brick, striking the ground with his sabre as he bent down. Once he raised his finger, in the classic gesture of one who has discovered the solution of a problem, such as might have been used by Archimedes himself, and his back once more assumed the erect attitude of greater self-confidence and certainty. But immediately it became once more doubled up in the consciousness of the undignified nature of the work undertaken. There was in his whole, full-grown figure something secretive as with children, when they are afraid they will be found out.

I carelessly struck a match to light a cigarette, and the gendarme turned round startled. For a moment he looked at me in confusion, and suddenly his youthful countenance was illumined by a slightly solicitous, confiding, and kindly smile. But the very next moment he resumed his austere, unapproachable look, and his hand went up to his little thin moustache—but in it, in that very hand, there still lay that unlucky brick! And I saw how painfully ashamed he was of that brick, and of his involuntary, compromising smile. Apparently he did not know how to blush, otherwise he would have become as red as the brick which he still held helplessly in his hand.

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They had carried the wall up half way, and it was no longer possible to see what the skilful masons were doing on their scaffolding. Once more the gendarme oscillated from end to end of the platform, yawning, and when he turned round and passed me I could feel that he was ashamed—and that he hated me. And as I looked at his powerful arms listlessly swinging in their sleeves, at his inharmoniously jingling spurs and trailing sabre, it seemed to me that it was all unreal—that in the scabbard there was no sabre at all with which he might cut a man down, in the case no revolver, with which he might shoot a man dead. And his very uniform, that too was unreal, and seemed as though it was all just some strange masquerade taking place in full daylight, in the face of the honest April sun, and amidst ordinary working people, and busy fowls picking up grains under the sleeping-car.

But at times—at times I began to fear for some one. He was so terribly bored. . .

SNAPPER

I

HE belonged to no one, he had no name of his own, and none could say where he spent the long, frosty winter, or how he was fed. The housedogs hungry as himself, but proud and strong from the consciousness of belonging to a house, would chase him away from the warm cottages. When driven by hunger or an instinctive need of company, he showed himself in the street, the boys pelted him with stones and sticks, while the grown-ups gave a merry whoop, or a terribly piercing whistle. Distaught with fear he would dart about from side to side, and stumbling against the fences and people's legs, would run as fast as he could to the end of the village, and hide himself in the depths of a large garden in a place known only to himself. There he would lick his bruises and wounds, and in solitude heap up terror and malice.

Once only had he been pitied and petted. This was by a peasant, a drunkard, who was returning from the public house. Just then he loved all things, and pitied all, and said something in his beard about kind people, and the trust he himself put in kind people. He pitied even the dirty, unlovely dog, on which by chance his drunken, aimless glance had fallen.

“Doggie,” said he, calling it by a name common to all dogs; “Doggie, come here, don't be afraid.”

Doggie wanted very much to come. He wagged his tail, but could not make up his mind. The peasant patted his knee with his hand, and repeated reassuringly:

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“Come along, then, silly. I swear I won’t hurt you.”

But while the dog was hesitating, wagging its tail more and more energetically, and advancing with short steps, the humour of the drunkard changed. He recalled all the insults that had been heaped on him by kind people, and felt angry and dully malicious, so that when Doggie lay on his back before him, he gave him a vicious kick in the side with the toe of his heavy boot.

“Garn! Dirty! Where are you coming to!”

The dog began to whimper, more from surprise and the insult, than from pain, and the peasant staggered home, where he gave his wife a savage beating, and tore to pieces a new kerchief which he had bought for her as a present the week before.

From this time forth the dog ceased to trust people who wished to pet it, and either put his tail between his legs and ran away, or sometimes would fly at them angrily and try to bite them, until they succeeded in driving him away with stones or a stick. For one winter he had taken up his abode under the verandah of an unoccupied bungalow which was without a caretaker, and took care of it for nothing. By night he ran about the streets and barked till he was hoarse, and long after he had lain himself down in his place, he would keep up an angry growl, but beneath the anger there was apparent a certain amount of content, and even pride, in himself.

The winter nights dragged themselves out slowly, and the black windows of the empty bungalow gazed grimly on the motionless, icy garden. Sometimes blue lights seemed to kindle in them, at others a falling star would be reflected in the panes, or again the sharp-horned moon would throw on them its timid ray.

II

Spring came on, and the quiet bungalow was all a-voice with loud talk, the creaking of wheels, and the stamping of people moving heavy things. The owners had arrived from the city, a whole merry troop of grown-up people, of half-grown ups and children, all intoxicated with the air, the warmth and the light. Some shouted, some sang, and some laughed with shrill female voices.

The first with whom the dog made acquaintance was a pretty girl, who ran out into the garden in a formal, cinnamon-coloured dress. Greedily and impatiently desiring to seize and hug in her embrace everything visible, she looked at the clear sky, at the reddish cherry twigs, and lay quickly down on the grass with her face towards the burning sun. Then she got up again as suddenly, and hugging herself, and kissing the Spring air with her fresh lips, said expressively and seriously:

“Well, this *is* jolly!”

She spoke, and then suddenly turned round. At this very moment

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the dog noiselessly approached, and furiously seized the extended skirt of her dress in its teeth and tore it, and then as noiselessly disappeared into the thick gooseberry and currant bushes.

“Oh! bad dog!” cried the girl, running away, and for long might be heard her agitated voice: “Mamma! children! don’t go into the garden. There is a dog there, such a great, big, fierce one!”

At night the dog crept up to the sleeping bungalow, and noiselessly lay down in its place under the verandah. It smelt of people, and through the open windows was borne the soft sound of gentle breathing. The people were asleep, they were powerless and no longer terrible, and the dog jealously guarded them. He slept with one eye open, and at every rustle stretched out his head with its two motionless phosphorescent eyes. But the alarming noises were so many in the sensitive Spring night: in the grass something small and unseen rustled, and came quite close to the shiny nose of the dog; last year’s twigs crackled under the feet of sleeping birds, and on the neighbouring road a cart rumbled, and heavily-laden wains creaked. And afar off round about in the motionless air was diffused the sweet, fresh scent of resin, and lured one into the lightening distance.

The owners who had arrived at the bungalow were very kind people, and all the more so now that they were far from the city, breathing pure air, seeing around them everything green, and blue and harmless. The sunlight went into them in warmth, and came out again in laughter and goodwill towards all things living. At first they wished to drive away the dog, of which they were afraid, and even shot at it with a revolver, when it would not take itself off; but later they became accustomed to its barking at night, and even sometimes remembered it in the morning:

“But where’s our Snapper?”

And this new name “Snapper” stuck to it. Sometimes even by day they would notice among the bushes its dark body, which would fall flat on the ground at the first motion of a hand throwing bread—as though it were a stone, not bread—and soon all became accustomed to Snapper, and called him “our dog,” and joked about the cause of his shyness and unreasonable fear. Each day Snapper diminished by one step the distance which separated him from the people; he grew accustomed to their faces, and adopted their habits. Half an hour before dinner he would be already standing in the shrubs, blinking with a conciliatory air. And that same little schoolgirl it was, who, forgetting the former outrage, brought the dog definitely into the happy circle of cheerful, restful people.

“Snapper, come here,” said she, calling him. “Good dog, come here. Do you like sugar? I’ll give you a lump. Come along, then.”

But Snapper would not come; he was afraid. Then cautiously patting her knee, and speaking with all the caressing kindness of a beautiful voice and a pretty face, Lelya approached the dog, but was in her turn afraid; suddenly he snapped.

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“I am so fond of you, Snapper, dear; you have such a nice little nose, and such expressive eyes. Won’t you trust me, Snapperkin?”

Lelya raised her eyebrows, and her own little nose was so pretty and her eyes so expressive, that the sun acted wisely in covering all her little youthful, naïvely charming face with hot kisses, till her cheeks were red.

Snapper for the second time in his life turned on his back and closed his eyes, not knowing for a certainty whether he was to be kicked or petted. But he was petted. Small warm hands touched irresolutely his woolly head, and as though this were a sign of undeniable authority, began freely and boldly to run over the whole of his hairy body, rumpiling, petting, and tickling.

“Mamma! children! look here, I’m petting Snapper,” cried Lelya.

When the children ran up, noisy, loud-voiced, quick and bright as drops of uncontrollable mercury, Snapper cowed down in fear and helpless expectancy: he knew that if any one struck him now, he would no longer be in a position to fix his sharp teeth in the body of the offender: his unappeasable malice had been taken from him. And when they all began to vie in caressing him, he for a long time could not help trembling at each touch of the caressing hand, and the unwonted fondling hurt him as though it had been a blow.

III

All Snapper’s doggy nature expanded. He had now a name, at the sound of which he rushed headlong from the green depths of the garden; he belonged to people, and could serve them. What more did a dog need to make him happy!

Being accustomed to the moderation induced by years of a vagrant, hungry life, he ate but little, but that little changed him out of recognition. His long coat, which formerly had hung in foxy dry tufts on his back and on his belly, which had been covered eternally with dried mud, now became clean, and grew black, and became as glossy as velvet. And when he, having nothing better to do, would run to the gates and stand on the threshold, looking up and down the street with a dignified air, no one ever took it into his head to tease him or throw stones at him.

But such pride and independence he could enjoy only to himself. Fear had not as yet been wholly evaporated from his heart by the fire of caresses, and so every time people appeared, or approached him, he hid himself expecting a beating. And still for a long time every caress came to him as a surprise, and a wonder, which he could neither understand, nor respond to. He did not know how to receive caresses. Other dogs could stand and walk about on their hind legs and even smile, and thus express their feelings, but he did not know how.

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The one only thing that Snapper was able to do was to roll on his back, shut his eyes, and whimper gently. But this was insufficient, it could not express his delight, his thankfulness and love. By a sudden inspiration, however, Snapper began to do something, which maybe he had seen done by other dogs, but had long since forgotten. He turned absurd somersaults, leapt awkwardly, and ran after his tail; and his body, which had been always so supple and active, became stiff, ridiculous, and pitiful.

“Mamma! children! look, Snapper is performing,” cried Lelya, and choking with laughter, said: “Once more, Snapper, once more. That’s right!”

And they gathered together and laughed, and Snapper kept on twisting round, and turning somersaults and falling, and no one saw the strange entreating look in his eyes. And as formerly they used to howl and shout at the dog to see his despairing fear, so now they caressed him on purpose to excite in him an ebullition of love, so infinitely laughable in its awkward, absurd manifestations. Hardly an hour passed but some one of the half-grown-ups or the children would cry:

“Now then, Snapper dear, perform!”

And Snapper would twist about, turn somersaults, and fall, amid merry, irrepressible laughter. They praised him to his face and behind his back, and lamented only one thing, viz., that he would not show off his tricks before strangers, who came to visit, but would run away into the garden, or hide himself under the verandah.

Gradually Snapper became accustomed to not being obliged to trouble himself about his food, since at the appointed hour the cook would give him scraps and bones, while he confidently and quietly lay in his place under the verandah, and even sought and asked for caresses. And he grew heavy: he seldom ran away from the bungalow, and when the little children called him to go with them to the forest, he would wag an evasive tail, and disappear unseen. But all the same at night his bark would be loud and wakeful as ever.

IV

Autumn began to glow with yellow fires, and the sky to weep with heavy rain, and the bungalows became quickly empty, and silent, as though the incessant rain and wind had extinguished them one by one, like candles.

“What are we to do with Snapper?” asked Lelya, with hesitation. She was sitting embracing her knees and looking sorrowfully out of the window, down which were rolling glistening drops of rain.

“What a position you’re in, Lelya; that’s not the way to sit!” said her mother, and added: “Snapper must be left behind, poor fellow.”

“That’s—a—pity,” said Lelya lingeringly.

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“But what can one do? We have no courtyard at home, and we can’t keep him in the house, that you must very well understand.”

“It’s—a—pity,” repeated Lelya, ready to cry. Her dark brows were raised, like a swallow’s wings, and her pretty little nose puckered pitifully, when her mother said:

“The Dogayevs offered me a puppy some time ago. They say that it is very well bred, and ready trained. Do you see? But this is only a yard-dog.”

“A—pity,” repeated Lelya, but she did not cry.

Once, more strangers arrived, and wagons creaked, and the floors groaned beneath heavy footsteps, but there was less talk, and no laughter was heard at all. Terrified by the strange people, and dimly prescient of calamity, Snapper fled to the extreme end of the garden, and thence through the thinning bushes gazed unceasingly at that corner of the verandah which was open to his view, and at the figures in red shirts which were moving about on it.

“You there! my poor Snapper,” said Lelya as she came out. She was already dressed for the journey in the same cinnamon skirt, out of which Snapper had torn a piece, and a black jacket. “Come along!”

And they went out into the road. The rain kept coming and going, and the whole expanse between the blackened earth and the sky was full of clubbed, swiftly-moving clouds. From below it could be seen how heavy they were, impenetrable to the light on account of the water which saturated them, and how weary the sun must be behind that solid wall.

To the left of the road stretched the darkened stubble field, and only on the near hummocky horizon short uneven trees and shrubs appeared in lonesome patches. In front, not far off, was the barrier, and near it a wine-shop with red iron roof, and by it was a group of people teasing the village idiot Ilyusha.

“Give us a ha’penny,” snuffled the idiot in a drawling voice, and evil, jeering voices replied all together:

“Will you chop up some wood?”

Ilyusha reviled foully and cynically, and the others laughed without mirth. A sunray broke through, yellow and anaemic, as though the sun were hopelessly sick; and the foggy Autumn distance became wider, and more melancholy.

“I’m sorry, Snapper!” Lelya gently let fall the words, and went back without looking round. It was not till she reached the station that she remembered that she had not said good-bye to Snapper.

Snapper long followed the track of the people as they went away, he ran as far as the station, and wet through and muddy, returned to the bungalow. There he performed one more new trick, which no one, however, was there to see. For the first time he went on to the verandah, stood on his hind legs, looked in at the glass door, and even scratched at it. But the rooms were all empty, and no one answered him.

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A violent rain poured down, and on all sides the darkness of the long Autumn night began to close in. Quickly and dully it filled the empty bungalow: noiselessly it crept out from the shrubs and in company with the rain, poured down from the uninviting sky. On the verandah, from which the awning had been taken away, and which for that reason looked like a broad and unknown waste, the light had long been in conflict with the darkness, and mournfully illumined the marks of dirty feet; but soon it gave in.

Night had come on.

When there was no longer any doubt that the night was upon him, the dog began to howl in loud complaint. With a note resonant, and sharp as despair, that howl broke into the monotonous, sullenly persistent sound of the rain, rending the darkness, and then dying down was carried over the dark naked fields.

The dog howled—regularly, persistently, desperately, soberly—and to any one who heard that howling it seemed as though the impenetrable dark night itself were groaning and longing for the light, and he would wish himself with his wife by his warm fireside.

The dog howled.

THE LIE

I

“You lie! I know you lie!”

“What are you shouting for? Is it necessary that every one should hear us?”

And here again she lied, for I had not shouted, but spoken in the quietest voice, holding her hand and speaking quite gently while that venomous word “lie” hissed like a little serpent.

“I love you,” she continued, “and you ought to believe me. Does not this convince you?”

And she kissed me. But when I was about to take hold of her hand and press it—she was already gone. She left the semi-dark corridor, and I followed her once more to the place where a gay party was just coming to an end. How did I know where it was? She had told me that I might go there, and I went there and watched the dancing all the night through. No one came near me, or spoke to me, I was a stranger to all, and sat in the corner near the band. Pointed straight at me was the mouth of a great brass instrument, through which some one hidden in the depths of it kept bellowing, and every minute or so would give a rude staccato laugh: “Ho! ho! ho!”

From time to time a scented white cloud would come close to me. It was she, I knew not how she managed to caress me without being observed, but for one short little second her shoulder would press

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mine, and for one short little second I would lower my eyes and see a white neck in the opening of a white dress. And when I raised my eyes I saw a profile as white, severe, and truthful as that of a pensive angel on the tomb of the long-forgotten dead. And I saw her eyes. They were large, greedy of the light, beautiful and calm. From their blue-white setting the pupils shone black, and the more I looked at them the blacker they seemed, and the more unfathomable their depths. Maybe I looked at them for so short a time that my heart failed to make the slightest impression, but certainly never did I understand so profoundly and terribly the meaning of Infinity, nor ever realised it with such force. I felt in fear and pain that my very life was passing out in a slender ray into her eyes, until I became a stranger to myself—desolated, speechless, almost dead. Then she would leave me, taking my life with her, and dance again with a certain tall, haughty, but handsome partner of hers. I studied his every characteristic—the shape of his shoes, the width of his rather high shoulders, the rhythmic sway of one of his locks, which separated itself from the rest, while with his indifferent, unseeing glance he, as it were, crushed me against the wall, and I felt myself as flat and lifeless to look at as the wall itself.

When they began to extinguish the lights, I went up to her and said:

“It is time to go. I will accompany you.” But she expressed surprise.

“But certainly I am going with him,” and she pointed to the tall, handsome man, who was not looking at us. She led me out into an empty room and kissed me.

“You lie,” I said very softly.

“We shall meet again to-morrow. You must come,” was her answer.

When I drove home, the green frosty dawn was looking out from behind the high roofs. In the whole street there were only we two, the sledge-driver and I. He sat with bent head and wrapped-up face, and I sat behind him wrapped up to the very eyes. The sledge-driver had his thoughts, and I had mine, and there behind the thick walls thousands of people were sleeping, and they had their own dreams and thoughts. I thought of her, and of how she lied. I thought of death, and it seemed to me that those dimly-lightened walls had already looked upon my death, and that was why they were so cold and upright. I know not what the thoughts of the sledge-driver may have been, neither do I know of what those hidden by the walls were dreaming. But then, neither did they know my thoughts and reveries.

And so we drove on through the long and straight streets, and the dawn rose from behind the roofs, and all around was motionless and white. A cold scented cloud came close to me, and straight into my ear some one unseen laughed:

“Ho! ho! ho!”

II

She had lied. She did not come, and I waited for her in vain. The grey, uniform, frozen semidarkness descended from the lightless sky, and I was not conscious of when the twilight passed into evening, and when the evening passed into night—to me it was all one long night. I kept walking backwards and forwards with the same even, measured steps of hope deferred. I did not come close up to the tall house, where my beloved dwelt, nor to its glazed door which shone yellow at the end of the iron covered way, but I walked on the opposite side of the street with the same measured strides—backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards. In going forward I did not take my eye off the glazed door, and when I turned back I stopped frequently and turned my head round, and then the snow pricked my face with its sharp needles. And so long were those sharp cold needles that they penetrated to my very heart, and pierced it with grief and anger at my useless waiting. The cold wind blew uninterruptedly from the bright north to the dark south, and whistled playfully on the icy roofs, and rebounding cut my face with sharp little snowflakes, and softly tapped the glasses of the empty lanterns, in which the lonely yellow flame, shivering with cold, bent to the draught. And I felt sorry for the lonely flame which lived only by night, and I thought to myself, when I go away all life will end in this street, and only the snowflakes will fly through the empty space; but still the yellow flame will continue to shiver and bend in loneliness and cold.

I waited for her, but she came not. And it seemed to me that the lonely flame and I were like one another, only that my lamp was not empty, for in that void, which I kept measuring with my strides, there did sometimes appear people. They grew up unheard behind my back, big and dark; they passed me, and like ghosts suddenly disappeared round the corner of the white building. Then again they would come out from round the corner, come up alongside of me and then gradually melt away in the great distance, obscured by the silently falling snow. Muffled up, formless, silent, they were so like to one another and to myself that it seemed as if scores of people were walking backwards and forwards and waiting, as I was, shivering and silent, and were thinking their own enigmatic sad thoughts.

I waited for her, but she came not. I know not why I did not cry out and weep for pain. I know not why I laughed and was glad, and crooked my fingers like claws, as though I held in them that little venomous thing which kept hissing like a snake: a lie! It wriggled in my hands, and bit my heart, and my head reeled with its poison. Everything was a lie! The boundary line between the future and the present, the present and the past, vanished. The boundary line between the time when I did not yet exist, and the time when I began to be, vanished, and I thought that I must have always been, alive, or else never have lived at all. And always, before I lived and when I began to live,

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she had ruled over me, and I felt it strange that she should have a name and a body, and that her existence should have a beginning and an end. She had no name, she was always the one that lies, that makes eternally to wait, and never comes. And I knew not why, but I laughed, and the sharp needles pierced my heart, and right into my ear some one unseen laughed:

“Ho! ho! ho!”

Opening my eyes I looked at the lighted windows of the lofty house, and they quietly said to me in their blue and red language:

“Thou art deceived by her. At this very moment whilst thou art wandering, waiting, and suffering, she, all bright, lovely, and treacherous, is there, listening to the whispers of that tall, handsome man, who despises thee. If thou wert to break in there and kill her, thou wouldst be doing a good deed, for thou wouldst slay a lie.”

I gripped the knife I held in my hand tighter, and answered laughingly: “Yes, I will kill her.”

But the windows gazed at me mournfully, and added sadly: “Thou wilt never kill her. Never! because the weapon thou holdest in thy hand is as much a lie as are her kisses.”

The silent shadows of my fellow-watchers had disappeared long ago, and I was left alone in the cold void, I—and the lonely tongues of fire shivering with cold and despair. The clock in the neighbouring church-tower began to strike, and its dismal metallic sound trembled and wept, flying away into the void, and being lost in the maze of silently whirling snowflakes. I began to count the strokes, and went into a fit of laughter. The clock struck 15! The belfry was old, and so, too, was the clock, and although it indicated the right time, it struck spasmodically, sometimes so often that the grey, ancient bell-ringer had to clamber up and stop the convulsive strokes of the hammer with his hand. For whom did those senilely tremulous, melancholy sounds, which were embraced and throttled by the frosty darkness, tell a lie? So pitiable and inept was that useless lie.

With the last lying sounds of the clock the glazed door slammed, and a tall man made his way down the steps.

I saw only his back, but I recognized it as I had seen it only last evening, proud and contemptuous. I recognized his walk, and it was lighter and more confident than in the evening: thus had I often left that door. He walked, as those do, whom the lying lips of a woman have just kissed.

III

I threatened and entreated, grinding my teeth:

“Tell me the truth!”

But with a face cold as snow, while from beneath her brows, lifted

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in surprise, her dark, inscrutable eyes shone passionless and mysterious as ever, she assured me:

“But I am not lying to you.”

She knew that I could not prove her lie, and that all my heavy massive structure of torturing thought would crumble at one word from her, even one lying word. I waited for it—and it came forth from her lips, sparkling on the surface with the colours of truth, but dark in its innermost depths:

“I love thee! Am not I all thine?”

We were far from the town, and the snow-clad plain looked in at the dark windows. Upon it was darkness, and around it was darkness, gross, motionless, silent, but the plain shone with its own latent coruscation, like the face of a corpse in the dark. In the over-heated room only one candle was burning, and on its reddening flame there appeared the white reflection of the deathlike plain.

“However sad the truth may be, I want to know it. Maybe I shall die when I know it, but death rather than ignorance of the truth. In your kisses and embraces I feel a lie. In your eyes I see it. Tell me the truth and I will leave you forever,” said I.

But she was silent. Her coldly searching look penetrated my inmost depths, and drawing out my soul, regarded it with strange curiosity.

And I cried: “Answer, or I will kill you!”

“Yes, do!” she quietly replied; “sometimes life is so wearisome. But the truth is not to be extracted by threat.”

And then I knelt to her. Claspng her hand I wept, and prayed for pity and the truth.

“Poor fellow!” said she, putting her hand on my head, “poor fellow!”

“Pity me,” I prayed, “I want so much to know the truth.”

And as I looked at her pure forehead, I thought that truth must be there behind that slender barrier. And I madly wished to smash the skull to get at the truth. There, too, behind a white bosom beat a heart, and I madly wished to tear her bosom with my nails, to see but for once an unveiled human heart. And the pointed, motionless flames of the expiring candle burnt yellow—and the walls grew dark and seemed farther apart—and it felt so sad, so lonely, so eery.

“Poor fellow!” she said. “Poor fellow!”

And the yellow flame of the candle shivered spasmodically, burnt low, and became blue. Then it went out—and darkness enveloped us. I could not see her face, nor her eyes, for her arms embraced my head—and I no longer felt the lie. Closing my eyes, I neither thought nor lived, but only absorbed the touch of her hands, and it seemed to me true. And in the darkness she whispered in a strangely fearsome voice:

“Put your arms round me—I’m afraid.”

Again there was silence, and again the gentle whisper fraught with

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fear!

“You desire the truth—but do I know it myself? And oh! don’t I wish I did? Take care of me; oh! I’m so frightened!”

I opened my eyes. The paling darkness of the room fled in fear from the lofty windows, and gathering near the walls hid itself in the corners. But through the windows there silently looked in a something huge, deadly-white. It seemed as though some one’s dead eyes were searching for us, and enveloping us in their icy gaze. Presently we pressed close together, while she whispered:

“Oh! I am so frightened!”

IV

I killed her. I killed her, and when she lay a flat, lifeless heap by the window, beyond which shone the dead-white plain, I put my foot on her corpse, and burst into a fit of laughter. It was not the laugh of a madman; oh, no! I laughed because my bosom heaved lightly and evenly, and within it all was cheerful, peaceful, and void, and because from my heart had fallen the worm which had been gnawing it. And bending down I looked into her dead eyes. Great, greedy of the light, they remained open, and were like the eyes of a wax doll—so round and dull were they, as though covered with mica. I was able to touch them with my fingers, open and shut them, and I was not afraid, because in those black, inscrutable pupils there lived no longer that demon of lying and doubt, which so long, so greedily, had sucked my blood.

When they arrested me I laughed. And this seemed terrible and wild to those who seized me. Some of them turned away from me in disgust, and went aside; others advanced threateningly straight towards me, with condemnation on their lips, but when my bright, cheerful glance met their eyes, their faces blanched, and their feet became rooted to the ground.

“Mad!” they said, and it seemed to me that they found comfort in the word, because it helped to solve the enigma of how I could love and yet kill the beloved—and laugh. One of them only, a man of full habit and sanguine temperament, called me by another name, which I felt as a blow, and which extinguished the light in my eyes.

“Poor man!” said he in compassion, although devoid of anger—for he was stout and cheerful. “Poor fellow!”

“Don’t!” cried I. “Don’t call me that!”

I know not why I threw myself upon him. Indeed, I had no desire to kill him, or even to touch him; but all these cowed people who looked on me as a madman and a villain, were all the more frightened, and cried out so that it seemed to me again quite ludicrous.

When they were leading me out of the room where the corpse lay, I repeated loudly and persistently, looking at the stout, cheerful

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man:

“I am happy, happy!”
And that was the truth.

V

Once, when I was a child, I saw in a menagerie a panther, which struck my imagination and for long held my thoughts captive. It was not like the other wild beasts, which dozed without thought or angrily gazed at the visitors. It walked from corner to corner, in one and the same line, with mathematical precision, each time turning on exactly the same spot, each time grazing with its tawny side one and the same metal bar of the cage. Its sharp, ravenous head was bent down, and its eyes looked straight before it, never once turning aside. For whole days a noisily chattering crowd trooped before its cage, but it kept up its tramp, and never once turned an eye on the spectators. A few of the crowd laughed, but the majority looked seriously, even sadly, at that living picture of heavy, hopeless brooding, and went away with a sigh. And as they retired, they cast once more round at her a doubting, inquiring glance and sighed—as though there was something in common between their own lot, free as they were, and that of the unhappy, eager wild beast. And when later on I was grown up, and people, or books, spoke to me of eternity, I called to mind the panther, and it seemed to me that I knew eternity and its pains.

Such a panther did I become in my stone cage. I walked and thought. I walked in one line right across my cage from corner to corner, and along one short line travelled my thoughts, so heavy that it seemed that my shoulders carried not a head, but a whole world. But it consisted of but one word, but what an immense, what a torturing, what an ominous word it was.

“Lie!” that was the word.

Once more it crept forth hissing from all the corners, and twined itself about my soul; but it had ceased to be a little snake, it had developed into a great, glittering, fierce serpent. It bit me, and stifled me in its iron coils, and when I began to cry out with pain, as though my whole bosom were swarming with reptiles, I could only utter that abominable, hissing, serpent-like sound: “Lie!”

And as I walked, and thought, the grey level asphalt of the floor changed before my eyes into a grey, transparent abyss. My feet ceased to feel the touch of the floor, and I seemed to be soaring at a limitless height above the fog and mist. And when my bosom gave forth its hissing groan, thence—from below—from under that rarifying, but still impenetrable shroud, there slowly issued a terrible echo. So slow and dull was it, as though it were passing through a thousand years. And every now and then, as the fog lifted, the sound became less loud, and I understood that there—below—it was still whistling like a wind, that

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tears down the trees, while it reached my ears in a short, ominous whisper:

“Lie!”

This mean whisper worked me up into a rage, and I stamped on the floor and cried:

“There is no lie! I killed the lie.”

Then I purposely turned aside, for I knew what it would reply. And it did reply slowly from the depths of the bottomless abyss:

“Lie!”

The fact is, as you perceive, that I had made a grievous mistake. I had killed the woman, but made the lie immortal. Kill not a woman till you have, by prayer, by fire, and torture, torn from her soul the truth!

So thought I, and continued my endless tramp from corner to corner of the cell.

VI

Dark and terrible is the place to which she carried the truth, and the lie—and I am going thither. At the very throne of Satan I shall overtake her, and falling on my knees will weep; and cry:

“Tell me the truth!”

But God! This is also a lie. There, there is darkness, there is the void of ages and of infinity, and there she is not—she is nowhere. But the lie remains, it is immortal. I feel it in every atom of the air, and when I breathe, it enters my bosom with a hissing, and then rends it—yes, rends!

Oh! what madness it is—to be man and to seek the truth! What pain!

Help! Help!

AN ORIGINAL

A MOMENT of silence had fallen on the company and amid the clatter of knives on plates, and the confused talk at distant tables, the froufrou of a dress, and the creaking of the floor under the brisk steps of the waiters, some one’s quiet, meek voice was heard:

“But I *do* love negresses.”

Anton Ivanovich coughed over himself the vodka he was in the act of swallowing, and a waiter, who was collecting the plates, cast a glance of indiscriminate curiosity from under his brows. All turned with surprise to the speaker, and then for the first time took notice of the irregular little face with its red moustache, the ends of which were wet with vodka and soup, of the two dull, colourless little eyes, and of

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the carefully brushed head of Semyon Vasilyevich Kotel'nikov. For five years they had been in the same service as Kotel'nikov, every day they had said "How do you do?" and "Good-bye" to him, and talked to him about something or other; on the 20th of every month, after receiving their stipends, they had dined at the same restaurant as Kotel'nikov, as they were doing to-day; and now for the first time they were really conscious of his presence. They perceived him, and were astonished. It seemed that Semyon Vasilyevich was not so bad looking after all, if you did not count the moustache, and the freckles which were like splashes of mud from a rubber tyre, that he was decently well dressed, and his tall white collar, though a paper one, was at all events clean.

Anton Ivanovich, head of the office, coughing and still red with the exertion, looked at the confused Semyon Vasilyevich attentively, with curiosity in his prominent eyes, and still choking, asked with emphasis:

"So you, Semyon, ah!—I beg your pardon, I forget."

"Semyon Vasilyevich," Kotel'nikov reminded him, pronouncing it, not "Vasilich," but fully "Vasilyevich"; and this pronunciation was pleasing to all as expressive of a feeling of worth and self-respect.

"So you, Semyon Vasilyevich—love negresses?"

"Yes, I do, indeed."

And his voice, although rather weak, and, so to speak, somewhat wrinkled like a shrivelled turnip, was nevertheless pleasant. Anton Ivanovich pursed up his lower lip so that his grey moustache pressed against the tip of his red pitted nose, took in all the officials with his rounded eyes, and after an unavoidable pause emitted a fat unctuous laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha! He loves negresses! Ha, ha, ha!"

And all laughed in a friendly manner, even the stout dour Polzikov, who as a rule knew not how to laugh, gave a sickly neigh: "Hee, hee! hee!"

Semyon Vasilyevich laughed also, with a low staccato laugh, like a parched pea; he blushed with pleasure, but at the same time was rather afraid that some unpleasantness might arise.

"Are you really serious?" asked Anton Ivanovich, when he had done laughing.

"Perfectly serious, sir. In them, those black women, there is something so ardent, or—so to speak—*exotic*."

"Exotic?"

And once more all spluttered with laughter. But, though they laughed, they considered Semyon Vasilyevich quite a clever and educated man, since he knew such a rare word as "exotic." Then they began to argue with warmth that it was impossible for any one to love a negress: they were black and greasy, they had such impossible thick lips, and smelt too strong of musk.

"But I love them," modestly persisted Semyon Vasilyevich.

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“Every one to his choice,” said Anton Ivanovich with decision; “but I would rather fall in love with a nanny-goat than with one of those blacks.”

But all were pleased that among them in the person of one of their own comrades there was to be found such an original person, that he loved negresses, and to honour the occasion they ordered another half-dozen of beer, and began to look with a certain contempt on the neighbouring tables, at which there sat no original people. They began to talk louder and with more freedom, and Semyon Vasilyevich left off striking matches for his cigarette, but waited till the attendant offered him a light. When the beer was all drunk up, and they had ordered more, the stout Polzиков looked sternly at Semyon Vasilyevich, and said reproachfully:

“How is it, Mr. Kotel’nikov, that we have never got beyond the ‘you’ stage? Do not we serve in the same office? We must drink to Comradeship, since you are such an excellent fellow.”

“Certainly, I shall be delighted,” Semyon Vasilyevich consented. He beamed now with delight that at last they recognized and appreciated him, and then again feared somehow that they would thrash him; at all events he kept his arm across his breast, to be ready, in case of need, to protect his face and well-brushed hair. After Polzиков he drank to Comradeship with Troitzky and Novosyolov and the rest, and kissed them so heartily that his lips became swollen. Anton Ivanovich did not offer to drink to Comradeship, but politely remarked:

“When you are passing our way, please call. Although you love negresses, still I have daughters, and it will interest them to see you. So you are really in earnest?”

Semyon Vasilyevich bowed, and although he was a bit unsteady from the amount of beer he had drunk, still all remarked that his manners were good. When Anton Ivanovich went away they were still drinking, and afterwards went noisily, the whole company, on to the Nevsky, where they gave way to none, but made all give way to them. Semyon Vasilyevich walked in the middle, arm in arm with Troitzky and the sombre Polzиков, and explained to them:

“Nay, friend Kostya, you don’t understand the matter. In negresses there is something peculiar, something, so to speak, *exotic*.”

“And I don’t want to understand! They are black—black—nothing else.”

“Nay, friend Kostya, this is a matter requiring taste. Negresses are—”

Until that day Semyon Vasilyevich had never even thought of negresses, and could not more exactly define what there was so desirable about them, so he repeated:

“My friend, they are ardent.”

“Now, then, Kostya, what are you quarrelling about?” angrily asked Troitzky, as he tripped up, and splashed in a big swapped galloche. “You are a wonderful fellow for arguing; you never agree with

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any one. Of course, he knows why he loves negresses. Drive on, Senya! love away! don't listen to fools! You're a brave fellow; we'll get up a scandal before long. Lord! what a devil he is!"

"Black—black—nothing more," Polzikov morosely insisted.

"Nay, Kostya, you don't understand the matter," Semyon Vasilyevich mildly declared; and so they went on, rolling and racketting, quarrelling, and jostling one another, but thoroughly contented.

At the end of a week the whole Department knew that the civil servant, Kotel'nikov, was very fond of negresses. By the end of a month the porters of the neighbouring houses, the petitioners, and the policeman on duty at the corner, knew it too. The ladies who worked the typewriters took to looking at Semyon Vasilyevich from the adjoining rooms; but he sat quiet and modest, and still was not sure whether he would be praised or thrashed. Already he had been at an evening party at Anton Ivanovich's, had drunk tea with cherry jam upon a new damask tablecloth, and had explained that about negresses there was something *exotic*. The ladies looked confused, but the hostess's daughter Nastenka, who had read novels, blinked her shortsighted eyes, and, adjusting her curls, asked:

"But, why?"

And all were very much pleased; but when the interesting guest had departed they spoke of him with the greatest compassion, and Nastenka pronounced him the victim of a pernicious passion.

Semyon Vasilyevich had been taken with Nastenka; but since he loved only negresses, he determined not to show his liking, and was cold and stand-offish, though strictly polite. And all the way home he thought of negresses, how black and greasy and objectionable they were, and at the thought of kissing one of them, he felt a sort of heart-burn, and was inclined to weep quietly and to write to his mother in the country to come to him. But in the night he overcame this attack of pusillanimity, and when he appeared at the office in the morning, by his whole appearance, by his red tie, and by the mysterious expression of his face, it was abundantly clear that this man was very fond indeed of negresses.

Soon after this, Anton Ivanovich, who took an interest in his fate, introduced him to a theatrical reporter; the reporter took him and treated him at a *café-chantant*, where he presented him to the Manager, Monsieur Jacques Ducquelau.

"Here is a gentleman," said the reporter, as he brought forward the modestly bowing Semyon Vasilyevich, "here is a gentleman who is much enamoured of negresses; no one but negresses. He is an extraordinary original. Give him encouragement, Jacques Ivanovich, for [if] such people be not encouraged, who should be? This, Jacques Ivanovich, is a public matter."

The reporter slapped Semyon Vasilyevich patronizingly on his narrow back, in its creaseless, tightly-fitting coat, and the Manager, a Frenchman, with a fierce black moustache, cast his eyes up to the sky,

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as though looking for something there, made a gesture of decision, and transfixing the still bowing civil servant with his black eyes, said:

“Negresses! Excellent! I have here at present three beautiful negresses.”

Semyon Vasilyevich blanched slightly, but M. Jacques was very fond of his own establishment, and took no notice. The reporter requested: “Give him a free ticket, Jacques Ivanovich; a season.”

From that evening Semyon Vasilyevich began to pay court to a negress, Miss Korraitto, the whites of whose eyes were like saucers, with pupils no larger than sloes. And when she turned on all this battery and made eyes at him, his feet turned cold, and, as he bowed hastily, his well-pomatumed head glistened under the electric light, and he thought with grief of his poor mother who lived in the country.

Of Russian Miss Korraitto understood not a word, but happily they found plenty of willing interpreters, who took to heart the interests of the young couple, and accurately transmitted to Semyon Vasilyevich the gushing exclamations of the dusky fair.

“She says: ‘She has never seen such a kind, handsome gentleman.’ Is not that right, Miss?”

Miss Korraitto would incline her head again and again, show her teeth, which were as wide as the keys of a piano, and roll her saucers round on every side. And Semyon Vasilyevich would unconsciously incline his head too, and mutter:

“Tell her, please, that there is something *exotic* about negresses.”

And all were satisfied. When Semyon Vasilyevich for the first time kissed the hand of the negress, there assembled to see it, not only all the *artistes*, but many of the spectators, and one in particular, an old merchant, Bogdan Kornyeich Seliverstov, burst into tears from tenderness and patriotic feelings. Then they drank champagne. For two days Semyon Vasilyevich suffered from a painful palpitation of the heart, and did not go to the office. Several times he began a letter, “Dear Mamma,” but he was too weak to finish it. When he went back to the office they invited him to the private room of his Excellency. Semyon Vasilyevich smoothed with a comb his hair, which had begun to stick up during his illness, arranged the dark ends of his moustache, so as to speak more clearly, and collapsing with dread, went in.

“Look here, is it true, what they tell me, that you—” His Excellency hesitated, “is it true that you love negresses?”

“Quite true, your Excellency.”

The general concentrated his gaze on his poll, on the smooth centre of which two thin locks obstinately stuck up and trembled, and with some surprise, but at the same time with approval, asked:

“But why do you love them?”

“I cannot say, your Excellency,” replied Semyon Vasilyevich, whose courage had evaporated.

“What do you mean by ‘I can’t say’? Who, then, can say? But don’t be embarrassed, my dear sir. I like my subordinates to show

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self-reliance and initiative in general, provided, of course, they do not exceed certain legal bounds. Tell me candidly, as though you were talking to your father, why do you love negresses?"

"There is in them, your Excellency, something *exotic*."

That same evening at the general's whist table at the English Club, his Excellency, when he had dealt the cards with his puffy white hands, remarked with assumed carelessness:

"There's in my office an official who is terribly enamoured of negresses. An ordinary clerk, if you please."

The other three generals were jealous: each of them had at his office many officials, but they were the most ordinary, colourless, unoriginal people imaginable, of whom nothing could be said.

The choleric Anaton Petrovich considered long, scored only one out of a certain four, and after the next deal said:

"I too—I have a subordinate, whose beard is half black and half red."

But all understood that the victory was on the side of his Excellency; the subordinate mentioned was in no respect responsible for the fact that his beard was half black and half red, and probably was not even pleased to have it so; while the official in point, independently and of his own free will, loved negresses; and such a predilection undoubtedly testified to his originality of taste. But his Excellency, as though he remarked nothing, continued:

"He affirms that in negresses there is something *exotic*."

The existence in the Second Department of an extraordinary original obtained for it the most flattering popularity among official circles in the Capital, and begat, as is always the case, many unsuccessful and pitiful imitators. A certain grey-haired clerk in the Sixth Department, with a large family, who had sat unremarked at his table for twenty-eight years, proclaimed publicly that he could bark like a dog; and when they only laughed at him, and in all the rooms began to bark, and grunt, and neigh, he was put out of countenance, and took to a fortnight's drink, forgetting even to send in a report of sickness, as he had always done for the past twenty-eight years. Another official, a youngish man, pretended to fall in love with the wife of the Chinese Ambassador, and for some time attracted universal observation, and even sympathy. But experienced eyes soon distinguished the pitiful, dishonest pretence from the true originality, and the failure was contemptuously consigned to the abyss of his former obscurity. There were other attempts of the same kind, and among the officials in general there was remarked this year a peculiar elation of spirit, and a long-hidden desire for originality seized the youths of the service with particular severity, and in some cases even led to tragic consequences. Thus one clerk, of good birth, being unable to invent anything original, had the impudence to insult his superior, and was promptly cashiered. Even against Semyon Vasilyevich there rose up enemies, who openly affirmed that he knew nothing whatever about negresses. But

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as an answer to them there appeared in one of the dailies an interview in which Semyon Vasilyevich publicly declared, with the permission of his chief, that he loved negresses because there was something *exotic* in them. And the star of Semyon Vasilyevich shone out with a new, undimming light.

At Anton Ivanovich's evenings he was now the most desirable guest, and Nastenka more than once wept bitterly, so sorry was she for his ruined youth; but he would sit proudly at the very middle of the table, and feeling himself the cynosure of all eyes, put on a somewhat melancholy, but at the same time exotic face. And to all, to Anton Ivanovich himself, to his guests, and even to the deaf old woman who washed up the dirty things in the kitchen, it was a pleasure to know that such an original man visited their house quite without ceremony. But Semyon Vasilyevich went home and wept upon his pillow, because he loved Nastenka exceedingly, and hated the damned Miss Korraitto with all his soul.

Before Easter there was a report that Semyon Vasilyevich was going to marry Miss Korraitto the negress, who for that reason would adopt Orthodoxy and leave the service of M. Jacques Ducquelau, and that his Excellency himself would give away the bride. Fellow civil-servants, petitioners, and porters congratulated Semyon Vasilyevich; and he bowed, only not so low as before, but still more politely, and his bald, polished head glistened in the rays of the spring sunshine.

At the last evening party given by Anton Ivanovich before the wedding, he was a positive hero; but Nastenka every half-hour or so ran off to her own rooms to cry, and then so powdered herself, that the powder was scattered from her face like flour from a millstone, and both her neighbours became correspondingly whitened. At supper all congratulated the bridegroom and drank his health; but Anton Ivanovich, as he took his leave of his guests, said:

"There is one interesting question, my friend, what colour will your children be?"

"Striped," glumly said Polzikov.

"How striped?" asked the guests in surprise.

"Why, in this way: one stripe white, and one black, then another white, and so on," Polzikov explained quite despondently, for he was sorry with all his heart for his old friend.

"That's impossible!" excitedly exclaimed Semyon Vasilyevich, who had grown pale at the thought. But Nastenka, no longer able to contain herself, burst out sobbing and ran out of the room, whereby she caused universal confusion.

For two years Semyon Vasilyevich was the happiest of men, and all rejoiced when they looked at him, and recalled his unusual fate. Once he was invited, together with his spouse, to his Excellency's; and on the birth of a boy he received considerable assistance from the reserve fund, and soon after that he was promoted, out of his turn, to be assistant secretary of the fourth office of the department. And the

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child was born not striped, but only slightly grey, or rather olive-coloured. Everywhere Semyon Vasilyevich talked of his warm love for his wife and son; but he was never in a hurry to return home, and when he did get there he was in no hurry to pull the bell-handle. But when there met him on the threshold those teeth broad as piano-keys, and the white saucers rolled, and when his smoothly brushed head was pressed against something black, greasy, and smelling like musk, he felt quite faint with grief, and thought of those happy people who had white wives and white children.

“Dear!” said he submissively, and on the insistence of the happy mother went to look at the baby. He hated that thick-lipped baby of a greyish colour like asphalt, but he obediently nursed it, meditating in the depths of his soul on the possibility of dropping it suddenly on the floor.

After long vacillation and hidden sighs he wrote to his mother in the country about his marriage, and to his surprise received from her a most joyful answer. She also was pleased at having such an original for her son, and that his Excellency himself had given away the bride. But with regard to the colour, and other disabilities of the bride, she expressed herself thus:

“Let her face be that of a sheep, if only her soul be human.”

At the end of two years Semyon Vasilyevich died of typhus fever. Before the end he sent for the parish priest, who looked with curiosity on the quondam Miss Korraitto, stroked his full beard, and said meaningly, “N . . . y . . . es!” But it was evident that he respected Semyon Vasilyevich for his originality, although he looked on it as sinful.

When his reverence stooped down to the dying man, the latter gathered together the remnants of his strength, and opened his mouth wide to cry:

“I hate that black devil!”

But he recalled his Excellency, and the help from the reserve fund, he recalled the kindly Anton Ivanovich, and Nastenka, and looking at the black weeping countenance, said softly:

“Father, I love negresses very much. In them there is something *exotic*.”

With his last efforts he gave to his emaciated face the semblance of a happy smile, and expired with it on his lips.

And the earth received him without emotion, not asking whether he loved negresses or no, brought his body to corruption, mingled his bones with those of other dead people, and annihilated every trace of the white paper-collar.

But the Second Department long cherished the memory of Semyon Vasilyevich, and when the waiting petitioners began to grow weary, the porter would take them to his room to smoke, and would tell them tales of the wonderful civil-servant who was so awfully fond of negresses. And all, narrator and listeners, were pleased.

PETKA AT THE BUNGALOW

OSIP ABRAMOVICH, the barber, arranged a dirty sheeting on his customer's chest, and tucking it into his collar, shouted abruptly in a sharp tone, "Boy! water!"

The customer, examining his face in the glass with that sharpened intentness and interest which is exhibited only at the barber's, observed that another pimple had appeared on his chin, and turning his eyes away in dissatisfaction they fell straight on a thin little hand, which stretched out from somewhere at the side, and put a tin of hot water down on the ledge below the looking-glass. When he raised his eyes still higher, they caught the strange and distorted looking reflection of the barber, and he noticed the sharp threatening glance which he was casting down on the head of some one, and the silent movements of his lips, caused by an inaudible but expressive whisper. If the master himself was not doing the shaving but one of the assistants, Prokopy or Mikhailo, then the whisper would become loud, and take the form of a vague threat:

"Just you wait!"

This meant that the boy was not quick enough with the water, and that punishment awaited him. "Serve 'm right too," thought the customer, bending his head down sideways, and contemplating the great moist hand by the side of his nose, three fingers of which were spread out, while the forefinger and thumb, all sticky and smelly, gently touched cheek and chin as the blunt razor, with a disagreeable grating noise, took off the lather, and with it the stiff bristles of his beard.

At this barber's shop, permeated with the oppressive smell of cheap scents, full of tiresome flies and dirt, the customers were not very exacting. They consisted of hall-porters, overseers, and sometimes minor officials, or workmen, and often coarsely handsome but suspicious-looking fellows with ruddy cheeks, slender moustaches, and insolent oleaginous eyes.

Close by was a quarter full of houses of cheap debauchery. They lorded it over the whole neighbourhood, and gave to it a special character of something dirty, disorderly and disquieting.

The boy, who was called out to most frequently, was named Petka, and was the smallest of all who served in the establishment. The other boy Nikolka was his elder by three years, and would soon develop into an assistant. Already when a more than ordinarily humble customer looked in, and the assistants in the absence of the master were too lazy to work, they would set Nikolka to cut his hair, and laugh when he had to raise himself on tiptoe to see the back hair of some *dvórník*. fat Sometimes the customer would be offended that his hair was badly cut and utter a loud complaint, and then the assistants would scold Nikolka, not seriously, but only to satisfy the cropped lout. But such cases were not of frequent occurrence, and Nikolka gave himself the airs of a man; he smoked cigarettes, spat

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through his teeth, used bad language, and even boasted to Petka that he drank vodka; but there he probably lied. In company with the assistants he would run to the neighbouring street to look on at a coarse fight, and when he came back laughing with delight, Osip Abramovich would give him a couple of smacks, one on each cheek.

Petka was only ten years old. He did not smoke, or drink vodka, or swear, though he knew plenty of bad words, and in all these respects he envied his companion. When there were no customers, and Prokopy, who usually had spent a sleepless night somewhere or other, and in the daytime would drowsily stumble about and throw himself into the dark corner behind the partition, and Mikhailo was reading the *Police News*, and amongst the accounts of thefts and robberies was looking out for the name of some regular customer, Petka and Nikolka would chat together. The latter was kinder when the two were alone together, and used to explain to the younger the meaning of the terms used to describe the various styles of hair-cutting.

Sometimes they sat at the window, by the side of a half-length figure of a female in wax with pink cheeks, staring glass eyes, and straight sparse eyelashes, and looked out on the boulevard, where life had been stirring since the early morning. The trees of the boulevard, powdered with dust, drooped motionless under the merciless burning rays of the sun, and afforded an equally grey, unrefreshing shade. On all the benches were seated men and women in dirty, uncouth attire, without kerchiefs or hats, just as though they lived there and had no other home. Whether the faces were indifferent, malignant, or dissolute, on all alike was impressed the stamp of utter weariness and contempt of their surroundings. Oft-times a frowsy head would nod helplessly on a shoulder, and the body would try to stretch itself out to sleep like a third-class passenger after an unbroken journey of one thousand versts, but there was nowhere to lie down. The park-keeper, in a bright blue uniform with a cane in his hand, walked up and down the pathways, looking out that no one lay down on the benches, or threw himself upon the grass, which, though parched by the sun, was still so soft, so cool. The women, for the most part more neatly dressed, and even with a hint at fashion, were seemingly all of one type of countenance and of one age; although here and there might be found some old, and others quite young, almost children. All of these talked with hoarse, harsh voices; and scolded, embracing the men as simply as though they were alone on the boulevard. Sometimes they would take a snack and a drop of vodka. It might happen that a drunken man would beat an equally drunken woman. She would fall down, and get up again, and fall down again, but no one would take her part. Only the faces of the crowd as they gathered round the couple would light up with some intelligence and animation, and wear a broader grin. But when the blue-coated keeper drew near, they would listlessly disperse to their former places. Only the ill-used woman would keep on weeping, uttering meaningless oaths, with

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her ruffled hair covered with sand, and her semi-made bust looking dirty and yellow in the morning light, cynically and piteously exposed. They would put her on the bottom of a cab and drive her off with her head hanging down, and swaying, as if she were dead.

Nikolka knew several of the men and women by name, and told Petka nasty stories about them, and laughed showing his sharp teeth. And Petka admired his knowledge and daring, and thought that some day he would be like him. But meanwhile he wanted to be somewhere else. Wanted badly!

Petka's days dragged on wonderfully monotonously, as like to one another as two brothers. Summer and winter alike he saw the same mirrors, one of which was cracked, and another was contorted and amusing. On the stained wall hung one and the same picture, representing two half-dressed women on the sea-shore, the only difference being that their pink bodies became more spotted with fly dirt, and that the black patch of soot became larger above the place where the common kerosene lamp gleamed all the whole winter's day. And morning, evening, and the whole livelong day, there hung over Petka the one and the same abrupt cry, "Boy, water!" and he was always bringing it—always. There were no holidays. On Sundays, when the windows of the stores and shops ceased to illuminate the street, those of the hair-dresser's till late at night cast a bright sheaf of light upon the pavement, and the passer-by might observe a little thin figure huddled upon his seat in the corner, and immersed in something between thought and a heavy slumber. Petka slept a great deal, but still for some reason or other he was always wanting to sleep, and it often seemed to him that all around him was not real, but a very unpleasant dream. Ofttimes he would spill the water, or fail to hear the sharp call, "Boy, water!" He grew thinner and thinner, and unsightly scabs came out on his closely-cropped head. Even the not too fastidious customers looked with aversion on this thin, freckled boy, whose eyes were always sleepy, his mouth half-open, and his hands and neck ingrained with dirt. Round his eyes and under his nose faint lines were forming as though traced by a sharp needle, and they made him look like an aged dwarf.

Petka did not know whether he was happy or unhappy, but he did want to go to some other place; but where, or what, that place was he could not have told you. When his mother, the cook, Nadejda, paid him a visit, he would eat listlessly the sweets she brought him. He never, never complained, but only asked to be taken away from the place. But he soon forgot his request, and would coolly take leave of his mother, without asking when she was coming again. And Nadejda thought with sorrow that she had only one son—and that one an imbecile.

How long he had lived in this fashion, Petka did not know, when suddenly one day his mother came to dinner, had a talk with Osip Abramovich, and told Petka that he was to be allowed to go to the

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bungalow at Tzaritzyno, where her master and mistress were living. At first, Petka could not realize the good news, but after a time his face broke out into faint wrinkles of soft laughter, and he began to hasten his mother's departure. But for decency's sake she had to talk to Osip Abramovich about his wife's health, while Petka was gently dragging her by the hand and shoving her towards the door. He had no idea what a bungalow was like, but he supposed that it must be the very place which he had so longed to go to. With simple egotism he quite forgot Nikolka, who was standing there with his hands in his pockets endeavouring to regard Nadejda with his usual insolence. But instead of insolence there shone in his eyes a profound grief. He had no mother, and at that moment he would not have objected to having just such a stout one as Nadejda. The fact was that he too had never been at a bungalow.

The railway station with its many voices, with its bustle and the rumble of incoming trains, and the whistles of the engines, some thick and irate like the voice of Osip Abramovich, others thin and shrill like the voice of his sickly wife, with its hurrying passengers who kept coming and going in a continuous stream, as if there were no end to them—all this presented itself for the first time to the puzzled gaze of Petka, and filled him with a feeling of excitement and impatience. Like his mother, he was afraid of being late, though it wanted a good half-hour to the time of the departure of the suburban train. But when they were once seated in the carriage, and the train had started, he stuck to the window, and only his cropped head kept turning about on his thin neck, as though on a metal spindle.

Petka had been born and bred in the city, and was now in the country for the first time in his life, and everything there was to him strikingly new and strange; that you could see so far; that the world looked like a lawn; and that the sky of this new world was so wonderfully bright and far-stretching—just as if you were looking at it from the roof of a house! Petka looked at it from his own side, and when he turned to his mother, there was the same sky shining blue through the opposite window, and on its surface were flocking—like little angels—small, merry white flecks of clouds. Now Petka would turn back to his own window, now run over to the other side of the carriage, with confidence laying his ill-washed little hands on the shoulders and knees of strangers, who answered him back with a smile. But one gentleman who was reading a newspaper, and yawning all the time, either from excessive fatigue or from ennui, looked askance at the boy once or twice in not too friendly a manner, and Nadejda hastened to apologise:

“It is his first journey by rail—and he is interested.”

“Humph,” growled the gentleman, and buried himself in his newspaper.

Nadejda would very much have liked to tell him, how that Petka had lived three years with a barber, who had promised to set him

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upon his feet; and that this would be a very good thing, since she was a lone weak woman, with no other means of support in case of sickness or when she became old. But the expression of his face was so uninviting, that she kept all this to herself.

To the right of the railway there was a broad stretch of undulating plain, dark green with the continual moisture, and on its edge there stood grey little houses, just like toys, and upon a high green hill, at the foot of which flowed a silvery river, was perched a similarly toy-like white church. When the train, with a noisy metallic clanking, which suddenly became intensified, rushed on to a bridge, and seemed to hang suspended in the air over the mirror-like surface of a river, Petka gave a little shiver of fright and surprise, and started back from the window; but immediately turned to it again, for fear of losing a single detail of the journey. His eyes had long ceased to look sleepy, and the lines had disappeared from his face. It was as though some one had passed a hot flat-iron over his face, smoothing out the wrinkles, and leaving the surface white and shining.

For the first two days of his sojourn at the bungalow the wealth and force of the new impressions which inundated him from above and from below confused his timid little soul. In contradistinction to the savages of a former age, who felt lost on coming into a city from the wilderness, this modern savage, who had been snatched away from the stony embrace of the massive city, felt weak and impotent in the face of nature. Here everything was to him living, sentient, and possessed of conscious will. He was afraid of the forest, which gently rustled over his head, and was so dark, so passive, so terrible in its immensity. But the bright green joyful meadows, which seemed to be singing with all their bright flowers, he loved, and wished to fondle them as a sister; and the dark blue sky called him to itself, and laughed like a mother. Petka would become agitated, shudder, and grow pale, would smile at something, and slowly, like an old man, walk along the outskirts of the forest, and on the wooded shore of the pond. There, weary and out of breath, he would fling himself down on the thick damp grass, and sink into it, only his little freckled nose appearing above the green surface. For the first two days he was always going back to his mother, and nestling up to her: and when the master of the house asked him whether he liked being at the bungalow, he would smile in confusion and answer:

“Very much!”

And then he would go off again to the threatening forest, and the still water, and it was as though he were questioning them.

But after two days Petka had arrived at a complete understanding with Nature. This was brought about by the co-operation of a school-boy named Mitya from old Tzaritzyno. The schoolboy had a swarthy countenance, the colour of a second-class carriage. His hair stood erect on the crown of his head, and was quite white, so bleached was it by the sun. He was fishing in the pond, when Petka caught sight of

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him and unceremoniously entered into conversation with him. They came to terms with wonderful promptitude; he allowed Petka to hold one of the rods, and afterwards took him some distance off to bathe. Petka was very much afraid of going into the water, but when once in, he did not wish to come out again, but pretended to swim, putting his forehead and nose above the water. Then he got a great gulp of water in his mouth, and beat the water with his hands and made a great splashing. At this moment he was very like a puppy, that had for the first time fallen into the water. When Petka dressed himself he was as blue as a corpse with the cold, and as he talked his teeth chattered. At the proposal of Mitya, who was of inexhaustible resource, they next explored the ruins of a mansion. They clambered upon the roof overgrown with shoots, and wandered between the broken-down walls of the great building. They did enjoy themselves there! All about heaps of stones were piled up, on which they climbed with difficulty, and between which grew young rowan and birch trees. It was still as death, and it seemed as though some one suddenly jumped out from a corner, or that some horrible, terrible face appeared through the aperture left by a broken window. By degrees Petka began to feel quite at home at the bungalow, and he forgot that there was any Osip Abramovich or barber's shop in the world.

"Just look how he is putting on flesh! He's a regular merchant!" Nadejda at this time would exclaim with delight.

She was stout enough herself and her face shone with the heat of the kitchen like a copper samovar. She attributed his improvement to the fact that she gave him plenty to eat. But in reality Petka ate very little indeed, not because he did not care for his food, but because he could scarcely find time for it. If only it had been possible to bolt his food without mastication!—but one must masticate, and during the intervals swing one's feet, since Nadejda ate deuced slowly, polishing the bones and wiping her fingers on her apron, while she kept up a perpetual chatter. But he was up to the neck in business: he had to bathe four times, to cut a fishing-rod in the hazel coppice, to dig for worms—all this required time. Now Petka ran about bare-foot, and that was a thousand times pleasanter than wearing boots with thick soles: the rustling ground now warmed, now cooled his feet so deliciously. He had even discarded his secondhand school jacket, in which he looked like a full-grown master-barber, and thereby became amazingly rejuvenated. He put it on only in the evening, when he went and stood on the dam to watch the Master and Mistress boating. Well-dressed and cheerful they would laughingly take their seats in the rocking boat, which leisurely ploughed the mirror-like surface of the water on which the reflection of the trees swayed as though agitated by a breeze.

At the end of the week the Master brought from the city a letter addressed "to Cook Nadejda." When he had read it over to her she began to cry, and smeared her face all over with the soot which was

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on her apron. From the fragmentary remarks which accompanied this operation, it might be deduced that the contents of the letter affected Petka. This took place in the evening. Petka was playing athletic sports by himself in the back court, and puffing out his cheeks, because that made it considerably easier to jump. The schoolboy Mitya had taught him this stupid but interesting occupation, and now Petka, like a true "sportsman," was practising alone. The master came out, and laying his hand on his shoulder, said:

"Well, my friend, you have to go!"

Petka smiled in confusion and said nothing.

"What a strange lad," thought the master.

"Yes, have to go."

Petka smiled. Nadejda coming up with tears in her eyes repeated:

"You have to go, sonny."

"Where?" said Petka in surprise. He had forgotten the city; and the other place, to which he had always so wanted to go away—was found.

"To your master, Osip Abramovich."

Still Petka failed to understand, though the matter was as clear as daylight. But his mouth felt suddenly dry, and his tongue moved with difficulty as he asked:

"How then can I go fishing to-morrow? Look, here is the rod."

"But what can one do? He wants you. Prokopy, he says, is ill, and has been taken to the hospital. He says he has not enough hands. Don't cry! See, he'll be sure to let you come again. He is kind is Osip Abramovich."

But Petka was not thinking of crying, and still did not understand. On one side there was the fact, the fishing-rod—on the other the phantom, Osip Abramovich. But gradually Petka's thoughts began to clear and a strange metamorphosis took place: Osip Abramovich became the fact, and the fishing-rod, which had not yet had time to dry, was changed into the phantom. And then Petka surprised his mother, and distressed the master and his wife, and would have been surprised himself if he had been capable of self-analysis. He did not begin to cry, as town children, thin and half-starved, cry; he simply bawled louder than the strongest-voiced man; and began to roll on the ground, as the drunken women rolled on the boulevard. He clenched his skinny fists, and struck his mother's hands and the ground, in fact everything he came across, feeling, indeed, the pain caused by the pebbles and sharp stones, but striving, as it were, to increase it.

In course of time Petka became calm again, and the master said to his wife, who was standing before the glass arranging a white rose in her hair:

"You see he has left off. Children's grief is not long-lived."

"All the same I am very sorry for the poor little boy."

"Yes, indeed! they live under terrible conditions, but there are people who are still worse off. Are you ready?"

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And they went off to Bigman's Gardens, where dances had been arranged for the evening, and a military band was already playing.

The next day Petka started for Moscow by the 7 a.m. train. Again he saw the green fields, grey with the night's dew, only they did not now run in the same direction as before, but in the opposite. The second-hand school jacket enveloped his thin body, and from the opening at the neck stuck out the corner of a white paper collar. Petka did not turn to the window, indeed, he hardly looked at it, but sat so still and modest, with his little hands primly folded upon his knees. His eyes were sleepy and apathetic, and fine wrinkles, as in the case of an old man, gathered about his eyes and under his nose. Suddenly the pillars and the planks of the platform flashed before the window, and the train stopped.

They pressed through the hurrying crowd, and came out into the noisy street; and the great, greedy city callously swallowed up its little victim.

"Put away the fishing tackle for me," said Petka, when his mother deposited him at the door of the barber's shop.

"Trust me for that, sonny! Maybe you will come again."

And once more in the dirty, stuffy shop was heard the sharp call, "Boy, water!" and the customer saw a small, dirty hand thrust out to the ledge below the mirror, and heard the vague, threatening whisper. "Just you wait a bit!" This meant that the sleepy boy had either spilled the water, or had bungled the orders. But at nights from the place where Nikolka and Petka lay side by side, a little low and agitated voice might be heard telling about the bungalow, and speaking of what is not, and what no one has ever seen or heard. And when silence supervened, and only the irregular breathing of the children was audible, another voice, unusually deep and strong for a child, would exclaim:

"The devils! May they bu'st!"

"Who are devils?"

"Why, the whole blooming lot, of course!"

A string of cars passed by, and drowned the boys' voices with its noisy rumbling; and then that distant cry of complaint was heard, which had for long been borne in from the boulevard, where a drunken man was beating an equally drunken woman.

SILENCE

I

ON a moonlight night in May, when the nightingales were singing, his wife came to Father Ignaty who was sitting in his study. Her face was expressive of suffering, and the small lamp trembled in her hand.

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She came up to her husband, touched him on the shoulder, and said sobbing:

“Father, let us go to Verochka!”

Without turning his head, Father Ignaty frowned at his wife over his spectacles, and looked long and fixedly, until she made a motion of discomfort with her free hand, and sat down on a low divan.

“How pitiless you *both* are,” said she slowly and with strong emphasis on the word “both,” and her kindly puffed face was contorted with a look of pain and hardness, as though she wished to express by her looks how hard people were—her husband and her daughter.

Father Ignaty gave a laugh and stood up. Closing his book, he took off his spectacles, put them into their case, and fell into a brown study.

His big black beard, shot with silver threads, lay in a graceful curve upon his chest, and rose and fell slowly under his deep breathing.

“Well, then, we will go!” said he.

Olga Stepanovna rose quickly, and asked in a timid, ingratiating voice:

“Only don’t scold her, father! You know what she is.”

Vera’s room was in a belvedere at the top of the house, and the narrow wooden stairs bent and groaned under the heavy steps of Father Ignaty. Tall and ponderous, he was obliged to stoop so as not to hit his head against the ceiling above, and he frowned fastidiously when his wife’s white jacket touched his face. He knew that nothing would come of their conversation with Vera.

“What, is that you?” asked Vera, lifting one bare arm to her eyes. The other arm lay on the top of the white summer counterpane, from which it was scarcely distinguishable, so white, transparent and cold was it.

“Verochka!” the mother began, but gave a sob and was silent.

“Vera!” said the father, endeavouring to soften his dry, hard voice. “Vera, tell us what is the matter with you?”

Vera was silent.

“Vera, are your mother and I undeserving of your confidence? Do we not love you? Have you any one nearer to you than ourselves? Speak to us of your grief, and believe me, an old and experienced man, you will feel the better for it. And so shall we. Look at your old mother, how she is suffering.”

“Verochka—!”

“And to me—” his voice trembled, as though something in it had broken in two, “and to me, is it easy, think you? As though I did not see that you were devoured by some grief—but what is it? And I, your father, am kept in ignorance. Is it right?”

Vera still kept silence. Father Ignaty stroked his beard with special precaution, as though he feared that his fingers would involuntarily begin to tear it, and continued:

“Against my wishes you went to St. Petersburg—did I curse you

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for your disobedience? Or did I refuse you money? Or do you say I was not kind? Well, why don't you speak? See, the good your St. Petersburg has done you!"

Father Ignaty ceased speaking, and there rose before his mind's eye something big, granite-built, terrible, full of unknown dangers, and of strange callous people. And there alone and weak was his Vera, and there she had been ruined. An angry hatred of that terrible incomprehensible city arose in Father Ignaty's soul, together with anger towards his daughter, who kept silent, so obstinately silent.

"St. Petersburg has nothing to do with it," said Vera crossly, and closed her eyes. "But there is nothing the matter with me. You had better go to bed, it's late."

"Verochka!" groaned her mother. "My little daughter, confide in me!"

"Oh! mamma!" said Vera, impatiently interrupting her.

Father Ignaty sat down on a chair and began to laugh.

"Well then, nothing is the matter after all?" he asked ironically.

"Father," said Vera, in a sharp voice, raising herself up on her bed, "you know that I love you and mamma. But—I do feel so dull. All this will pass away. Really, you had better go to bed. I want to sleep, too. To-morrow, or sometime, we will have a talk."

Father Ignaty rose abruptly, so that his chair bumped against the wall, and took his wife's arm.

"Let's go!"

"Verochka!"

"Let's go—I tell you," cried Father Ignaty. "If she has forgotten God, shall we too! Why should we!"

He drew Olga Stepanovna away, almost by main force, and as they were descending the stairs, she, dragging her steps more slowly, said in an angry whisper:

"Ugh! pope, it's you who have made her so. It's from you she has got this manner. And you'll have to answer for it. Ah! how wretched I am—"

And she began to cry, and kept blinking her eyes, so that she could not see the steps, and letting her feet go down as it were into an abyss below into which she wished to precipitate herself.

From that day forward Father Ignaty ceased to talk to his daughter, and she seemed not to notice the change. As before, she would now lie in her room, now go about, frequently wiping her eyes with the palms of her hands, as though they were obstructed. And oppressed by the silence of these two people, the pope's wife, who was fond of jokes and laughter, became lost and timid, hardly knowing what to say or do.

Sometimes Vera went out for a walk. About a week after the conversation related above, she went out in the evening as usual. They never saw her again alive, for that evening she threw herself under a train, which cut her in two.

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Father Ignaty buried her himself. His wife was not present at the church, because at the news of Vera's death she had had a stroke. She had lost the use of her feet and hands and tongue, and lay motionless in a semi-darkened room, while close by her the bells tolled in the belfry. She heard them all coming out of church, heard the choristers singing before their house, and tried to raise her hand to cross herself, but the hand would not obey her will. She wished to say: "Good-bye, Vera," but her tongue lay inert in her mouth, swollen and heavy. She lay so still that any one who saw her would have thought that she was resting, or asleep. Only—her eyes were open.

There were many people in the church at the funeral, both acquaintances of Father Ignaty's and strangers. All present compassionated Vera, who had died such a terrible death, and they tried in Father Ignaty's movements and voice to find signs of profound grief. They were not fond of Father Ignaty, because he was rough and haughty in his manners, harsh and unforgiving with his penitents, while, himself jealous and greedy, he availed himself of every chance to take more than his dues from a parishioner. They all wished to see him suffering, broken-down; they wished to see him acknowledge that he was doubly guilty of his daughter's death—as a harsh father, and as a bad priest, who could not protect his own flesh and blood from sin. So they all watched him with curiosity, but he, feeling their eyes directed on his broad powerful back, endeavoured to straighten it, and thought not so much of his dead daughter as of not compromising his dignity.

"A well-seasoned pope," Karzenov the carpenter, to whom he still owed money for some frames, said with a nod in his direction.

And so, firm and upright, Father Ignaty went to the cemetery, and came back the same. And not till he reached the door of his wife's room did his back bend a little; but that might have been because the door was not high enough for his stature. Coming in from the light he could only with difficulty distinguish his wife's face, and when he succeeded in so doing, he perceived that it was perfectly still and that there were no tears in her eyes. In them was there neither anger nor grief; they were dumb, and painfully, obstinately silent, as was also her whole obese feeble body that was pressed against the bed-rail.

"Well, what? How are you feeling?" Father Ignaty inquired.

But her lips were dumb, and her eyes were silent. Father Ignaty laid his hand on her forehead; it was cold and damp, and Olga Stepanovna gave no sign whatever that she had felt his touch. And when he removed his hands from her forehead, two deep, grey eyes looked at him without blinking; they seemed almost black on account of the dilation of the pupils, and in them was neither grief nor anger.

"Well, I will go to my own room," said Father Ignaty, who had turned cold and frightened.

He went through the guest-chamber, where everything was clean and orderly as ever, and the high-backed chairs stood swathed in white covers, like corpses in their shrouds. At one of the windows

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hung a wire cage, but it was empty and the door was open.

“Nastasya!” Father Ignaty called, and his voice seemed to him rough, and he felt awkward, that he had called so loud in those quiet rooms, so soon after the funeral of their daughter. “Nastasya,” he called more gently, “where’s the canary?”

The cook, who had cried so much that her nose was swollen and become as red as a beet, answered rudely:

“Don’t know. It flew away.”

“Why did you let it go?” said Father Ignaty, angrily knitting his brows.

Nastasya burst out crying, and wiping her eyes with the ends of a print handkerchief she wore over her head, said through her tears:

“The dear little soul of the young mistress. How could I keep it?”

And it seemed even to Father Ignaty that the happy little yellow canary, which used to sing always with its head thrown back, was really the soul of Vera, and that if it had not flown away it would have been impossible to say that Vera was dead. And he became still more angry with the cook, and shouted:

“Get along!” and when Nastasya did not at once make for the door, added “Fool!”

II

From the day of the funeral silence reigned in the little house. It was not stillness, for that is the mere absence of noise, but it was *silence* which means that those who kept silence could, apparently, have spoken if they had pleased. So thought Father Ignaty when, entering his wife’s chamber, he would meet an obstinate glance, so heavy that it was as though the whole air were turned to lead, and was pressing on his head and back. So he thought when he examined his daughter’s music, on which her very voice was impressed; her books, and her portrait, a large one painted in colours which she had brought with her from St. Petersburg. In examining her portrait a certain order was evolved.

First he would look at her neck, on which the light was thrown in the portrait, and would imagine to himself a scratch on it, such as was on the neck of the dead Vera, and the origin of which he could not understand. And every time he meditated on the cause. If it had been the train which struck it, it would have shattered her whole head, and the head of the dead Vera was quite uninjured.

Could it be that some one had touched it with his foot when carrying home the corpse; or was it done unintentionally with the nail?

But to think long about the details of her death was horrible to Father Ignaty, so he would pass on to the eyes of the portrait. They were black and beautiful, with long eyelashes, the thick shadow of which lay below, so that the whites seemed peculiarly bright, and the

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two eyes were as though enclosed in black mourning frames. The unknown artist, a man of talent, had given to them a strange expression. It was as though between the eyes, and that on which they rested, there was a thin, transparent film. It reminded one of the black top of a grand piano, on which the summer dust lay in a thin layer, almost imperceptible, but still dimming the brightness of the polished wood. And wherever Father Ignaty placed the portrait, the eyes continually followed him, not speaking, but silent; and the silence was so clear that it seemed possible to hear it. And by degrees Father Ignaty came to think that he did hear the silence.

Every morning after the Eucharist Father Ignaty would go to the sitting-room, would take in at a glance the empty cage, and all the well-known arrangement of the room, sit down in an arm-chair, close his eyes and listen to the silence of the house. It was something strange. The cage was gently and tenderly silent; and grief and tears, and far-away dead laughter were felt in that silence. The silence of his wife, softened by the intervening walls, was obstinate, heavy as lead; and terrible, so terrible that Father Ignaty turned cold on the hottest day. Endless, cold as the grave, mysterious as death, was the silence of his daughter. It was as though the silence were a torture to itself, and as though it longed passionately to pass into speech, but that something strong and dull as a machine, held it motionless, and stretched it like a wire. And then somewhere in the far distance, the wire began to vibrate and emit a soft, timid, pitiful sound. Father Ignaty, with a mixture of joy and fear, would catch this incipient sound, and pressing his hands on the arms of the chair, would stretch his head forward and wait for the sound to reach him. But it would break off, and lapse into silence.

“Nonsense!” Father Ignaty would angrily exclaim, and rise from the chair, tall and upright as ever. From the window was to be seen the market-place, bathed in sunlight, paved with round, even stones, and on the other side the stone wall of a long, windowless storehouse. At the corner stood a cab like a statue in clay, and it was incomprehensible why it continued to stand there, when for whole hours together not a single passerby was to be seen.

III

Out of the house Father Ignaty had much talking to do: with his ecclesiastical subordinates, and with his parishioners when he was performing his duties; and sometimes with acquaintances when he played with them at “Preference.” But when he returned home he thought that he had been all the day silent. This came of the fact that with none of these people could he speak of the question which was the chief and most important of all to him, which racked his thoughts every night: Why had Vera died?

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Father Ignaty was unwilling to admit to himself that it was impossible now to solve this difficulty, and kept on thinking that it was still possible.

Every night—and they were all now for him sleepless—he would recall the moment when he and his wife had stood by Vera's bed at darkest midnight, and he had entreated her "Speak!" And when in his recollections he arrived at that word, even the rest of the scene presented itself to him as different to what it had really been. His closed eyes preserved in their darkness a vivid, unblurred picture of that night; they saw distinctly Vera lifting herself upon her bed and saying with a smile—But what did she say? And that unuttered word of hers, which would solve the whole question, seemed so near, that if he were to stretch his ear and still the beating of his heart, then, then he would hear it—and at the same time it was so infinitely, so desperately far.

Father Ignaty would rise from his bed, and stretching forth his clasped hands in a gesture of supplication, entreat:

"Vera!"

And silence was the answer he received.

One evening Father Ignaty went to Olga Stepanovna's room, where he had not been for about a week, and sitting down near the head of her bed, he turned away from her doleful, obstinate gaze, and said:

"Mother! I want to talk to you about Vera. Do you hear?"

Her eyes were silent, and Father Ignaty raising his voice began to speak in the loud and severe tones with which he addressed his penitents:

"I know you think that I was the cause of Vera's death. But consider, did I love her less than you? You judge strangely—I was strict, but did that prevent her from doing as she pleased? I made little of the respect due to a father; I meekly bowed my neck, when she, with no fear of my curse, went away—thither. And you—mother—did not you with tears entreat her to remain, until I ordered you to be silent. Am I responsible for her being born hardhearted? Did I not teach her of God, of humility, and of love?"

Father Ignaty gave a swift glance into his wife's eyes, and turned away.

"What could I do with her, if she would not open her grief to me. Command? I commanded her. Intreat? I intreated. What? Do you think I ought to have gone down on my knees before the little chit of a girl, and wept, like an old woman! What she had got in her head, and where she got it, I know not. Cruel, heartless daughter!"

Father Ignaty smote his knees with his fists.

"She was devoid of love—that's what it was! I know well enough what she called me—a tyrant. You she did love, didn't she? You who wept, and humbled yourself?"

Father Ignaty laughed noiselessly.

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“Lo—o—ved! That’s it, to comfort you she chose such a death—a cruel, disgraceful death! She died on the ballast, in the dirt—like a d—d—og, to which some one gives a kick on the muzzle.”

Father Ignaty’s voice sounded low and hoarse:

“I’m ashamed! I’m ashamed to go out into the street! I’m ashamed to come out of the chancel! I’m ashamed before God. Cruel, unworthy daughter! One could curse you in your grave—”

When Father Ignaty glanced again at his wife, she had fainted, and did not come to herself for some hours. And when she did come to herself her eyes were silent, and it was impossible to know whether she understood what Father Ignaty had said to her, or no.

That same night—it was a moonlight night in July, still, warm, soundless—Father Ignaty crept on tiptoe, so that his wife and her nurse should not hear him, up the stairs to Vera’s room. The window of the belvedere had not been opened since the death of Vera, and the atmosphere was dry and hot, with a slight smell of scorching from the iron roof, which had become heated during the day. There was an uninhabited and deserted feeling about the apartment from which man had been absent so long, and in which the wood of the walls, the furniture and other objects gave out a faint smell of growing decay.

The moonlight fell in a bright stripe across the window and floor, and reflected by the carefully washed white boards it illumined the corners with a dim semi-light, and the clean white bed with its two pillows, a big one and a little one, looked unearthly and ghostly. Father Ignaty opened the window, and the fresh air poured into the room in a broad stream, smelling of dust, of the neighbouring river, and the flowering lime, and bore on it a scarcely audible chorus, apparently, of people rowing a boat, and singing as they rowed.

Stepping silently on his naked feet, like a white ghost, Father Ignaty approached the empty bed, and bending his knees fell face-down on the pillows, and embraced them—the place where Vera’s face ought to have been.

He lay long so. The song became louder, and then gradually became inaudible; but he still lay there, with his long black hair dishevelled over his shoulders and on the bed.

The moon had moved on, and the room had become darker, when Father Ignaty raised his head, and throwing into his voice all the force of a long suppressed and long unacknowledged love, and listening to his words, as though not he, but Vera, were listening to them, exclaimed:

“Vera, my daughter! Do you understand what it means, daughter! Little daughter! My heart! my blood, my life! Your father, your poor old father, already grey and feeble.”

His shoulders shook, and all his heavy frame was convulsed. With a shudder Father Ignaty whispered tenderly, as to a little child:

“Your poor old father asks you. Yes, Verochka, he entreats. He weeps. He who never was so wont. Your grief, my little daughter, your

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suffering, are my own. More than mine.”

Father Ignaty shook his head.

“More, Verochka. What is death to me, an old man? But you—. If only you had realized, how tender, weak and timid you were! Do you remember how when you pricked your finger and the blood came, you began to cry. My little daughter! And you do indeed love me, love me dearly, I know. Every morning you kiss my hand. Speak, speak of what is grieving you—and I with these two hands will strangle your grief. They are still strong, Vera, these hands.”

His locks shook.

“Speak!”

He fixed his eyes on the wall, and stretching out his hands, cried: “Speak!”

But the chamber was silent, and from the far distance was borne in the sound of the long and short whistles of a locomotive.

Father Ignaty, rolling his distended eyes, as though there stood before him the frightful ghost of a mutilated corpse, slowly raised himself from his knees, and with uncertain movement lifted his hand, with the fingers separated and nervously stretched out, to his head. Going out by the door, Father Ignaty sharply whispered the word:

“Speak!”

And silence was the answer he received.

IV

The next day, after an early and solitary dinner, Father Ignaty went to the cemetery—for the first time since the death of his daughter. It was close, deserted, and still, as though the hot day were but an illumined night; but Father Ignaty as his habit was, with an effort straightened his back, looked sternly from side to side, and thought that he was the same as heretofore. He did not regard the new, but terrible, weakness of his legs, nor that his long beard had grown completely white, as though bitten by a hard frost. The way to the cemetery led through the long, straight street, which sloped gently upwards, and at the end of which gleamed white the roof of the lych-gate, which was like a black, ever-open mouth edged with gleaming teeth.

Vera’s grave lay in the very depth of the cemetery, where the gravelled pathways ended; and Father Ignaty had to wander for long on the narrow tracks, along a broken line of little mounds which protruded from the grass, forgotten of all, deserted of all. Here and there he came upon monuments sloping and green with age, broken-down railings, and great heavy stones cast upon the ground, and pressing it with a sort of grim senile malignity.

Vera’s grave was next to one of these stones. It was covered with new sods, already turning yellow, while all around it was green. A rowan tree was intertwined with a maple, and a widely spreading clump

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of hazel stretched its pliant branches with rough furred leaves over the grave. Sitting down on the neighbouring tomb, and sighing repeatedly, Father Ignaty looked round, cast a glance at the cloudless desert sky, in which the red-hot disc of the sun hung suspended in perfect immobility—and then only did he become conscious of that profound stillness, like nothing else in the world, which holds sway over a cemetery, when there is not a breath of wind to rustle the dead leaves. And once more the thought came to Father Ignaty, that this was not stillness, but silence. It overflowed to the very brick walls of the cemetery, climbed heavily over them, and submerged the city. And its end was only there—in those grey, stubbornly, obstinately silent eyes.

Father Ignaty shrugged his shoulders, which were becoming cold, and let his eyes fall on Vera's grave. He gazed long at the short little seared stalks of grass, which had been torn from the ground somewhere in the wide wind-swept fields, and had failed to take root in the new soil; and he could not realize that there, under that grass, at a few feet from him, lay Vera. And this nearness seemed incomprehensible, and imbued his soul with a confusion and strange alarm. She, of whom he was accustomed to think as having for ever disappeared in the dark depth of infinity, was here, close—and it was difficult to understand that nevertheless she was not, and never would be again. And it seemed to Father Ignaty that if he spoke some word, which he almost felt upon his lips, or if he made some movement, Vera would come forth from the tomb, and stand up as tall and beautiful as ever. And that not only would she arise; but that all the dead, who could be felt, so awesome in their solemn cold silence, would rise too.

Father Ignaty took off his black wide-brimmed hat, smoothed his wavy locks, and said in a whisper:

“Vera!”

He became uneasy lest he should be heard by some stranger, and stood upon the tomb and looked over the crosses. But there was no one near, and he repeated aloud:

“Vera!”

It was Father Ignaty's old voice, dry and exacting, and it was strange that a demand made with such force remained without answer.

“Vera!”

Loud and persistently the voice called, and when it was silent for a moment it seemed as though somewhere below a vague answer resounded. And Father Ignaty looked once more around, removed his hair from his ears, and laid them on the rough prickly sod.

“Vera! Speak!”

And Father Ignaty felt with horror that something cold as the tomb penetrated his ear, and froze the brain, and that Vera spoke—but what she said was ever the same long silence. It became ever more and more alarming and terrible, and when Father Ignaty dragged his head with an effort from the ground, pale as that of a corpse, it

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seemed to him that the whole air trembled and vibrated with a resonant silence, as though a wild storm had arisen on that terrible sea. The silence choked him: it kept rolling backwards and forwards through his head in icy waves, and stirred his hair; it broke against his bosom, which groaned beneath the shocks. Trembling all over, casting from side to side quick, nervous glances, he slowly raised himself, and strove with torturing efforts to straighten his back and to restore the proud carriage to his trembling body. And in this he succeeded. With slow deliberation he shook the dust from his knees, put on his hat, made the sign of the cross three times over the grave, and went with even, firm gait, and yet did not recognize the well-known cemetery, and lost his way.

“Lost my way!” he laughed, and stood still at the branching paths.

He stood still for a moment, and then without thinking turned to the left, because it was impossible to stand still and wait. The silence pursued him. It rose from the green graves; the grim grey crosses breathed it; it came forth in thin suffocating streams from every pore of the ground, which was sated with corpses. Father Ignaty’s steps became quicker and quicker. Dazed, he went round the same paths again and again, he leapt the graves, stumbled against the railings, grasped the prickly tin wreaths, and the soft stuff tore to pieces in his hands. Only one thought, that of getting out, was left in his head. He rushed from side to side, and at last ran noiselessly, a tall figure, almost unrecognizable in his streaming cassock, with his hair floating on the air. More frightened than at the sight of a corpse risen from the grave, would have been any one who had met this wild figure of a man running, leaping, waving his arms—if he had recognized his mad, distorted face, and heard the dull rattle that escaped from his open mouth.

At full run Father Ignaty jumped out upon the little square at the end of which stood the low white mortuary chapel. In the porch on a little bench there dozed an old man who looked like a pilgrim from afar, and near him two old beggar-women were flying at one another, quarrelling and scolding.

When Father Ignaty reached home, it was already getting dark, and the lamp was lit in Olga Stepanovna’s room. Without change of clothes or removing his hat, torn and dusty, he came hurriedly to his wife and fell on his knees.

“Mother—Olga—pity me!” he sobbed; “I am going out of my mind.”

He beat his head against the edge of the table, and sobbed tumultuously, painfully, as a man does who never weeps. He lifted his head, confident that in a moment a miracle would be performed, and that his wife would speak, and pity him.

“Dear!”

With his whole big body he stretched out towards his wife, and met the look of the grey eyes. In them there was neither compassion

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nor anger. Maybe his wife forgave and pitied him, but in those eyes there was neither pity nor forgiveness. They were dumb and silent.

...

And the whole desolate house was silent.

LAUGHTER

I

AT 6:30 I was certain that she would come, and I was desperately happy. My coat was fastened only by the top button, and fluttered in the cold wind; but I felt no cold. My head was proudly thrown back, and my student's cap was cocked on the back of my head; my eyes with respect to the men they met were expressive of patronage and boldness, with respect to the women of a seductive tenderness. Although she had been my only love for four whole days, I was so young, and my heart was so rich in love, that I could not remain perfectly indifferent to other women. My steps were quick, bold and free.

At 6:45 my coat was fastened by two buttons, and I looked only at the women, but no longer with a seductive tenderness, but rather with disgust. I only wanted *one* woman—the others might go to the devil; they only confused me, and with their seeming resemblance to Her gave to my movements an uncertain and jerky indecision.

At 6:55 I felt warm.

At 6:58 I felt cold.

As it struck seven I was convinced that she would not come.

By 8:30 I presented the appearance of the most pitiful creature in the world. My coat was fastened with all its buttons, collar turned up, cap tilted over my nose, which was blue with cold; my hair was over my forehead, my moustache and eyelashes were whitening with rime, and my teeth gently chattered. From my shambling gait, and bowed back, I might have been taken for a fairly hale old man returning from *rea party* at the almshouse.

And She was the cause of all this—She! “Oh, the Dev—! No, I won't. Perhaps she could not get away, or she is ill, or dead. She's dead!”—and I swore.

II

“Eugenia Nikolaevna will be there to-night,” one of my companions, a student, remarked to me, without the slightest *arrière pensée*. He could not know how that I had waited for her in the frost from

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seven to half-past eight.

"Indeed," I replied, as in deep thought, but within my soul there leapt out: "Oh, the Dev—!" "There" meant at the Polozovs' evening party. Now the Polozovs were people with whom I was not upon visiting terms. But this evening I would be there.

"You fellows!" I shouted cheerfully, "to-day is Christmas Day, when everybody enjoys himself. Let us do so too."

"But how?" one of them mournfully replied.

"And where?" continued another.

"We will dress up, and go round to all the evening parties," I decided.

And these insensate individuals actually became cheerful. They shouted, leapt, and sang. They thanked me for my suggestion, and counted up the amount of "the ready" available. In the course of half an hour we had collected all the lonely, disconsolate students in town; and when we had recruited a cheerful dozen or so of leaping devils, we repaired to a hairdresser's—he was also a costumier—and let in there the cold, and youth, and laughter.

I wanted something sombre and handsome, with a shade of elegant sadness; so I requested:

"Give me the dress of a Spanish grandee."

Apparently this grandee had been very tall, for I was altogether swallowed up in his dress, and felt there as absolutely alone as though I had been in a wide, empty hall. Getting out of this costume, I asked for something else.

"Would you like to be a clown? Motley with bells."

"A clown, indeed!" I exclaimed with contempt.

"Well, then, a bandit. Such a hat and dagger!"

Oh! dagger! Yes, that would suit my purpose. But unfortunately the bandit whose clothes they gave me had scarcely grown to full stature. Most probably he had been a corrupt youth of eight years. His little hat would not cover the back of my head, and I had to be dragged out of his velvet breeks as out of a trap. A page's dress was no go: it was all spotted like the pard. The monk's cowl was all in holes.

"Look sharp; it's late," said my companions, who were already dressed, trying to hurry me up.

There was but one costume left—that of a distinguished Chinaman. "Give me the Chinaman's," said I with a wave of my hand. And they gave it me. It was the devil knows what! I am not speaking of the costume itself. I pass over in silence those idiotic flowered boots, which were too short for me, and reached only half-way to my knees; but in the remaining, by far the most essential part, stuck out like two incomprehensible adjuncts on either side of my feet. I say nothing of the pink rag which covered my head like a wig, and was tied by threads to my ears, so that they protruded and stood up like a bat's. But the mask!

It was, if one may use the expression, a face *in the abstract*. It had

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nose, eyes, and mouth all right enough, and all in the proper places; but there was nothing human about it. A human being could not look so placid—even in his coffin. It was expressive neither of sorrow, nor cheerfulness, nor surprise—it expressed absolutely nothing! It looked at you squarely, and placidly—and an uncontrollable laughter overwhelmed you. My companions rolled about on the sofas, sank impotently down on the chairs, and gesticulated.

“It will be the most original mask of the evening,” they declared.

I was ready to weep; but no sooner did I glance in the mirror than I too was convulsed with laughter. Yes, it will be a most original mask!

“In no circumstances are we to take off our masks,” said my companions on the way. “We will give our word.”

“Honour bright!”

III

Positively it was the most original mask. People followed me in crowds, turned me about, jostled me, pinched me. But when, harried, I turned on my persecutors in anger—uncontrollable laughter seized them. Wherever I went, a roaring cloud of laughter encompassed and pressed on me; it moved together with me, and I could not escape from this circle of mad mirth. Sometimes it seized even myself, and I shouted, sang, and danced till everything seemed to go round before me, as if I was drunk. But how remote everything was from me! And how solitary was I under that mask! At last they left me in peace. With anger and fear, with malice and tenderness intermingling, I looked at her.

“’Tis I.”

Her long eyelashes were lifted slowly in surprise, and a whole sheaf of black rays flashed upon me, and a laugh, resonant, joyous, bright as the spring sunshine—a laugh answered me.

“Yes, it is I; I, I say,” I insisted with a smile. “Why did you not come this evening?”

But she only laughed, laughed joyously.

“I suffered so much; I felt so hurt,” said I, imploring an answer.

But she only laughed. The black sheen of her eyes was extinguished, and still more brightly her smile lit up. It was the sun indeed, but burning, pitiless, cruel.

“What’s the matter with you?”

“Is it really you?” said she, restraining herself. “How comical you are!”

My shoulders were bowed, and my head hung down—such despair was there in my pose. And while she, with the expiring afterglow of the smile upon her face, looked at the happy young couples that hurried by us, I said: “It’s not nice to laugh. Do you not feel that there is a living, suffering face behind my ridiculous mask—and can’t you

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see that it was only for the opportunity it gave me of seeing you that I put it on? You gave me reason to hope for your love, and then so quickly, so cruelly deprived me of it. Why did you not come?"

With a protest on her tender, smiling lips, she turned sharply to me, and a cruel laugh utterly overwhelmed her. Choking, almost weeping, covering her face with a fragrant lace handkerchief, she brought out with difficulty: "Look at yourself in the mirror behind. Oh, how droll you are!"

Contracting my brows, clenching my teeth with pain, with a face grown cold, from which all the blood had fled, I looked at the mirror. There gazed out at me an idiotically placid, stolidly complacent, inhumanly immovable face. And I burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. And with the laughter not yet subsided, but already with the trembling of rising anger, with the madness of despair, I said—nay, almost shouted:

"You ought not to laugh!"

And when she was quiet again I went on speaking in a whisper of my love. I had never spoken so well, for I had never loved so strongly. I spoke of the tortures of expectation, of the venomous tears of mad jealousy and grief, of my own soul which was all love. And I saw how her drooping eyelashes cast thick dark shadow over her blanched cheeks. I saw how across their dull pallor the fire, bursting into flame, threw a red reflection, and how her whole pliant body involuntarily bent towards me.

She was dressed as the Goddess of Night, and was all mysterious, clad in a black, mist-like face, which twinkled with stars of brilliants. She was beautiful as a forgotten dream of far-off childhood. As I spoke my eyes filled with tears, and my heart beat with gladness. And I perceived, I perceived at last, how a tender, piteous smile parted her lips, and her eyelashes were lifted all a-tremble. Slowly, timorously, but with infinite confidence, she turned her head towards me, and—

And such a shriek of laughter I never heard!

"No, no, I can't," she almost groaned, and throwing back her head, she burst into a resonant cascade of laughter.

Oh, if but for a moment I could have had a human face! I bit my lips, tears rolled over my heated face; but it—that idiotic mask, on which everything was in its right place, nose, eyes, and lips—looked with a complacency stolidly horrible in its absurdity. And when I went out, swaying on my flowered feet, it was long before I got out of reach of that ringing laugh. It was as though a silvery stream of water were falling from an immense height, and breaking in cheerful song upon the hard rock.

IV

Scattered over the whole sleeping street and rousing the stillness

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of the night with our lusty, excited voices, we walked home. A companion said to me:

“You have had a colossal success. I never saw people laugh so—Halloa! what are you up to? Why are you tearing your mask? I say, you fellows, he’s gone mad! Look, he’s tearing his costume to pieces! By Jove! he’s actually crying.”

THE FRIEND

WHEN late at night he rang at his own door, the first sound after that of the bell was a resonant dog’s bark, in which might be distinguished both fear that it might have been a stranger, and joy that it was his own master, who had arrived.

Then there followed the squish-squash of goloshes, and the squeak of the key taken out of the lock.

He came in, and taking off his wrappers in the dark, was conscious of a silent female figure close by, while the nails of a dog caressingly scratched at his knees, and a hot tongue licked his chilled hand.

“Well, what is it?” a sleepy voice asked in a tone of perfunctory interest.

“Nothing! I’m tired,” curtly replied Vladimir Mikhailovich, and went to his own room. The dog followed him, his nails striking sharply on the waxed floor, and jumped on to the bed. When the light of the lamp which he lit filled the room, his glance met the steady gaze of the dog’s black eyes. They seemed to say: “Come now, pet me.” And to make the request better understood the dog stretched out his forepaws, and laid his head sideways upon them, while his hinder quarters wriggled comically, and his tail kept twirling round like the handle of a barrel-organ.

“My only friend!” said Vladimir Mikhailovich, as he stroked the black, glossy coat. As though from excess of feeling the dog turned on his back, showed his white teeth, and growled gently, joyful and excited. But Vladimir Mikhailovich sighed, petted the dog, and thought to himself, how that there was no one else in the world that would ever love him.

If he happened to return home early, and not tired out with work, he would sit down to write, and the dog curled himself into a ball on a chair somewhere near to him, opened one black eye now and again, and sleepily wagged his tail. And when excited by the process of authorship, tortured by the sufferings of his own heroes, and choking with a plethora of thoughts and mental pictures, he walked about in his room, and smoked cigarette after cigarette, the dog would follow him with an anxious look, and wag his tail more vigorously than ever.

“Shall we become famous, you and I, Vasyuk?” he would inquire of the dog, who would wag his tail in affirmation. “We’ll eat liver then, is that right?”

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“Right!” the dog would reply, stretching himself luxuriously. He was very fond of liver.

Vladimir Mikhailovich often had visitors. Then his aunt, with whom he lived, would borrow china from her neighbour, and give them tea, setting on samovar after samovar. She would go and buy vodka and sausages, and sigh heavily as she drew out from the bottom of her pocket a greasy rouble-note. In the room with its smoke-laden atmosphere loud voices resounded. They quarrelled and laughed, said droll and sharp things, complained of their fate and envied one another. They advised Vladimir Mikhailovich to give up literature and take to some more lucrative occupation. Some said that he ought to consult a doctor, others clinked glasses with him, while they bewailed the injury that vodka was doing to his health. He was so sickly, so continually nervous. This was why he had such fits of depression, and why he demanded of life the impossible. All addressed him as “thou,” and their voices expressed their interest in him, and in the friendliest manner, they would invite him to drive beyond the city with them, and prolong the conviviality. And when he drove off merry, making more noise than the others, and laughing at nothing, there followed him two pairs of eyes: the grey eyes of his aunt, angry and reproachful, and the anxiously caressing black eyes of the dog.

He did not remember what he did, when he had been drinking, and returned home in the morning bespattered with mud and marl, and without his hat.

They would tell him afterwards how in his cups he had insulted his friend; at home had reviled his Aunt, who had wept and said she could not bear such a life any longer, but must do away with herself; and how he had tortured his dog, when he refused to come to him and be petted; and that when, terrified and trembling, he showed his teeth, he had beaten him with a strap.

And the following day all would have finished their day’s work before he woke up sick and miserable. His heart would beat unevenly and feel faint, filling him with dread of an early death, while his hands trembled. On the other side of the wall, in the kitchen, his Aunt would stomp about, the sound of her steps re-echoing through the cold, empty flat. She would not speak to Vladimir Mikhailovich, but austere and unforgiving, gave him water in silence. And he too would keep silence, looking at the ceiling, at a particular stain long known to him, and thinking how he was wasting his life, and that he would never gain fame and happiness. He confessed to himself that he was weak, worthless and terribly lonesome. The boundless world seethed with moving human beings, and yet there was not one single soul who would come to him and share his pains—madly arrogant thoughts of fame, coupled with a deadly consciousness of worthlessness. With trembling, bungling hand he would grip his forehead, and press his eyelids, but however firmly he pressed, still the tears would ooze through, and creep down over his cheeks, which still retained the

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scent of purchased kisses. And when he dropped his hand, it would fall upon another forehead, hairy and smooth, and his gaze, confused with tears, would meet the caressing black eyes of the dog, and his ears would catch his soft sighs. And touched and comforted he would whisper:

“My friend, my only friend!”

When he recovered, his friends used to come to him, and softly reprove him, giving advice and speaking of the evils of drink. But some of his friends, whom he had insulted when drunk, ceased to notice him in the streets. They understood that he did not wish them any harm, but they preferred not to run the risk of further unpleasantnesses. Thus he spent the oppressive fume-laden nights and the sternly avenging sunlit days at war with himself, his obscurity and loneliness. And oftentimes the steps of his Aunt resounded through the deserted flat, while from the bed was heard a whisper, which resembled a sigh:

“My friend, my only friend!”

Eventually his illusive fame came, came unguessed at, and unexpected, and filled the empty apartments with light and life. His Aunt's steps were drowned in the tramp of friendly footsteps, and the spectre of loneliness vanished, and the soft whisper ceased. Vodka, too, disappeared, that ominous companion of the solitary, and Vladimir Mikhailovich ceased to insult his Aunt and his friends.

The dog too was glad. Still louder became his bark on the occasion of their belated meetings, when his master, his only friend, came home kind, happy, and laughing. The dog himself learnt to smile; his upper lip would be drawn up exposing his white teeth, and his nose would pucker up into funny little wrinkles. Happy and frolicsome he began to play; he would seize hold of things and make as though he would carry them away, and when his master stretched out his hands to catch him, he would let him approach to within a stride of him, and then run away again, while his black eyes sparkled with artfulness.

Sometimes Vladimir Mikhailovich would point to his Aunt and say, “Bite her!” and the dog would fly at her in feigned anger, shake her petticoat, and then, out of breath, glance sideways at his friend with his roguish black eyes. The Aunt's thin lips would be contorted into an austere smile, and stroking the dog, now tired out with play, on his glossy head, would say:

“Sensible dog!—only he does not like soup.”

And at night, when Vladimir Mikhailovich was at work, and only the jarring of the window-panes, caused by the street traffic, broke the stillness, the dog would doze near to him on the alert, and wake at his slightest movement.

“What, laddie, would you like some liver?” he would ask.

“Yes,” would Vasyuk reply, wagging his tail in the affirmative.

“Well, wait a bit, I'll buy you some. What do you want? To be petted? I have no time now, I am busy; go to sleep, laddie!”

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Every night he asked the dog about liver, but he continually forgot to buy it, because his head was full of plans for a new work, and of thoughts of a woman he was in love with. Only once did he remember the liver. It was in the evening; he was passing a butcher's shop, arm in arm with a pretty woman who pressed her shoulder close against his. He jokingly told her about his dog, and praised his sense and intelligence. Showing off somewhat, he went on to tell her that there were terrible, distressing moments, when he regarded his dog as his only friend, and laughingly related his promise to buy liver for his friend, when he should have attained happiness—and he pressed the girl's hand closer to him.

"You clever fellow," cried she, laughing; "you would make even stones speak. But I don't like dogs at all: they are so apt to carry infection."

Vladimir Mikhailovich agreed that that was the case, and held his tongue with regard to his habit of sometimes kissing that black shiny muzzle.

One day, Vasyuk played more than usual during the daytime, but in the evening, when Vladimir Mikhailovich came home, he did not turn up to meet him, and his Aunt said that the dog was ill. Vladimir Mikhailovich was alarmed, and went into the kitchen, where the dog lay on a bed of soft litter. His nose was dry and hot, and his eyes were troubled. He made a slight movement of his tail, and looked piteously at his friend.

"What is it, boy; ill? My poor fellow!"

The tail made a feeble motion, and the black eyes became moist.

"Lie still, then; lie still!"

"He will have to be taken to the veterinary: but to-morrow, I have no time. But it will pass off—" thought Vladimir Mikhailovich, and he forgot the dog in thinking of the happiness the pretty girl might give him. All the next day he was away from home. When he returned his hand fumbled long in searching for the bell-handle, and when it was found hesitated long as to what to do with the wooden thing.

"Ah, yes! I must ring," he laughed, and then began singing, "Open—ye!"

The bell gave a solitary ring, goloshes squish-squashed, and the key squeaked as it was taken out of the lock.

Vladimir Mikhailovich, still humming, passed through into his room, and walked about a long time before it occurred to him that he ought to light the lamp. Then he undressed, but for a long time he kept in his hands the boots he had taken off, and looked at them as though they were the pretty girl, who had only that day said so simply and sincerely, "Yes! I love you!" And when he had got into bed, he still saw her speaking face, until side by side with it there appeared the black shiny muzzle of his dog, and with a sharp pain there crept into his heart the question:

"But where is Vasyuk?"

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He became ashamed of having forgotten the sick dog—but not particularly so: for had not Vasyuk been ill several times before, and nothing had come of it. But to-morrow the veterinary must be sent for. At all events he need not think of the dog, and of his own ingratitude—that would do no good, and would only diminish his own happiness.

When morning came the dog became worse. He was troubled with nausea, and being a well-mannered dog, he rose with difficulty from his litter, and went to the courtyard, staggering like a drunken man. His little black body was sleek as ever, but his head hung feebly, and his eyes, which now looked grey, gazed in mournful surprise.

At first Vladimir Mikhailovich himself, with the help of his Aunt, opened wide the dog's mouth, with its yellowing gums, and poured in medicine: but the dog was in such pain and suffered so, that it became too distressing to him to look at him, and he left him to the care of his Aunt. And when the dog's feeble, helpless moan penetrated through the wall, he stuffed his fingers into his ears, and was surprised at the extent of his love for this poor dog.

In the evening he went out. Before doing so he gave a look in at the kitchen. His Aunt was on her knees stroking the hot, trembling head with her dry hand.

With his legs stretched out like sticks, the dog lay heavy and motionless, and only by putting one's ear down close to his muzzle could one catch the low, frequent moans.

His eyes, now quite grey, fixed themselves on his master as he came in, and when he carefully passed his hand over the dog's forehead, his groans became clearer and more piteous.

"What, laddie, are you so bad? But wait a bit, when you are well I will buy you some liver."

"I'll make him eat soup!" jokingly threatened the Aunt.

The dog closed his eyes, and Vladimir Mikhailovich with a forced joke went out in haste; and when he got into the street he hired a cab, since he was afraid of being late at the rendezvous with Natalya Lavrentyevna.

That autumn's evening the air was so fresh and pure, and so many stars twinkled in the dark sky! They kept falling, leaving behind them a fiery track, and burst kindling with a bluish light a pretty girl's face, and were reflected in her dark eyes—as though a glow-worm had appeared at the bottom of a deep dark well. And greedy lips noiselessly kissed those eyes, those lips fresh as the night air, and those cool cheeks. Voices exultant, and trembling with love, whispered, prattling of joy and life.

When Vladimir Mikhailovich drove up to his house, he remembered the dog, and his breast ached with a dark foreboding.

When his Aunt opened the door, he asked:

"Well, how's Vasyuk?"

"Dead. He died about an hour after you left."

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The dead dog had been already removed to some outhouse, and the litter bed cleared away. But Vladimir Mikhailovich did not even wish to see the body; it would be too distressing a sight. When he lay down in bed, and all noises were stilled in the empty flat, he began to weep restrainedly. His lips puckered up silently, and tears forced their way through his closed eyelids, and rolled quickly down on to his bosom. He was ashamed that he was kissing a woman at the very moment when he, who had been his friend, lay a-dying on the floor alone. And he dreaded what his Aunt would think of him, a serious man, if she heard that he had been crying about a dog.

Much time had elapsed since these events. Mysterious, outrageous fame had left Vladimir Mikhailovich just as it had come to him. He had disappointed the hopes that had been built on him, and all were angry at this disappointment, and avenged themselves on him by exasperating remarks and cold jeers. And then they had shut down on him dead, heavy oblivion, like the lid of a coffin.

The young woman had dropped him. She too considered herself taken in.

The oppressive fume-laden nights, and the pitilessly vengeful sunlit days, went by: and frequently, more frequently than formerly, the Aunt's steps resounded through the empty flat, while he lay on his bed looking at the well-known stain on the ceiling, and whispered:

“My friend, my friend, my only friend!”

And his trembling hand fell feebly on an empty place.

IN THE BASEMENT

I

HE drank hard, lost his work and his acquaintances, and took up his abode in a cellar in the company of thieves and unfortunates, living on the last things he had.

His was a sickly, anaemic body, worn out with work, eaten up by sufferings and vodka. Death was already on the watch for him, like a grey bird-of-prey blind in the sunshine, sharp-eyed in the black night. By day death hid itself in the dark corners, but at night it took its seat noiselessly by his bedside, and sat long, till the very dawn, and was quiet, patient, and persistent. When at the first streak of light he put out his pale head from under the blankets, his eyes gleaming like those of a hunted wild animal, the room was already empty. But he did not trust this deceptive emptiness, which others believe in. He suspiciously looked round into all the corners; with crafty suddenness he cast a glance behind his back, and then leaning upon his elbows he gazed intently before him into the melting darkness of the departing night. And then he saw something, such as ordinary people do not

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see: the rocking of a monster grey body, shapeless, terrible. It was transparent, embraced all things, and objects were seen in it as behind a glass wall. But now he feared it not; and it departed until the next night, leaving behind it a cold impression.

For a short time he was wrapped in oblivion, and terrible, extraordinary dreams came to him. He saw a white room, with white floor and walls, illumined by a bright, white light, and a black serpent which was creeping away under the door with a gentle rustling-like laughter. Pressing its sharp flat head to the floor, it wriggled and quickly glided away, and was lost somewhere or other, and then again its black flattened nose appeared through a crevice under the door, and its body drew itself out in a black ribbon—and so again and again. Once in his sleep he dreamed of something pleasant, and laughed, but the sound seemed strange, and more like a suppressed sob—it was terrible to hear it—his soul somewhere in the unknown depths laughing, or perhaps weeping, while the body lay motionless as the dead.

By degrees the sounds of nascent day began to invade his consciousness: the indistinct talk of passers-by, the distant squeaking of a door, the swish of the broom as he brushed away the snow from the window-sill—all the undefined bustle of a great city awakening. And then there came upon him the most horrible, mercilessly clear consciousness that a new day had arrived, and that he would soon have to get up, in order to struggle for life without any hope of victory.

One must live.

He turned his back to the light, threw the blanket over his head, so that not the minutest ray might penetrate to his eyes, squeezed himself together into a small ball, drawing his legs up to his very chin, and so lay motionless, dreading to stir and to stretch out his legs. A whole mountain of clothes lay upon him as a protection against the cold of the basement, but he did not feel their weight, and his body remained cold. And at every sound speaking of life he seemed to himself to be monstrous and unveiled, and he hugged himself together all the tighter, and silently groaned—neither with voice nor in thought—since he feared now his own voice and his own thoughts. He prayed to some one that the day might not come, so that he might always lie under the heap of rags, without movement or thought, and he concentrated his whole will to keep back the coming day, and to persuade himself that it was still night. And more than anything in the world he wished that some one from behind would put a revolver to the back of his head, just at the place where there is a cavity, and blow his brains out.

But daylight unfolded, broad, irresistible, calling forcibly to life, and all the world began to move, to talk, to work, to think. The first in the basement to wake was the landlady, old Matryona. She got up from the side of her twenty-five-year-old lover, and began to stamp about the kitchen, clatter with the buckets, and busy herself about something close to Khinyakov's very door. He felt her approach, and

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lay quiet, determined not to answer if she called him. But she kept silence, and went away somewhere. In the course of an hour or two the two other lodgers woke up, an unfortunate named Dunyasha, and the old woman's lover Abram Petrovich. He was so called in spite of his youth out of respect, because he was a daring and skilful thief, and something else besides, which was guessed at, but not spoken about.

The waking up of these terrified Khinyakov more than anything, since they had a hold on him, and the right to come in and sit on his bed, to touch him, and recall him to thought and speech. He had become intimate with Dunyasha one day when he was drunk, and had promised her marriage, and although she had laughed and slapped him on the back, she sincerely considered him as her lover, and patronized him, although she was herself a stupid, dirty, unwashed slut, who had spent many a night at the police-station. With Abram Petrovich he had only the day before yesterday been drinking, and they had kissed one another and sworn eternal friendship.

When the fresh loud voice of Abram Petrovich and his quick steps resounded near the door, Khinyakov's heart's blood curdled with fear and suspense, and he could not help groaning aloud, and then was all the more frightened. In one distinct picture that drinking-bout passed before him: how they had sat in some dark tavern or other, illumined by a single lamp, amid dark people who kept whispering together about something, while they themselves also whispered together. Abram Petrovich was pale and excited, and complained of the hardships of a thief's life; for some reason or other he had bared his arms and allowed him to feel the badly-mended bones of his once broken arm, and Khinyakov had kissed him and said:

"I love thieves, they are so bold," and proposed to him that they should drink to "brotherhood," although they had for long been on quite intimate terms.

"And I love you, because you are educated, and understand us so well," replied Abram Petrovich.

"Look again at my arm; here it is, eh?"

And again the white arm had passed before his eyes, seeming to be sorry for its own whiteness, and suddenly realizing something (which he did not now remember or understand), he had kissed that arm, and Abram Petrovich had proudly cried:

"Indeed, brother, death before surrender!"

And then something dirty whirling round and round, howls, whistles, and jumping lights. Then he had felt cheerful, but now when death was hiding in the corners, and when day was rushing in upon him from every direction with the inexorable necessity to live and do something, to struggle after something and ask for something—he felt tortured and inexpressibly frightened.

"Are you asleep, sir?" Abram Petrovich inquired sarcastically through the door, and receiving no answer, added:

"Well, then, sleep away; devil take you!"

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Many acquaintances visited Abram Petrovich, and throughout the day the door squeaked on its hinges, and bass voices were to be heard. And it seemed to Khinyakov at every sound that they were coming for him, and he buried himself the deeper in his bedclothes, and listened long to catch to whom the voice belonged. He waited and waited in agony, trembling all over his body, although there was no one in the whole world who would come to fetch him.

He had once had a wife—long ago—but she was dead. Still further back in the past he had had brothers and sisters, and still earlier—something indistinct and beautiful, which he called Mother. All these were dead, or possibly some one of them might be still alive, only so lost in the wide, wide world, that he was as though dead. And he himself would soon be dead too—he knew it. When he should get up to-day his legs would tremble and give way under him, and his hands would make uncertain strange motions—and this was death. But meanwhile he must need live, and that is such a serious task for a man who has neither money, health, nor will, that Khinyakov was seized with despair. He threw off his blanket, clasped his hands, and breathed out into the void such prolonged groans, that they seemed to proceed from a thousand suffering breasts, therefore was it that they were so full, brimming over with insupportable torture.

“Open, you devil!” cried Dunyasha from the other side of the door, pounding it with her fists. “Or I’ll break the door down!”

Trembling with tottering steps, Khinyakov reached the door, opened it, and quickly lay down again, nay almost fell, on his bed. Dunyasha, already befrizzled and bepowdered, sat down at his side, shoving him against the wall, and, crossing her legs, said with an air of importance:

“I have brought you news. Katya expired yesterday?”

“What Katya?” asked Khinyakov, using his tongue clumsily and uncertainly, as though it did not belong to him.

“Come, now, you can’t have forgotten!” laughed Dunyasha. “The Katya who used to live here. How can you have forgotten her, when she has been gone only a week?”

“Died?”

“Why, of course died, as all die.” Dunyasha moistened the tip of her little finger and wiped the powder from her thin eye-lashes.

“What of?”

“What all die of. Who knows what? They told me yesterday at the cafe, Katya was dead.”

“Did you love her?”

“Certainly I loved her! What are you talking about!”

Dunyasha’s stupid eyes looked at Khinyakov in dull indifference as she swung her fat leg. She did not know what more to say, and tried to look at him, as he lay there, in such a manner as to show to him her love, and with that intent she gently winked her eye, and dropped the corners of her full lips.

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The day had begun.

II

That day, a Saturday, the frost was so severe that the boys did not go to school, and the horseraces were postponed for fear of the horses catching cold. When Natalya Vladimirovna came out from the lying-in hospital, she was for the first moment glad that it was evening, that there was no one on the embankment, that none met her—an unmarried girl, with a six-day-old child in her arms. It had seemed to her that, as soon as she should cross the threshold, she would be met by a shouting, hissing crowd, among whom would be her senile, paralytic, and almost blind father, her acquaintances, students, officers and their young ladies; and that all these would point the finger at her and cry:

“There goes a girl who has passed through six classes at the high-school, had acquaintances among the students both intellectual and of good birth, who used to blush at a word spoken unadvisedly, and who six days ago gave birth to a child, in the lying-in hospital, side by side with other fallen women.”

But the embankment was deserted. Along it the icy wind traveled unrestrained, lifted a grey cloud of snow, ground by the frost into a biting dust, and covered with it everything living and dead which met it in its path. With a gentle whistle it wove itself round the metal pillars of the railings, so that they shone again, and looked so cold and lonely that it was a pain to look at them. And the girl felt herself to be just such a cold thing, an outcast from mankind and life. She had on a little short jacket, the one which she usually wore skating, and which she had hurriedly thrown on when she left her home suffering the premonitory pains of childbirth. And when the wind seized her, and wrapped her thin skirt about her ankles, and chilled her head, she began to fear that she might be frozen to death; and her fear of a crowd disappeared, and the world expanded into a boundless icy wilderness, in which was neither man, nor light, nor warmth. Two burning tear-drops gathered in her eyes, and froze there. Bending her head down, she wiped them away with the formless bundle she was carrying, and went on faster. Now she no longer loved herself nor the child, and both lives seemed to her worthless; only certain words, which had, as it were, sunk into her brain, persistently repeated themselves, and went before her calling:

“Nyemchinovskaya Street, the second house from the corner. Nyemchinovskaya Street, the second house from the corner.”

These words she had repeated for six days as she lay on the bed and fed her infant. They meant, that she must go to Nyemchinovskaya Street, where her foster-sister, an unfortunate, lived, because only with her could she find an asylum for herself and her child. A year ago,

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when all was still well and she was continually laughing and singing, she had visited Katya, who was ill, and had helped her with money, and now she was the only human being remaining before whom she was not ashamed.

“Nyemchinovskaya Street, the second house from the corner. Nyemchinovskaya Street, the second house from the corner.”

She walked on, and the wind whirled angrily round her; and when she came upon the bridge it greedily dashed at her bosom, and dug its iron nails into her cold face. Vanquished, it dropped noisily from the bridge, and circled along the snow-covered surface of the river, and again swept upwards, overshadowing the road with cold, trembling wings. Natalya Vladimirovna stood still, and in utter weakness leaned against the rail. From the depth below there looked up at her a dull black eye—a spot of unfrozen water—and its gaze was mysterious and terrible. But before her resounded and called persistently the words:

“Nyemchinovskaya Street, the second house from the corner. Nyemchinovskaya Street, the second house from the corner.”

Khinyakov dressed, and lay down again on his bed rolled to the very eyes in a warm overcoat, his sole remaining possession. The room was cold, there was ice in the corners, but he breathed into the astrakhan collar, and so became warm and comfortable. The whole long day he kept deceiving himself, that to-morrow he would go and seek work, and ask for something; but meanwhile he was content not to think at all, but merely to tremble at the sound of a raised voice the other side of the wall, or at the sound of a sharply slammed door. He had lain long in this way, perfectly still, when at the entrance door he heard an uneven rapping, timid, and yet hurried and sharp, as if some one was knocking with the back of the hand. His room was the one next to the entrance door, and by craning his head and pricking up his ears he could distinguish everything which took place near it. Matryona went to the door and opened it, let some one in and closed it again. Then followed an expectant silence.

“Whom do you want?” asked Matryona in a hoarse, unfriendly tone. A stranger’s voice, gentle and broken, bashfully replied:

“I want Katya Nyechayeva. She lives here?”

“She did. But what do you want with her?”

“I want her very badly. Is she not at home?” and in her voice there was a note of fear.

“Katya is dead. She died, I say—in the hospital.”

Again there was a long silence, so long indeed that Khinyakov felt a pain at his back; but he did not dare to move it, while the people there kept silence.

Then the stranger’s voice pronounced gently and without expression, the one word:

“Good-bye!”

But evidently she did not go away, since in the course of a minute

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Matryona asked: "What have you there? Have you brought something for Katya?"

Some one knelt down, striking her knees on the floor, and the stranger's voice, convulsed with suppressed sobs, uttered quickly the words:

"Take it, take it! For the love of God, take it! And then I—I'll go away."

"But what is it?"

Again there was a long silence, and then a gentle weeping, broken, and hopeless. There was in it a deadly weariness, and a black despair, without a single gleam of hope. It was as though a hand had impotently drawn the bow across the over-tightened, the last remaining, string of an expensive instrument, and when the, string snapped the soft wailing note had been silenced for ever.

"Why, you have nearly smothered it!" exclaimed Matryona in a rough, angry tone. "You see what sort of people undertake to bear children. How could you do it? Whoever would wrap up babies like that? Come now, come along; do, I say. How could you do such a thing?"

Once more all was silent near the door.

Khinyakov listened a little longer and then lay down, delighted that no one had come to fetch him, and not taking the trouble to guess the truth about what he had not understood in that which had just taken place. He began already to feel the approach of night, and wished that some one would turn the lamp up higher. He became restless, and, clenching his teeth, he endeavoured to restrain his thoughts. In the past there was nothing but mire, falls, and horror, and—there was the same horror in the future. He was just beginning by degrees to snuggle himself together, and draw up his hands and feet, when Dunyasha came in, dressed to go out in a red blouse, and already slightly intoxicated. She plopped down on the bed, and said with a gesture of surprise:

"Oh Lord!" She shook her head and smiled. "They have brought a little baby here. Such a tiny one, my friend, but he shouts just like a police-inspector. Just like a police-inspector!"

She swore whimsically, and coquettishly flipped Khinyakov's nose.

"Let's go and see. Why not, indeed! Yes, we'll just take a look at him. Matryona is going to bathe it; she is boiling the samovar. Abram Petrovich is blowing up the charcoal with his boot. How funny it all is. And the baby is crying: 'Wa, wa, wa!'"

Dunyasha made a face which she meant to represent the baby, and again went on puling: "'Wa, wa, wa! Just like a police-inspector! Let's go. Don't you want to?—well, then devil take you! Turn up your toes where you are, rotten egg, you!'"

And she danced out of the room. But half an hour after Khinya-

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kov, tottering on his weak legs and hanging on to the doorposts, hesitatingly opened the door of the kitchen.

“Shut it! You’ve made a draught,” cried Abram Petrovich.

Khinyakov hastily slammed the door behind him, and looked round apologetically; but no one took any notice of him, so he calmed down. The combined heat of the stove, the urn, and the company made the kitchen pretty warm, and the vapour rose, and then rolled down the colder walls in thick drops. Matryona with a severe and irritated mien was washing the child in a trough, and with pock-marked hands was splashing the water over him, while she crooned:

“Little lambkin, then, it s’all be clean. It s’all be white.”

Whether it was because the kitchen was light and cheerful, or because the water was warm and caressing, at all events the child was quiet, and wrinkled up its little red face as though about to sneeze. Dunyasha looked at the tub over Matryona’s shoulder, and seizing her opportunity, splashed the little one with three fingers.

“Get away!” the old woman cried in a threatening tone, “where are you coming to? I know what to do without your help. I have had children of my own.”

“Don’t meddle. She’s quite right, children are such tender things,” said Abram Petrovich, in support of her; “they want some handling.”

He sat down on the table, and with condescending satisfaction contemplated the little rosy body. The baby wriggled its fingers, and Dunyasha with wild delight wagged her head and laughed.

“Just like a police-inspector!”

“But have you seen a police-inspector in a trough?” asked Abram Petrovich.

All laughed, and even Khinyakov smiled; but almost immediately the smile left his face affright, and he looked round at the mother. She was sitting wearily on the bench, with her head thrown back, and her black eyes, abnormally large from sickness and suffering, lighted up with a peaceful gleam, and on her pale lips hovered the proud smile of a mother. And when he saw this Khinyakov burst into a solitary, belated laugh:

“He! he! he!”

He even looked proudly round on all sides. Matryona took the baby out of the tub, and wrapped it in a bath-sheet. The child burst into loud crying, but was soon quieted again, and Matryona, unrolling the sheet, smiled in confusion, and said:

“What a dear little body, just like velvet.”

“Let me feel,” entreated Dunyasha.

“What next!”

Dunyasha began suddenly to tremble all over, and stamped her feet; choking with longing, and mad with the desire, which overwhelmed her, she cried in such a shrill voice as none had ever heard from her:

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“Let me! let me!”

“Yes, let her,” entreated Natalya Vladimirovna in a fright. And Dunyasha just as suddenly became quiet again. She cautiously touched the child’s little shoulder with two fingers, and following her example, Abram Petrovich, with a condescending wink, also reached out to that little red shoulder.

“Yes, indeed, children are tender things,” said he in self-justification.

Last of all Khinyakov tried it. His fingers felt for a moment the touch of something living, downy like velvet, and withal so tender and feeble that his fingers seemed no longer to belong to him, and became as tender as the something he touched. And thus, craning their necks, and unconsciously lighting up into a smile of strange happiness, stood the three, the thief, the prostitute, and the lonely broken man, and that little life, feeble as a distant light on the steppe, was vaguely calling them somewhither, and promising them something beautiful, bright, immortal. And the happy mother looked proudly on, while above the low ceiling the house rose in a heavy mass of stone, and in the upper flats the rich sauntered about, and yawned with ennui.

Night had come on, black, malign, as all nights are, and had pitched her tent in darkness over the distant snowy fields; and the lonely branches of trees became chilled with fear, just those branches which first welcomed the morning sun. With feeble artificial light man fought against her, but strong and malign she girded the isolated lights in a hopeless circle, and filled the hearts of men with darkness. And in many a heart she extinguished the feeble flickering sparks.

Khinyakov did not sleep. Huddled up together into a little ball, he hid himself under a soft heap of rags from the cold and from the night, and wept, without effort, without pain or convulsion, as those weep whose heart is pure and without sin, as the heart of a little child. He pitied himself huddled up into a heap, and it seemed to him that he pitied all mankind and the whole of human life, and in this feeling there was a secret, profound gladness. He saw the child, just born, and it seemed to him that he himself was reborn to a new life, and would live long, and that his life would be beautiful. He loved and yet pitied this new life, and he felt so happy, that he laughed so that he shook the heap of rags, and then asked himself:

“Why am I weeping?”

But he could not discover the answer to his own question, and so replied:

“So!”

And such a profound thought was conveyed by this short word, that this wreck of a man, whose life was so pitiable and lonely, was convulsed with a fresh burst of scalding tears.

But at his bedside rapacious death was noiselessly taking its seat, and waiting—quietly, patiently, persistently.

THE CITY

IT was an immense city in which they lived: Petrov, clerk in a commercial bank, and he, the other—name unknown.

They used to meet once a year, at Easter, when they both went to pay a visit at one and the same house, that of the Vasilyevskys. Petrov used to pay a visit also at Christmas, but probably the other, whom he used to meet, came at Christmas at a different hour, and so they did not see one another. The first two or three times Petrov did not notice him among so many visitors, but the fourth year his face seemed known to him and they greeted one another with a smile—and the fifth year Petrov proposed to clink glasses with him.

“Your health!” he said politely, and held out his glass.

“Here’s to yours!” the other replied with a smile, and he too held out his glass.

Petrov did not think of asking his name, and when he went out into the street he quite forgot his existence, and the whole year never thought of him again. Every day he went to the bank, where he had been employed for nine years; in the winter he occasionally went to the theatre; in the summer he visited at the bungalow of an acquaintance; and twice he was ill with the influenza—the second time immediately before Easter.

And just as he was mounting the stairs at the Vasilyevskys’, in evening dress and with his opera-hat under his arm, he remembered that he would see him there, the other, and felt very much surprised that he could not in the least recall his face and figure. Petrov himself was below the average height and somewhat round-shouldered, so that many took him for a hunchback; he had large black eyes with yellowish whites. In other respects he did not differ from the rest, who paid a visit to the Vasilyevskys twice a year, and when they forgot his surname they used to speak of him as the “little hunchback.”

He, the other, was already there, and on the point of going away; but when he recognized Petrov, he smiled politely, and remained. He was also in evening dress and had an opera-hat, and Petrov failed to examine him further since he was occupied with talking, and eating, and drinking tea.

They went out together, and helped one another on with their coats, like friends: they politely made way the one for the other, and each gave the porter a half-rouble. They stood still a short time in the street, and then he, the other, said:

“Well, tipping’s become a regular tax. But it can’t be helped.”

Petrov replied:

“Yes, quite true.”

And since there was nothing more to be said, they smiled in a friendly manner, and Petrov said:

“Which way are you going?”

“I turn to the left. And you?”

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“I to the right.”

In the cab Petrov remembered that he had again failed either to ask his name, or to observe him particularly. He turned round: carriages were passing in both directions, the pavements were black with pedestrians, and in that closely moving mass it was as impossible to distinguish him, the other, as to find a particular grain of sand amongst other grains. And again Petrov forgot him, and did not think of him again for a whole year.

Petrov had lived for many years in the same furnished apartments, and he was not much liked there, because he was grumpy and irritable; and they also called him behind his back “Humpty.” He used often to sit in his apartment alone, and none knew what work he did, since Fedot, the upstairs servant, did not look on books and letters as “work.” At night Petrov sometimes went for a walk, and Ivan the porter could not understand these walks, since Petrov always returned sober, and—alone.

But Petrov used to walk about at night, because he was very much afraid of the city in which he lived, and he feared it more than ever in the daytime, when the streets were full of people.

The city was immense and populous, and there was in its populousness and immensity something stubborn, unconquerable, and callously cruel. With the colossal weight of its bloated stone houses, it crushed the earth on which it stood; and the streets between the houses were narrow, crooked, and deep like fissures in a rock. It seemed as though they were all seized with a panic of fear, and were endeavouring to run away from the centre to the open country, and that they could not find the road, and losing their way had rolled themselves in a ball like a serpent, and were intersecting one another, and looking back in hopeless despair.

One might walk for hours about these streets, which seemed broken-down, choked, and faint with a terrible convulsion, and never emerge from the line of fat stone houses. Some high, others low, some flushed with the cold thin blood of new bricks, others painted with a dark or light colour, they stood in unswaying solidity on both sides, callously met, and personally conducted one, and pressing together in a dense crowd, in this direction and in that, lost their individuality and become like one another—and the walker grew frightened: it was as though he had become rooted to the spot, and the houses kept going past him in an endless truculent file.

Once Petrov was walking quietly about the street, when suddenly he felt what a thickness of stone houses separated him from the wide, open country, where the free earth breathed softly in the sunshine, and man’s eyes might look round to the distant horizon.

It seemed to him that he was suffocating and being blinded, and he felt a desire to run and get quickly out from the stony embrace—and it became a horror to him to think, however fast he might run, still houses, ever houses, would go with him on both sides, and he

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would be suffocated before he could run beyond the city. Petrov ensconced himself in the first restaurant he came across, but even there he seemed for a long time to be suffocating; so he drank cold water, and wiped his eyes with his handkerchief.

But the most terrible thing of all was, that in all the houses there lived human beings, and about all the streets were moving human beings. There were a multitude of them, and all of them were unknown to him—strangers; and all of them lived their own separate life, hidden from the eyes of others; they were without interruption being born, and dying, and there was no beginning nor end to this stream. Whenever Petrov went to the bank, or out for a walk, he saw the same familiar, well-known houses, and everything appeared to him simply an old acquaintance; if, however, he stood still, but for a moment, to fix his attention on some face, then all was quickly and terribly changed. With a feeling of terror and impotence Petrov would look at all the faces, and understand that he saw them for the first time, that yesterday he had seen other people, and to-morrow would see yet others; and so always, every day, and every minute, he would see new, unknown faces. There was a stout gentleman, at whom Petrov glanced, disappearing round the corner—and never would Petrov see him again. Even if he wished to find him, he might search for him all his life, and never succeed.

And Petrov feared the immense, callous city.

This year again Petrov had the influenza, very severely with a complication, and he was frequently afflicted with cold in the head.

Moreover, the doctor found that he had catarrh of the stomach, and the next Easter, as he was going to the Vasilyevskys', he thought on the way of what he should eat there. When he recognized him, the other, he was pleased and informed him:

“My dear sir, I have a catarrh.”

He, the other, shook his head sympathetically, and replied:

“You don't say so!”

And once more Petrov did not inquire his name, but he began to look upon him as quite an old acquaintance, and thought of him with pleasurable feelings. “Him,” he named him, but when he wanted to recall his face, he could only conjure up an evening coat, white waistcoat, and a smile; and since he could not in the least recollect the face, it inevitably appeared as though the coat and waistcoat smiled. That summer Petrov went out very frequently to a certain bungalow, wore a red neck-tie, dyed his moustache, and said to Fedot that in the autumn he should change his quarters; but afterwards he gave up going to the bungalow, and took to drink for a whole month. He managed his drinking clumsily—with tears and scenes. Once he broke the mirror in his room; another time he frightened a certain lady. He invaded her apartment in the evening, fell on his knees and proposed to her. This fair unknown was a courtesan, and at first listened to him attentively and even laughed, but when he began to weep and complain of

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his loneliness, she took him for a madman, and began to scream with terror. As they led him away, supporting himself against Fedot, he pulled his hair and cried:

“We are all men, all brethren!”

They had decided to get rid of him; but he gave up drinking, and once more the porter swore at having to open and shut the door for him. At New Year Petrov received an increase of 100 roubles *per annum* and he changed into a neighbouring apartment, which was five roubles dearer, and had windows looking into the courtyard, Petrov thought that there he would not hear the rumbling of the street traffic, and might even forget what a multitude of unknown strangers surrounded him, and lived their own particular lives in proximity to him.

In the winter it was quiet in his rooms, but when spring came, and the snow was removed from the streets, the rumble of the traffic began again, and the double walls were no protection from it.

In the daytime, while he was occupied with something, and himself moved about and made a noise, he did not notice the rumbling, though it never ceased for a moment; but when night came on and all became quiet in the house, then the noisy street forced its way into the dark chamber, and deprived it of all quiet and privacy. The jarring and disjointed sounds of individual vehicles were heard; an indistinct, slight sound would come to life somewhere in the distance, grow louder and clearer, and by degrees lie down again, and in its place would be heard a new one, and so on and on without intermission. Sometimes only the hoofs of the horses struck the ground evenly and rhythmically, and there was no sound of wheels—this was when a *ca-lèche* went by on rubber tyres; but often the noise of individual vehicles would blend into a terrible loud rumble, which made the stone walls tremble slightly, and set the bottles vibrating in the cupboard. And all this was caused by human beings! They sat in hired and private carriages, they drove no one knew whence or whither, they disappeared into the unknown depths of the immense city, and in their place appeared fresh people, other human beings, and there was no end to this incessant movement, so terrible in its incessancy. And every passer-by was a separate microcosm, with his own rules and aims of life, with his own affinity, whom he loved, with his own separate joys and sorrows, and each was like a ghost, which appeared for a moment and then disappeared inexplicably and unrecognized. And the more people there were, who were unknown to one another, the more terrible became the solitude of each. And during those black, rumbling nights Petrov often felt inclined to cry out in fear, and to betake himself to the deep cellar, in order to be there perfectly alone. There one might think only of those one knew, and not feel oneself so infinitely alone among a multitude of strange people.

At Easter, he, the other, did not turn up at the Vasilyevskys', and Petrov did not observe his absence until the end of his call, when he had begun to make his adieux, and failed to meet the well-known

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smile. And he felt a disquiet at heart, and suddenly was conscious of a painful longing to see him, the other, and to say something to him about his loneliness and his nights. But he had only a very slight recollection of the man whom he sought; only that he was of middle age, fair apparently, and always in evening dress; but by this description the Vasilyevskys could not guess of whom he was speaking.

“So many people pay us a visit on Festivals, that we do not know the surnames of all,” said Madame. “However—was it Syomenov?”

And she counted one by one on her fingers several surnames: “Smirnov, Antonov, Nikiphorov;” and then without the surname: “The bald man, in the civil service, the post office I think; the one with the light brown hair; the one quite grey.” And none of them were the one after whom Petrov was inquiring—though they might have been. And so he was not discovered.

This year nothing particular happened in the life of Petrov, except that his eyesight deteriorated and he had to take to glasses. At night, when the weather was fine, he went walking, and chose the quiet, deserted bye-streets for his peregrinations. But even there people were to be met, whom he had never seen before, and never would see again; and the houses towered on either side in a dull wall, and inside they were full of persons utterly unknown to him, who slept, and talked and quarrelled: some one was dying behind those walls, and close to him a fresh human being was coming into the world, to be lost for a time in its ever-moving infinity, and then to die for ever. In order to console himself, Petrov would count over all his acquaintances; and their neighbourly familiar faces were like a wall which separated him from infinity. He endeavoured to remember all; the porters, shop-keeper, cabmen that he knew, also passers-by whom he casually remembered; and at first he seemed to know very many people, but when he began to count them up, the number became terribly small: all his life long he had only known 250 people, including him, the other. And these were all who were known and neighbourly to him in the world. Possibly there were people whom he had known, and forgotten; but that was just as though they did not exist.

He, the other, was very glad, when he recognized Petrov the next Easter. He had a new dress suit on, and new boots which creaked, and he said as he pressed Petrov’s hand:

“But, you know, I almost died. I was seized with inflammation of the lungs, and even now there is there”—and he tapped himself on the side—“something the matter with the upper part, I believe.”

“I’m sorry . for you,” said Petrov with sincere sympathy.

They talked about various ailments, and each spoke of his own, and when they separated they did so with a prolonged pressure of the hand, but they quite forgot to ask each other’s name. The following Easter it was Petrov who did not put in an appearance at the Vasilyevskys’, and he, the other, was much disquieted, and inquired of Madame Vasilyevsky who the little hunchback was who visited them.

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“I know what his surname is,” said she, “it is Petrov.”

“But what are his Christian name and his father’s?”

Madame Vasilyevsky would willingly have told his name, but it seems she did not know it, and was very much surprised at the fact. Neither did she know in what office Petrov was, perhaps the post office or some bank.

The next time he, the other, did not appear.

The time after both came, but at different hours, so they did not meet. And then they altogether left off putting in an appearance, and the Vasilyevskys never saw them again, and did not even give them a thought; for so many people visited them, and they could not possibly remember them all.

The immense city grew still bigger, and there, where the broad fields had stretched, irrepressible new streets lengthened out, and on both sides of them stout, multi-coloured stone houses crushed heavily the ground on which they stood. And to the seven cemeteries which had before existed in the city was added a new one, the eighth. In it there was no greenery at all, and meanwhile they buried in it only paupers.

And when the long autumn night drew on, it became still in the cemetery, and there reached it only in distant echoes the rumbling of the street traffic, which ceased not day nor night.

THE MARSEILLAISE

HE was a nonentity, with the soul of a hare and the shameless endurance of a beast of burden. When the malicious irony of fate cast his lot in among our black ranks, we laughed like maniacs at the thought that such absurd inept mistakes could actually be made. As for him, well—he cried. And never have I met with a man of so many tears, flowing so freely—from eyes and nose and mouth. He was like a sponge saturated with water, and then squeezed. In our ranks I have seen, indeed, men who wept, but then their tears were fire, from which even fierce wild beasts would run away. These manly tears aged the faces, but made the eyes young again. Like lava released from the red-hot bowels of the earth, they burnt an indelible track, and buried under themselves whole cities of worthless devices and shallow cares. But when this fellow began to weep, only his nose grew red, and his handkerchief became wet. Probably he used to hang out his handkerchiefs on a line to dry; how otherwise could he have supplied himself with so many?

During the whole time of exile he was continually applying to the authorities, real and imaginary, bowing, and weeping, and swearing that he was innocent, entreating them to have pity upon his youth, and promising all his life never to open his mouth except in petition and gratitude. But they laughed at him, even as did we, and called him

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“the wretched little pig,” and would call out to him:

“Piggy, come here!”

And he would obediently run to their cell, expecting each time to hear news of his restoration to his native land. But they were only joking. They knew, as well as we did, that he was innocent. But they thought by his torments to intimidate other little pigs, as though they were not cowardly enough already. He would also come to us, impelled by an animal dread of solitude. But our faces were stern, and locked against him, and in vain he sought for the key. At an utter loss what to do, he would call us his dear comrades and friends. But we would shake our heads and say:

“Look out! Some one will hear you!”

And he was not ashamed to glance round at the door—the little pig!

Well! Could we possibly contain ourselves? No, we laughed with mouths long accustomed to laughter. Then he, emboldened and comforted, would sit down nearer to us, and converse, and weep about his dear books, which he had left upon the table, and about his mamma and little brothers, of whom he did not know whether they were alive or dead of fear and grief.

Towards the end we refused to associate with him any longer. When the hunger-strike began he was seized with terror—the most inexpressibly comical terror. He was evidently very fond of his stomach, poor little pig, and he was terribly afraid of his dear comrades, and also of the authorities. He wandered about among us in a state of perturbation, continually passing his handkerchief over his forehead, upon which something had exuded—was it tears or perspiration? Then he asked me in an irresolute manner:

“Shall you starve long?”

“For a long time,” I sternly replied.

“But will you not eat anything on the sly?”

“Our mammas will send us pies,” I acquiesced in all seriousness. He looked at me in doubt, nodded his head and went away with a sigh. The next day, green as a paroquet with fear, he answered:

“Dear comrades! I also will starve with you.”

We replied with one voice: “Starve by yourself!”

And he did starve! We did not believe it, just as you will not believe it: we thought that he ate something on the sly, and so too thought our guards. And when towards the end of the strike he fell ill of famine-typhus, we only shrugged our shoulders and said:

“Poor little Pig!”

But one of us—he who never laughed—said grimly: “He is our comrade, let us go to him.”

He was delirious, and his incoherent ravings were as piteous as the whole of his life. He talked of his dear books, of his mamma and brothers; he asked for tarts, cold as ice, tasty tarts; and he swore that he was innocent, and begged for pardon. He called on his native

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country—his dear France, and damn the weakness of the human heart! he rent our souls with that cry of “Dear France.”

We were all in the room when he lay a-dying. He recovered his consciousness before death, and silent he lay, so small, so weak; and silent stood we his comrades. We all to a man heard him say: “When I am dead sing over me the Marseillaise.”

“What dost thou say?” we exclaimed, with a shock of mingled joy and rising anger.

He repeated: “When I am dead sing over me the Marseillaise.”

And it happened for the first time that his eyes were dry, but we wept, wept one and all: and our tears burned like fire from which fierce wild-beasts do flee.

He died, and we sang over him the Marseillaise. With lusty young voices we sang that great song of freedom; and threateningly the ocean re-echoed it to us, and the crests of its waves bore to his dear France pale terror, and blood-red hope.

And he became ever our watchword, that nonentity with the body of a hare, and of a beast of burden—but with the great soul of a man! On your knees, comrades and friends!

We sang! At us the rifles were aimed, while their locks clicked ominously, and the sharp points of the bayonets were menacingly turned towards our hearts. But ever louder and more joyfully resounded the threatening song, while the black coffin swayed in the tender hands of stalwarts.

We sang the. Marseillaise!

THE TOCSIN

I

DURING that hot and ill-omened summer everything was burning. Whole towns, villages and hamlets were consumed; forests and fields were no longer a protection to them, but even the forests themselves submissively burst into flame, and the fire spread like a red table-cloth over the parched meadows. During the day the dim red sun was hidden in acrid smoke, but at night-time in all quarters of the sky a quiet red-glow burst forth, which rocked in silent, fantastic dance; and strange confused shadows of men and trees crept over the ground like some unknown species of reptile. The dogs ceased their welcoming bark, which from afar calls to the traveller and promises him a roof and hospitality, and either uttered a prolonged melancholy howl, or crept into the cellar in sullen silence. And men, like dogs, looked at one another with evil, frightened eyes, and spoke aloud of arson, and secret incendiaries. Indeed, in one remote village they had killed an old man who could not give a satisfactory account of his

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movements, and then the women had wept over the murdered man, and pitied his grey beard all matted with dark blood.

During this hot and ill-omened summer I lived at the house of a country squire, where were many women, young and old. By day we worked and talked, and thought little of conflagrations, but when night came on we were seized with fear. The owner of the property was often absent in the town. Then for whole nights we slept not a wink, but in fear and trembling made our rounds of the homestead in search of an incendiary. We huddled close together and spoke in whispers; but the night was still, and the buildings stood out in dark, unfamiliar masses. They seemed to us as strange, as if we had never seen them before, and terribly unstable, as though they were expecting the fire and were already ripe for it. Once, through a crack in the wall, there gleamed before us something bright. It was the sky, but we thought it was a fire, and with screams the womenkind rushed to me, who was still almost a boy, and entreated my protection.

But I—held my breath for fear, and could not move a step.

Sometimes in the depth of night I would rise from my hot, tumbled bed and creep through the window into the garden. It was an ancient, formal and stately garden, so protected that it answered the very fiercest storm with nothing more than a suppressed drone. Below it was dark and deadly still as at the bottom of an abyss; but above there was a continual indistinct rustling and sound, like the far-off speech of the steppe. Concealing myself from some one, who seemed to be following at my heels, and looking over my shoulder, I would make my way to the end of the garden, where upon a high bank stood a wattle-fence, and beyond the fence far below extended fields and forests and hamlets hidden in the darkness. Lofty, gloomy, silent lime-trees opened out before me, and between their thick black stems, through the interstices of the fence, and through the space between the leaves I could see something terrible, extraordinary, which would fill my heart with an uneasy dread feeling, and make my legs twitch with a slight tremor. I could see the sky, not the dark, still sky of night, but rosy-red, such as is neither by day nor night. The mighty limes stood grave and silent, like men expecting something, but the sky was unnaturally rosy, and the ominous reflection of the burning earth beneath darted in fiery red spasms about the sky. And curling columns would go slowly up and disappear in the height; and it was a puzzle, as strangely unnatural as the pink colouring of the sky, how they could be so silent, when below all was gnashing of teeth; how they could be so unhurried and stately there above, when everything was tossing in restless confusion here below.

As though coming to themselves the lofty limes would all at once begin to talk together with their tops, and then suddenly relapse into silence, congealed, as it were, for a long time in sullen expectation. It would become still as at the bottom an abyss, while far behind me I felt conscious of the house on the alert, full of frightened people; the

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limes crowded watchfully around me, and in front silently rocked a rose-red sky, such as is not nor by night nor day.

And because I saw it not as a whole, but only through the interstices between the trees, it was all the more terrible and incomprehensible.

II

It was night and I was dosing restlessly, when there reached my ear a dull staccato sound, rising as it seemed from below the ground; it penetrated my brain, and settled there like a round stone. After it another forced its way in, equally short and dolorous, and my head became heavy and sick, as though molten lead were falling upon it in thick drops. The drops kept boring and burning into my brain; they became ever more and more, and soon they were filling my head with a dripping rain of impetuous staccato sounds.

“Boom! boom! boom!” Some one tall, strong and impatient kept jerking out from afar.

I opened my eyes, and at once understood that it was the alarm-bell, and that Slobodishtchy, the next village, was on fire. It was dark in the room and the window was closed, and yet at the terrible call the whole room, with its furniture, pictures and flowers, went out, as it were, into the street, and no longer was one conscious of wall or ceiling.

I do not remember how I got dressed, and know not why I ran alone and not with the others; whether it was that they forgot me, or I did not remember their existence. The tocsin called persistently and dully, as though its sounds were falling, not from the transparent air, but were cast forth from the immeasurable thickness of the earth. I ran on.

Amid the rosy sheen of the sky the stars twinkled above my head, and in the garden it was strangely light, such as is neither by day, nor by majestic, moon-lit night, but when I reached the hedge something bright-red, seething, tossing desperately, looked up at me through the fissures. The lofty limes, as though sprinkled with blood, trembled in their rounded leaves, and turned them back in fear, but their sound was inaudible on account of the short, loud strokes of the swinging bell. Now the sounds became clear and distinct, and flew with mad speed like a swarm of red-hot stones. They did not circle in the air like the doves of the peaceful angelus, neither did they expand in the caressing waves of the solemn call to prayer; they flew straight like grim harbingers of woe, who have no time to glance backward and whose eyes are wide with terror.

“Boom! boom! boom!” they flew with unrestrainable impetuosity, the strong overtaking the weak, and all of them together delving into the earth and piercing the sky.

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And, as straight as they, I ran over the immense tilled plain, which faintly scintillated with blood-red gleams like the scales of a great black wild-beast. Above my head, at a wonderful height, bright isolated sparks floated by, and in front was one of those terrible village conflagrations, in which in one holocaust perish houses, cattle and human beings. There behind the irregular line of dark trees now round, now sharp as pikes, the dazzling flame soared aloft, arched its neck proudly, like a maddened horse, leaped, threw burning flocks from its midst into the black sky, and then greedily stooped for fresh prey. The blood surged in my ears with the swiftness of my running, and my heart beat loud and rapidly; but the irregular strokes of the tocsin overtook my heart-beats and struck me full on head and breast. And so full of despair was it that it seemed not the clanging of a metal bell, but as though the very heart of the much-suffering earth were beating wildly in the agony of death.

“Boom! boom! boom!” the red-hot conflagration ejaculated. And it was difficult to realize that the church belfry, so small and slight, so peaceful and still, like a maiden in a pink dress, could be giving forth those loud, despairing cries.

I kept falling down on my hands against clods of dry earth, which scattered beneath them, and again I would rise and run on, and the fire and the summoning sound of the bell ran to meet me. One could already hear the wood crackling as it caught fire, and the many-voiced cry of human beings with the dominating notes of despair and terror. And when the serpent-like hissing of the fire ceased for a moment, a prolonged groaning became clearly differentiated: it was the wailing of women, and the bellowing of cattle in a panic of terror.

A swamp intercepted my path. A wide, weed-grown swamp, which ran far to right and left. I went into the water up to my knees, then to the breast, but the swamp began to suck me down, and I returned to the bank. Opposite, quite close, raged the fire, throwing up into the sky golden sparks like the burning leaves of a gigantic tree: while the water of the swamp stood out like a mirror sparkling with fire in a black frame of reed and sedge. The tocsin called, despairingly in deadly agony:

“Come! do come!”

III

I flung along the strand, and my dark shadow flung after me, and when I stooped down to the water to find a bottom, the spectre of a fire-red form gazed at me from the black abyss, and in the distorted lineaments of its face, and in its dishevelled hair, which seemed as though it were lifted up upon the head by some terrific force, I failed to recognize myself.

“Ah! what is it? O Lord!” I prayed with outstretched hands.

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But the tocsin kept calling. The bell no longer entreated, it shouted like a human being, and groaned and choked. The strokes had lost their regularity, and piled themselves one on the top of the other, rapidly and without echo; they died down, were reproduced and again died down. Once more I bent down to the water, and alongside of my own reflection I perceived another fiery spectre, tall and erect, and to my horror just like a human being.

“What’s that?” I screamed, looking round. Close to my shoulder stood a man looking at the conflagration in silence. His face was pale, his cheeks were covered with still moist blood, which gleamed as it reflected the fire. He was dressed simply, like a peasant. Possibly he had been already here when I ran up, and had been stopped like myself by the swamp, or possibly he may have arrived after me; but at all events I had not heard his approach, nor did I know who he was.

“It burns,” said he, without removing his eyes from the fire. The reflected fire leapt in them, and they seemed large and glassy.

“Who are you? Where do you come from?” I asked; “you are all bloody.” With long, thin fingers he touched my cheeks, looked at them, and again fixed his gaze upon the fire.

“It burns,” he repeated, without paying any attention to me. “Everything is burning.”

“Do you know how to get there?” I asked, drawing back. I guessed that this was one of the many maniacs, which this ill-omened summer had produced.

“It burns!” he replied; “ho! ho! don’t it burn!” he cried, laughing, and looked at me kindly, wagging his head. The hurried strokes of the tocsin suddenly stopped, and the flame crackled louder. It moved like a living thing, and with long arms, as though weary, dragged itself to the silent belfry, which now seemed near and tall, and clothed no longer in pink but in red. Above the dark loop-hole, where the bells were hung, there appeared a timid quiet tongue of fire, like the flame of a candle, and was reflected in pale rays on their metal surface. Once more the bell began to tremble, sending forth its last madly-despairing cries, and once more I flung myself along the shore, and my black shadow flung after me.

“I’m coming, I’m coming!” I cried, as though in reply to some one calling me. But the tall man was quietly seated behind me, embracing his knees, and kept singing a loud *secondo* to the bell: “Boom! boom! boom!”

“Are you mad?” I shouted to him. But he only sang the louder and the merrier, “Boom! boom! boom!”

“Be quiet!” I entreated. But he smiled and sang on, wagging his head, and the fire flared up in his glassy eyes. He was more terrible than the fire, this maniac, and I turned round and took to flight along the shore. But I had scarcely gone a few steps, when his lanky figure appeared silently alongside of me, his shirt fluttering in the wind. He ran in silence, even as I did, with long untiring strides, and in silence

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our black shadows ran along the upturned field.

The bell was suffocating in its last death-struggle and cried out like a human being who, despairing of assistance, has lost all hope. And we ran on in silence aimlessly into the darkness, and close to us our black shadows leapt mockingly.

BARGAMOT AND GARASKA

IT would be unjust to say that Nature had injured Ivan Akindinich Bargamotov, who in his official capacity was called "Constable No. 20," and unofficially simply Bargamotov. The inhabitants of one of the outskirts of the provincial towns of Orel, who in their turn were nicknamed "gunners," from the name of their abode (Gunner Street) and, from the moral side were characterized as "broken-headed gunners," when they dubbed Ivan Akindinovich "Bargamot," were without doubt not thinking of the qualities which belong to such a delicate and delicious fruit as the *bergamot*. By his exterior Bargamot reminded one rather of the mastodon, or of any of those engaging, but extinct creatures, which for want of room have long ago deserted a world already filling up with flaccid little humans. Tall, stout, strong, loud-voiced Bargamot loomed big on the police horizon, and certainly would long ago have attained notable rank, if only his soul, compressed within those stout walls, had not been sunk in an heroic sleep.

Outward impressions in passing to Bargamot's soul by means of his little fat-encased eyes, lost all their sharpness and force, and arrived at their destination only in the form of feeble echoes and reflexions. A person of sublime requirements would have called him a lump of flesh; his superior officers called him a "stock," but a useful one—while to the "gunners," the persons most interested in this question, he was a staid, serious matter-of-fact man, one worthy of every respect and consideration. What Bargamot knew he knew well, were it only a policeman's instructions, which he had assimilated some time or other with all the energy of his mighty frame, and which had sunk so deep into his sluggish brain, that it would have been impossible to rout them out again, even with vitriol. Nevertheless certain truths occupied a permanent position in his soul, truths acquired by way of life's experience, and unconditionally dominating the situation.

Of that which Bargamot did not know he kept such an imperturbably stolid silence, that people who did know it became somehow or other somewhat ashamed of their knowledge. But the chief point was this that Bargamot was enormously powerful; and might was right in Gunner Street, a slum inhabited by shoemakers, tailors who worked at home, and the representatives of other "liberal" professions. Owning two public houses, uproarious on Sundays and Mondays, Gunner Street devoted all its leisure hours to Homeric fights, in which the women, bare-headed and dishevelled, took immediate part (as they

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separated their husbands), and also the little children, who gazed with delight on the daring of their papas.

All this rough wave of drunken “gunners” beat against the immovable Bargamot as against a stone breakwater, while he would deliberately seize with his mighty hands a pair of the most desperate rowdies and personally conduct them to the “lock-up,” and the rowdies would obediently submit their fate to the hands of Bargamot, protesting merely for the sake of appearances.

Such was Bargamot in the domain of international relations. In the sphere of home politics he held himself with no less dignity. The small tumble-down cottage, in which Bargamot lived with his wife and two young children, and which with difficulty afforded room for his mighty body, and trembled with craziness and with fear for its own existence whenever Bargamot turned round, might be at ease, if not with regard to its own wooden structure, at all events in respect of the family unity.

Domestic, careful, and fond of digging in his garden on free days, Bargamot was severe. He instructed his wife and children through the same medium of physical influence, not conforming so much to the actual requirement of science as to certain indefinite prescriptions on that score which existed in the ramifications of his big head. This did not prevent his wife Marya, who was still a young and handsome woman, on the one hand from respecting her husband as a steady, sober man, and on the other, in spite of all his massiveness, from twisting him round her finger with that ease and force of which only weak women are capable.

At about ten o'clock on a warm spring evening Bargamot stood at his usual post at the corner of Gunner Street and the 3rd Garden Street. He was in a bad humour. To-morrow was Easter Day, and soon people would be going to church, while he would have to stand on duty till 3 o'clock in the morning, and would only get home in time for the conclusion of the fast. Bargamot did not feel any need of prayer, but the bright holiday air which permeated the unusually peaceful and quiet street affected even him.

He did not like the spot on which he had stood still every day for a matter of ten years. He felt a desire to do something of a holiday character such as others were doing. And in view of these uneasy feelings there arose within him a certain discontent and impatience. Moreover he was hungry. His wife had given him no dinner at all that day, and so he had had to put up with a few sups of *kvass* and bread. His great stomach was insistently demanding food; and how long it was still to the conclusion of the fast!

Ptu!—spat Bargamot, as he made a cigarette and began reluctantly to suck at it. At home he had some good cigarettes, presented to him by a local shop-keeper, but he was reserving them till the conclusion of the fast.

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Soon the “gunners” drew along towards the church, clean and respectable in jackets and waistcoats over red and blue flannel shirts, and in long boots with innumerable creases, and high pointed heels. To-morrow all this splendour was destined to disappear behind the counter of the “pub,” or to be torn in pieces in a friendly struggle for harmony.

But for to-day the “gunners” were resplendent. Each one carefully carried a parcel of paschal cakes. None took any notice of Bargamot, neither did he look with especial love on his “god-children,” and uneasily prognosticated how many times he would have to make a journey tomorrow to the police station.

In fact, he was jealous that they were free and could go where it was bright, noisy and cheerful, while he was stuck there like a penitent.

“Here I have to stand because of you, drunkards,” muttered he, summing up his thoughts, and spat once more—he felt a hollow in the pit of his stomach.

The street was becoming empty. The Eucharistic bell had ceased. Then the joyful changes of the treble peal, so cheerful after the melancholy tolling of the Lenten bells, spread over the world the joyful news of Christ’s resurrection. Bargamot took off his hat and crossed himself. Soon he would be going home. He became more cheerful as he imagined to himself the table laid with a clean cloth, the paschal cakes and the eggs. He would without hurry give to all the Easter salutation. They would wake up Jack and bring him in, and he would at once demand the coloured egg, about which he had held circumstantial conversations the whole week through with his more experienced little sister. Oh, how he’ll open wide his mouth when his father brings him, not the bright dyed egg, but the real marble one, which the same obliging shop-keeper had presented to Bargamot!

“Dear little chap!” said Bargamot with a smile, feeling a sort of paternal tenderness welling up from the depths of his soul.

But Bargamot’s placidity was broken in on in the most abject manner. Round the corner were heard uneven footsteps and low mutterings.

“Who the devil is coming here?” thought Bargamot, looking round the corner and feeling injured in his very soul.

“Garaska! Yes, drunk as usual! Well, that’s a finisher!”

It was a mystery to Bargamot how Garaska could have managed to get drunk before daylight, but of the fact of his drunkenness there was no doubt. His behaviour, mysterious as it would have been to an outsider, was perfectly clear to Bargamot, who was well acquainted with the “Gunner” soul in general, and with the low nature of Garaska in particular. Attracted by an irresistible force from the middle of the street, in which he had the habit of walking, he was pressed close to the hoarding. Supporting himself with both hands, and contemplating the wall with a concentrated air of inquiry, Garaska staggered, while

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he gathered up his strength for a fresh struggle with any unexpected impediments he might meet with.

After a short but intense meditation he pushed himself energetically from the wall, and staggered backwards into the middle of the street, made a deliberate turn, and set out with long strides into space, which turned out to be not quite so endless as it has been said to be, but was in fact bounded by a mass of lamps.

With the first of these, Garaska came into the closest relations, and clasped it in the firm embrace of friendship.

“A lamp! Stop!” said he curtly, as he established the accomplished fact. Quite unusually, of course, Garaska was in an excessively good humour. Instead of heaping well-deserved objurgations upon the lamp-post he turned to it with mild reproaches, which contained some touches of familiarity.

“Stand still, you silly ass, where are you going to?” he muttered as he staggered away from the lamp-post, and again fell with his whole chest upon it, almost flattening his nose against its cold damp surface.

“That’s right! eh?” and by clinging with half his length along the post he managed to hold on, and sank into a reverie.

Bargamot contemptuously compressed his lips, as he looked down on Garaska from his superior height. Nobody annoyed him so much in the whole of Gunner Street as this wretched toper. To look at him—one would not have thought there was any strength in him, and yet he was the greatest scandal in the whole neighbourhood.

He’s not a man, but an ulcer! A “gunner” gets drunk, makes a disturbance, spends the night in the lock-up, and he gets over all this like a gentleman—but Garaska always does it stealthily, and of malice prepense. He may be beaten half to death or nearly starved at the police station, still they can never break him of bad language, of his most offensively foul tongue.

He will stand under the windows of any of the most respectable people in Gunner Street, and begin to swear without rhyme or reason. The shopmen seize Garaska and beat him—the crowd laughs and advises them to give it him hot. Garaska would revile even Bargamot himself in such fantastically realistic language, that without understanding all the subtleties of his wit, he felt himself more insulted, than if he had been whipped.

How Garaska got his living, remained to the “gunners” one of those mysteries which enveloped his whole existence. Certainly no one had ever seen him sober. He lived, or rather camped about in the orchards, or the river-bank, or under shrubs. In winter he disappeared to somewhere or other, and with the first breath of spring he reappeared. What attracted him to Gunner Street, where it was every one’s business to beat him, was again a profound mystery of Garaska’s soul, but get rid of him they could not. They strongly suspected, and that not without reason, that he was a thief, but they could not take him in the act, so he was beaten on merely circumstantial evidence.

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On this occasion Garaska had evidently a difficult path to negotiate. The rags, which made a pretence of seriously covering his emaciated body, were all over still undried mud.

His face, with its big, bulbous red nose, which was incontestably one of the causes of his unstable equilibrium, was covered with an irregularly distributed watery growth, and gave substantial evidence of its close relations with alcohol and a neighbour's fist. On his cheek near the eye was a scratch of evidently recent origin.

He succeeded at last in parting company with the lamp-post, and when he observed the dignified silent figure of Bargamot he was overjoyed.

"Our best respects to you, Bargamot Bargamotich—we hope we see you well!" said he with a polite wave of his hand, but he staggered, and was fain to prop himself up with his back against the lamp-post.

"Where are you going to?" growled Bargamot saturninely.

"We're orl righ'!"

"On the old lay, eh? Or do you want a doss in the cells. You wretch, I'll run you in at once."

"No, you don't!"

Garaska was just going to make a gesture of defiance, when he wisely restrained himself, spat and rubbed his foot about on the ground, as though to rub out the spittle.

"You can talk when you get to the police station! March!"

Bargamot's mighty hand stretched out to Garaska's collar, so greasy in fact that it was evident that Bargamot was not his first guide on the thorny path of well-doing. Giving the drunken man a slight shake, and propelling his body in the required direction, and at the same time giving it a certain stability, Bargamot dragged him towards the above-mentioned gaol, just as a strong hawser might tow after it a very light schooner, which had met with an accident outside the harbour. He considered himself deeply injured, instead of enjoying his well-earned rest, to have to drag himself with this drunkard to the station.

Ugh! Bargamot's hands itched—but the consciousness that on such a high festival it would be unseemly to let them have their way, restrained him. Garaska strode on bravely, mingling in a remarkable manner self-confidence, and even insolence, with meekness. He evidently harboured some thought of his own, which he began to approach by the Socratic method.

"Tell me, Mr. Policeman, what is to-day?"

"Won't you shut up!" Bargamot replied in contempt. "Drunk before daylight!"

"Has the bell at Michael the Archangel's rung yet?"

"Yes, what's that to you?"

"Then Christ is risen!"

"Well, He is risen."

"Then allow me—" Garaska was carrying on this conversation half

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twisted towards Bargamot, and with his face resolutely turned to him. Bargamot, interested by the strange questions, mechanically let go the greasy collar. Garaska, losing his support, staggered and fell before he could show to Bargamot an object which he had just taken out of his pocket. Raising his great shoulders, as he supported himself on his hands, Garaska looked on the ground, then fell face downwards, and began to wail, as a peasant woman wails for the dead.

Garaska howling! Bargamot was surprised, but deciding that it must be some new joke of his, he still felt interested as to developments. The development was that Garaska continued howling without words, just like a dog.

“What’s up now? Off your nut, eh?” said Bargamot as he gave him a shove with his foot. He went on howling. Bargamot was in a dilemma.

“What’s got yer, eh?”

“The eg—g.”

“Well?”

Garaska went on howling, but less noisily, he sat down and lifted up his hand. The hand was covered with something sticky, to which adhered pieces of coloured egg-shell. Bargamot, still in doubt, began to have an inkling that something untoward had taken place.

“I—like a gentleman—to present—Easter egg—but you—” blubbered Garaska disconnectedly; but Bargamot understood.

It was evident what had been Garaska’s intention. He wished to present him with an Easter egg according to Christian usage, and Bargamot was for taking him to gaol. Perhaps he had brought the egg a long way, and now it was broken—and he was crying. Bargamot imagined to himself that the marble egg he was keeping for Jack was broken, and how sorry it made him.

“Ere’s a go!” said Bargamot shaking his head, as he looked at the wallowing drunkard, and pitied him as intensely as he would have pitied a man cruelly wronged by his own brother.

“He was going to present—” “He is also a living soul,” muttered the policeman, striving albeit clumsily to render the state of affairs clear to himself, and feeling a mixture of shame and pity, which became more and more oppressive.

“And you would have run him in! Shame on you!”

Sighing heavily as he bent down he knocked his short sword against a stone, and sat down on his heels near to Garaska.

“Well,” he muttered in confusion, “perhaps it is not broken.”

“Not broken! Why yer was ready to break my snout for me. Brute!”

“But what did you shove for!”

“What for—” mimicked Garaska. “I was going—like a gentleman—to—and him to—the lock up. Think that’s my last egg? Yer lump!”

Bargamot sniffed. He did not feel in the least hurt by Garaska’s abuse; through his whole ill-organized interior he felt a sort of half

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pity, half shame, while in the remotest depths of his stout body something kept tiresomely wimbling and torturing.

“Can one help giving you a thrashing?” said Bargamot, more to himself than to Garaska.

“Not you, you garden scarecrow! Now look ’ere.”

Garaska was evidently falling into his usual groove. In his somewhat clearing brain he was picturing to himself a whole perspective of the most compromising terms of abuse, and most insulting epithets, when Bargamot cleared his throat with a sound which left not the slightest doubt as to the firmness of his determination and declared:

“We’ll go to my house, and break the fast.”

“What! go to your house, you tubby devil!”

“Let’s go, I say.”

Garaska’s surprise was boundless. Quite passively he allowed himself to be lifted up and led by the hand, and he went—but whither? Not to the lock-up, but to the house of Bargamot himself—actually to eat his Easter breakfast there! A seductive thought came into his head—to give Bargamot the slip, but though his head had become cleared by the very unusualness of the situation his feet still remained in such evil case, that they seemed sworn to perpetually cling to one another, and to prevent each other from walking.

Then, too, Bargamot was such a wonder that Garaska, truth to tell, did not want to get away.

Bargamot, twisting his tongue, and searching for words and stuttering, now propounded to him the instructions for a policeman, and now reverting to the special question of thrashing, and the lock-up, deciding in his own mind in the positive, and at the same time in the negative.

“You say truly, Ivan Akindinich, we must be beaten,” acknowledged Garaska, feeling even a sort of awkwardness. Bargamot was a sore wonder!

“No, I don’t mean to do that,” mumbled Bargamot, evidently understanding, even less than Garaska, what his woolly tongue was babbling.

They arrived at last at Bargamot’s house—and Garaska had already ceased to wonder. Marya at first opened her eyes wide at the sight of the unwonted couple, but she guessed from her husband’s perturbed look, that there was no room for objections, and in her womanly kind-heartedness quickly understood what she was expected to do.

Quieted and confused, Garaska sat down at the decorated table. He felt ashamed enough to sink into the ground. Ashamed of his rags, of his dirty hands, ashamed of his whole self, torn, drunken, disgusting as he was. Scalding himself with the deuced hot soup, swimming with fat, he spilt it on the table-cloth, and although the hostess with delicacy pretended not to have noticed it, he grew confused and spilt still more; so unbearably did those shrivelled fingers tremble with

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those great dirty nails, which Garaska now noticed for the first time.

“Ivan Akindinich, what surprise have you for Jacky?” asked Marya.

“Never mind—later on,” hurriedly replied Bargamot. He was scalding himself with the soup, blew on his spoon, and stolidly wiped his moustache—but through all this solidity the same amazement was apparent, as in the case of Garaska.

Marya hospitably pressed her guest to eat.

“Garasim,” she said, “how are you called after your father’s name?”

“Andreich.”

“Welcome, Garasim Andreich.”

Garaska, in endeavouring to swallow, choked, and throwing down his spoon, dropped his head on the table, right on the greasy spot which he had just made. From his breast there escaped again that rough, piteous howl, which had before so disturbed Bargamot.

The children, who had almost left off taking any notice of the guest, dropped their spoons and joined their treble to his tenor. Bargamot looked at his wife with a troubled and woeful expression.

“Now, what’s the matter with you, Garasim Andreich. Leave off,” said she, trying to quiet the perturbed guest.

“By my father’s name! Since I was born no one ever called me so!”

“MEN MAY RISE ON STEPPING-STONES OF THEIR DEAD SELVES TO HIGHER THINGS”

HAVE you ever happened to walk in a burial-ground?

Those little walled-in, quiet corners, overgrown with luscious grass, so small, and yet so ravenous, possess a peculiar dolorous poetry all their own.

Day after day thither are borne new corpses, a whole, immense, living, noisy city has been already borne thither one by one, and lo! the new city which has grown in its place is awaiting its turn—and the little corners remain ever the same, small, still, ravenous.

The peculiar air in them, the peculiar silence, and the lisping of the trees different there to anywhere else, are all mournful, pensive, tender. It is as though those white birches could not forget all those weeping eyes, which have sought the sky betwixt their green branches, and as though it were no wind, but deep sighs which keep swaying the air and the fresh leaves.

You, too, wander about the graveyard silent and pensive. Your ear is conscious of the gentle echoes of deep groans and tears, while your eyes rest on rich monuments, and modest wooden crosses; and

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the unmarked tombs of strangers, covering their dead, who were strangers when living, unmarked, unobserved. And you read the inscriptions on the monuments, and all these people who have disappeared from the world rise up in your imagination. You see them young, laughing, loving; you see them hale, loquacious, insolently confident in the endlessness of life.

And they are dead.

...

But is it necessary to go out of one's house to visit a burial ground? Is it not sufficient for this purpose, that the darkness of night should envelop you, and have swallowed up all the sounds of day?

How many rich and sumptuous monuments! How many unmarked graves of strangers!

But is night needful in order to visit a graveyard? Is not daytime enough—restless, noisy day, sufficient unto which is the evil thereof?

Look into your own soul, and then, be it day or night, you will find there a burial ground. Small greedy, having devoured so much! And a gentle, sorrowful, whisper will ye hear, an echo of bygone heavy groans when the dead was dear, whom ye left in the tomb, and could not forget nor cease to love. And monuments ye will see, and inscriptions half blotted out with tears; and still, obscure, little tombs; small and ominous mounds, under which is hidden something which once was living, although ye knew not its life, nor remarked its death. But, maybe, it was the very best in your soul—.

But why talk about it? Look for yourselves. And have you not indeed thus looked into your burial-ground every day, every single day of the long, weary year? Maybe as late as yesterday you recalled the dear departed, and wept over them. Maybe only yesterday you buried some one who had long been seriously ill, and had been forgotten even in life.

Lo! under the heavy marble surrounded by iron rails rests Love of mankind, and her sister Faith in them. How beautiful were they, and wondrous kind—these sisters. What bright light burned in their eyes, what strange power was wielded by their tender, white hands!

With what a caress did those white hands bring the cold drink to lips burning with thirst, and did feed the hungry. With what gentle care did they touch the sores of the sick, and healed them!

And they are dead, these sisters. They died of cold, as is said on the monument. They could not bear the icy wind in which life enveloped them.

And there, further on, a slanting cross marks the place where a Talent is buried in the earth. How bold it was, how noisy, how happy! It undertook anything, wished to do everything, and was confident that it could conquer the world.

And it is dead—died but lately, quietly, and unnoticed. One day it

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went among men, for long it was lost there, and it came back defeated, sad. Long it wept, long it strove to say something, and then without having said it—died.

And here is a long row of little sunken mounds. Who lies here?

Ah! yes. These are children. Little, keen, sportive Hopes. There were so many of them, they were so merry, and the soul was peopled with them. But one by one they died. They were so many, and they made such merriment in the soul.

It is quiet in the resting-place, and the leaves of the white birches rustle sadly.

...

But let the dead arise! Ye grim tombs ope wide, crumble to dust ye heavy monuments, ye iron bars give place!

Be it but for one day, for one moment, give freedom to those whom ye are smothering with your weight, and darkness!

Ye think they are dead! Oh, no! they live! They are silent, but they live.

They live!

Let them see the shining of the blue, cloudless sky, let them breathe the pure air of spring, let them be intoxicated with warmth and love.

Come to me my Talent that fell asleep. Why dost so drolly rub thine eyes. Does the sun blind thee? Does it not shine bright indeed? Thou laughest? Oh laugh, laugh on—there is so little of laughter among mankind. I too will laugh with thee. Look! there flies a swallow—let us fly after it! Has the tomb made thee too heavy? And what is that strange horror I see in thine eyes—like a reflection of the darkness of the tomb? No, no, don't! Don't cry. Don't cry, I say!

So glorious, indeed, is life for the risen!

And ye my dear little Hopes! What charming laughing faces are yours! Who art thou, stout, funny little cherub? I know thee not. And wherefore laughest thou? Has the tomb itself been unable to affright thee? Gently, my children, gently! Why dost insult it—see'st not how little, pale and weak it is become? Live ye in the world—and do not worry me. Do ye not see that I, too, have been in the tomb, and now my head is giddy with the sun, and the air, and gladness.

Ah! how glorious is life for the risen!

Come to me, ye lovely, majestic Sisters. Let me kiss your gentle white hands. What do I see? Is it bread ye are carrying? Did not the darkness of the tomb terrify you—so tender, womanly and weak; under the whelming mass did ye still think of bread for the hungry? Let me kiss your feet. I know where they will soon be going, your light, swift little feet. And I know that wherever they pass by flowers will spring up—wondrous, sweet-smelling flowers. Ye call. We will come, then.

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Hither! my risen Talent—why stand gazing at the fleeting clouds.
Hither! my little sportive Hopes.

Stop!

I hear music. Don't shout so, cherub. Whence these wondrous sounds? Gentle, melodious, madly joyful, and sad, they speak of life eternal—

Nay, be ye not afraid. This will soon pass away. I weep, indeed, for joy!

Ah! how glorious is life for the risen!

THE SPY

A YOUNG little student girl—almost a child. Her nose was thin, beautiful, with a slight upward tilt; and from her full lips there seemed to come the scent of chocolates and red caramels. And her fine hair, which covered her head like a heavy and caressing wave, was so generously rich that a glance at it gave rise to thoughts of all that is best and brightest on earth: of a golden morning upon a blue sea, of Autumn larks, of lilies of the valley and of fragrant and full-grown lilacs—a cloudless sky and lilacs, large, endless lilac bushes, and larks soaring over them.

And her eyes were young, bright, naïvely indifferent. But when you looked closely at her you could see upon her face the fine shades of fatigue, of lack of food, of sleepless nights spent in conversation in smoke-filled little rooms, by the exhausting lamp-light. Perhaps there had also been tears upon those eyes—big, not childish, venomous tears; all her bearing was full of restrained alarm; her face was cheerful, her lips smiled slightly, and her foot, in a little, mud-bespattered rubber shoe, stamped on the floor impatiently, as though to hurry the slow car and to drive it ahead faster, faster.

All this was noticed by the observing Mitrofan Krilov while the car slowly passed a small station. He stood on the platform, opposite the girl, and to while his time away he scrutinized her, somewhat fastidiously and inimically, as a very simple and familiar algebraic formula written in chalk upon the blackboard, which stared at him persistently. At first he felt cheerful, like everyone else who looked at the girl, but this feeling did not last long—there were causes which killed all cheerfulness in him.

“She must have come recently from some provincial town,” he remarked to himself sternly. “And why the deuce do they come here? I would gladly have run away from here to the most deserted spot, to the end of the world. I suppose she is occupied with all sorts of serious discussions and convictions, and, of course, cannot sew a ribbon around her skirt. She doesn't bother with such things. What hurts me most is that such a good looking girl should be like that.”

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The girl noticed his cross look and became confused, more confused than is usual under such circumstances; the smile vanished from her eyes, an expression of childish fear and perplexity appeared on her face, and her left hand quickly moved up to her chest and stopped there, clutching something.

“See!” Mitrofan wondered, looking aside, and his face assumed an apathetic expression. “She was frightened by my blue eyeglasses. She thinks that I am a detective; she is carrying some papers under her waist. There was a time when they used to carry love letters on their breasts—now they carry bulletins. And what an absurd name—bulletins.”

He cast another furtive glance at her in order to verify his expression, then he turned aside. The student girl gazed at him continuously, as though bewitched, and she pressed her hand firmly against her left side. Krilov grew angry.

“What a fool! Since I wear blue eyeglasses I must be, according to her ideas, a spy. But she does not understand that a man’s eyes may be sore from hard work. How naïve she is. Just think of it! And these people undertake to do work to save the fatherland. What she needs is a milk bottle and not a fatherland. No, we are not ripe yet. Lasalle, for instance—his was a great mind! But here every beetle is trying to do things! She can’t solve a simple mathematical problem, and yet she is bothering about finance, politics, documents. You deserve to be scared properly—then you will know what you are about!”

Mitrofan Krilov drew his head into his shoulders with a sharp gesture, his face assumed a cunning and mean expression which, in his opinion, was peculiar to real spies, and he cast a sinister look at the girl which almost turned his eyes out. And he was satisfied with his work: the girl shuddered and quivered with fear, and her eyes began to wander alarmedly.

“There is no escape!” Mitrofan Krilov interpreted her restlessness. “You may jump, you may jump, my dove, and I’ll make it still stronger.”

And growing ever more and more inspired, forgetting his hunger, and the nasty weather, elated with his creative power, he began to simulate a spy as cleverly as if he were a real actor or as if he actually served in the secret police department. His body wriggled in fine serpentine twists and turns, his eyes beamed with treachery, and his right hand, lowered in his pocket, clutched the torn car ticket energetically, as if it were not a piece of paper, but a revolver loaded with six bullets, or a spy’s notebook. And now he attracted the attention of other people as well as that of the girl. A stout, red-haired merchant, who occupied one-third of the platform, suddenly contracted his body imperceptibly, as though he had grown thin at once, and turned aside. A tall fellow, with a cape over his top coat, blinked his rabbit-like eyes as he stared at Krilov, and suddenly, pushing the girl aside, jumped off the car and disappeared among the carriages.

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“Excellent!” Mitrofan Krilov praised himself, overjoyed with the hidden and spiteful delight of a choleric man. In renouncing his individuality, in the fact that he pretended he was such an odious creature as a spy, and that people feared and despised him—in all this there was something keen, something pleasantly alarming, something intensely interesting. In the grey shroud of everyday life some dark, dreadful vistas opened, full of noiselessly moving shadows.

“Indeed, the occupation of a spy must be very interesting. A spy risks a great deal, and how he risks! One spy was even killed! He was slaughtered like a hog!”

For a moment he was frightened, and wanted to cease being a spy, but the teacher’s skin into which he was to return was so meagre, dull, and repulsive that he inwardly renounced it, and his face assumed as forbidding an expression as it could. The student girl no longer looked at him, but her whole youthful figure, the tip of her pink ear which peeped from under her heavy hair, her body bent slightly forward, and her chest working slowly and deeply, betrayed her terrible agitation and her one thought of escape. She must have been dreaming of wings, of wings. Twice she made an irresolute step, and slightly turned her head toward Mitrofan, but her flushed cheek felt his penetrating gaze, and she became as petrified. Her hand remained on the platform rail, and her black glove, torn at the middle finger, quivered slightly. She felt ashamed that everybody saw her torn glove and the protruding finger, her tiny, orphan-like, and timid finger—and yet she was powerless to take off her hand.

“Ah!” thought Mitrofan Krilov. “There you are! There is no escape for you. That’s a good lesson for you; you’ll know how to do such things. At first you acted as though you were going to a ball; that wouldn’t do, you mustn’t think of pleasures only. Now jump a bit, jump a bit!”

He pictured to himself the life of the girl he pursued, and it appeared to him to be just as interesting, just as full and as varied as the life of a spy. There was also something in it that the life of a spy lacked—a certain offended pride, a certain harmony of strife, mystery, quick terror, and quick, courageous joy. People were pursuing her.

Mitrofan Krilov looked askance, with aversion, at his outworn coat, rubbed out at the sleeves; he recalled the button below, which was torn out together with a piece of cloth, pictured to himself his own yellow, sour face, which he hid; his blue spectacles; and with venomous joy he discovered that he really resembled a spy. Particularly that button. Spies have nobody that would sew on their buttons for them.

Now he looked at everything with the same eyes that the girl did, and all was new to him. He had never before in all his life given any thought as to what evening and night meant—mysterious, voiceless night, which brings forth darkness, which hides people. Now he saw its silent advent, wondered at the lanterns that were lit, saw something in the struggle between light and darkness, and was amazed at the

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calm of the crowd walking on the sidewalks. Was it possible that they did not see the light? The girl looked greedily at the passing black spaces of the still dark side streets and he looked at them with the same eyes as she did, and the corridors, luring into the darkness, were eloquent. She looked mournfully at the dull houses which were fenced off from the streets by rocks, and at the shelterless people—and these massive, angry fortresses seemed new to her.

Availing herself of the teacher's distractedness, the student girl lifted her hand in the torn glove from the platform rail—this made her braver—and she jumped off at the corner of a large street. At this point people got off and many others boarded the car, and a thin woman with a huge bundle obstructed the way, so that Mitrofan Krilov could not leave the car. He said "Please," and tried to force himself out, but he got stuck in the doorway and ran to the other side of the car. But there the way was obstructed by the conductor and the red merchant.

"Let me pass," Mitrofan Krilov shouted. "Conductor, what disgraceful business is this? I'll make a complaint against you!"

"They didn't hear you," the conductor defended himself timidly. "Please, let him pass."

Out of breath, he finally freed himself, jumped off so awkwardly that he almost fell down and he threatened the departing red light of the car with his fist.

Mitrofan overtook the girl in a small deserted street, into which he turned by intuition. She walked briskly and kept looking around, and when she noticed her pursuer she started to run, thus naïvely betraying her helplessness. Mitrofan also started to run after her, and now in the dark, unfamiliar, side street, where there were no other people but they, he and the girl, running, he was seized with a strange feeling; he felt that he was too much of a spy, and he even became frightened.

"I must end this matter at once," he thought, running quickly, out of breath, but, for some reason, not daring to run at full speed.

At the entrance of a many storied house the student girl stopped, and while she was tugging at the knob of the heavy door Mitrofan Krilov overtook her and looked at her face with a generous smile in order to show her that the joke was ended, and that all was well. But breathing with difficulty, she passed into the half opened door, hurling at his smiling face:

"Scoundrel!"

And she disappeared. Through the glass her silhouette flashed—and then she disappeared completely. Still smiling generously, Mitrofan touched the cold knob of the door, made an attempt to open it, but in the hallway, under the staircase, he saw the porter's galoons, and he walked away slowly. He stopped a few steps away and for about two minutes stood shrugging his shoulders. He adjusted his spectacles with dignity, threw his head back and thought:

"How stupid. She did not allow me to say a word, but scolded me

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at once. The nasty girl could not understand that it was all a joke. I was doing it all for her own sake, while she—As if I needed her with her papers. Break your neck as much as you please. I suppose she is sitting now and telling all sorts of students, all sorts of long-haired students, how a spy was pursuing her. And they are sighing. The idiots! I am a university graduate myself, and am no worse than you are.”

He felt warm after his brisk walk, and he unbuttoned his coat, but he recalled that he might catch a cold, so he buttoned his coat again, tugging with aversion at the loose, dangling button.

He stood in the same spot for a time, cast a helpless glance at the rows of lighted and dark windows and went on thinking:

“And the shaggy students are no doubt happy, and they believe her. Fools! I myself was a shaggy student—my hair was so long! I would not have cut my hair even now if it weren’t falling out. It is falling out rapidly. I’ll soon be bald. And I can’t wear a wig like—a spy.”

He lit a cigarette and felt that it was too much for him—the smoke was so bitter and unpleasant.

“Shall I go up and say to them: ‘Ladies and gentlemen, it was all a joke, just a joke’? But they will not believe me. They may even give me a thrashing.”

Mitrofan walked away about twenty steps and paused. It was growing cold.

He felt his light coat and the newspaper in his side pocket—and he was seized with a sense of bitterness. He felt so offended that he was on the point of crying. He could have gone home, had his dinner, drunk his tea and read his newspaper—and his soul would have been calm, cloudless; the copy books had already been corrected, and tomorrow, Saturday, there would be a whist party at the inspector’s, house. And there, in her little room, his deaf grandmother was sitting and knitting socks—the dear, kind, devoted grandmother had already finished two pairs of socks for him. And the little oil lamp must be burning in her room—and he recalled that he had been scolding her for using too much oil. Where was he now? In some kind of a side street. In front of some house—in which there were shaggy students.

Two students came out of the lighted entrance of the house, slamming the door loudly, and turned in the direction of Mitrofan.

He came, to himself somewhere on the boulevard and for a long time was unable to recognise the neighbourhood. It was quiet and deserted. A rain was falling. The students were not there. He smoked two cigarettes, one after another, and his hands were trembling when he lit the cigarettes. . . .

“I must compose myself and look at the affair soberly,” he thought. “It isn’t so bad, after all. The deuce take that girl. She thinks that I am a spy; well, let her think what she pleases. But she does not know me. And the students didn’t see me either. I am no fool—I raised the collar of my coat!”

He laughed for joy, and even opened his mouth—but suddenly he

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stood still as though petrified by a terrible thought.

“My God! But she saw me! I demonstrated my face to her for a whole hour. She may meet me somewhere—”

And a long series of possibilities occurred to Mitrofan Krilov; he was an intelligent man, fond of science and art; he frequented theatres, attended various meetings and lectures, and he might meet that girl at any of those places. She never goes alone to such places, he thought; such girls never go alone, but with a whole crowd of student girls and audacious students—and he was terrified at the thought of what might happen when she pointed her finger at him and said: “Here’s a spy!”

“I must take off my spectacles, shave off my beard,” thought Mitrofan. “Never mind the eyes—it may be that the doctor was lying about them. But will my face be changed any if I remove my beard? Is this a beard?”

He touched his thin little beard with his fingers and felt his face.

“Even my beard does not grow properly!” He thought with sorrow and aversion.

“But it is all nonsense. Even if she recognised me it wouldn’t matter. Such a thing must be proven. It must be proven calmly and logically, even as a theorem must be proven.”

He pictured to himself a meeting of the shaggy students, before whom he was defending himself firmly and calmly.

Mitrofan Krilov adjusted his spectacles sternly, with dignity, and smiled contemptuously. Then he began to prove to them—but he convinced himself, to his horror, that all logic and theorem are one thing, while his life was quite another thing, and there were no logic, no proofs in his life to show that Mitrofan Krilov was not a spy. If some one, even that girl, accused him of being a spy, would he find anything definite, clear, convincing in his life by which he could offset this base accusation? Now it seemed to him she looked at him naïvely, with fearless eyes and called him “spy”—and from that straightforward look, and from that cruel word, all the false phantoms of convictions and decency melted away as from fire. Emptiness everywhere. Mitrofan was silent, but his soul was filled with a cry of despair and horror. What did all this mean? Where had it all disappeared? What would he lean upon in order to save himself from falling into that dark and terrible abyss?

“My convictions,” he muttered. “My convictions. Everybody knows them, my convictions. For instance—”

He searched his mind. He was grasping in his memory at fragments of conversations, he was looking for something clear, strong, convincing; he found nothing. He recalled absurd phrases such as this: “Ivanov, I am convinced that you have copied the problem from Sirotkin.” But is this a conviction? Fragments of newspaper articles passed before him, other people’s speeches, quite convincing—but where was that which he had said himself, which he himself had

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thought? He spoke as everyone else spoke, and thought as everybody else did, and it was just as impossible to find an unmarked grain in a heap of grain. Some people are religious, some are not religious, while he—

“Wait,” he said to himself. “Is there a God, or is there not? I don’t know. I don’t know anything. And who am I—a teacher? Do I exist, I wonder?”

Mitrofan Krilov’s hands and feet grew cold.

“Nonsense! Nonsense!” he consoled himself. “My nerves are simply upset. What are convictions after all? Words. A man reads words in a book, and there are his convictions. Acts, these are things that count chiefly. A fine spy who—”

But there were no acts of which he could think. There were school affairs, family affairs, other affairs, but there were no acts to speak of. Some one was persistently demanding of him: “Tell me, what have you done?” and he was searching his mind, desperately, sorrowfully—he was passing over the years he had lived as over the keyboard of a piano, and each year struck the same empty, wooden sound—“bya,” without meaning, without significance.

“Ivanov, I am convinced that you copied the problem from Sirotkin.” No, no, that is not the proper thing.

“Listen, madam, listen to me,” he muttered, lowering his head, gesticulating calmly and properly. “How absurd it is to think that I am a spy. I—a spy? What nonsense! Please, let me convince you. Now, you see—”

Emptiness. Where had everything disappeared? He knew that he had done something, but what? All his kin and his acquaintances regarded him as a sensible, kind and just man—and they must have reasons for their opinion. Yes, he had bought goods for a dress for grandmother, and his wife even said to him: “You are too kind, Mitrofan!” But, then, spies may also love their grandmothers, and they may also buy goods for their grandmothers—perhaps even the same black goods with little dots. What else? But, no, no. That is all nonsense!

Unconsciously Mitrofan came back from the boulevard to the house where the student girl disappeared, but he did not notice it. He felt that it was late, that he was tired, and that he was on the point of crying.

Mitrofan stopped in front of the many storied house and looked at it with a sense of unpleasant perplexity.

“What a repulsive house! Oh, yes, it is the same house.”

He walked away from the house quickly as though from a bomb, then he paused and reflected.

“The best thing for me to do is to write to her—to consider the matter calmly and write to her. Of course, I will not mention my name. Simply: that ‘the man whom you mistook for a spy’—Point by point I will analyse it. She’ll be a fool if she will not believe me.”

After a time, Mitrofan touched the cold knob several times,

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opened the heavy door, and entered with a stern look. The porter appeared in the doorway of the little room under the staircase, and his face bespoke his willingness to be of service.

“Listen, friend, a student girl passed here a little while ago—what is the number of her room?”

“What do you want to know it for?”

Mitrofan Krilov stared at him abruptly through his spectacles, in silence, and the porter understood: he shook his head strangely and extended his hand to him.

“Come in to my room,” called the porter.

“What for? I simply—” But the porter had already turned into his little room, and Mitrofan, gnashing his teeth, followed him meekly.

“He believed me—he believed me at once! The scoundrel!” he thought.

The little room was narrow; there was but one chair, and the porter occupied it calmly.

“Are you single?” asked Mitrofan good naturedly.

But the porter did not think it necessary to reply. Surveying the teacher from head to foot with an audacious glance, he maintained silence, and after a time, asked:

“One of you was here the day before yesterday. A light-haired fellow, with moustaches. Do you know him?”

“Of course I do. He is light-haired—”

“I suppose there are lots of you people roaming about nowadays,” the porter remarked indifferently.

“Look here,” Mitrofan said, growing indignant, “I haven’t come here—I simply want to—”

But the porter paid no attention to his words, and continued:

“Do you get a large salary? The light-haired fellow said he was getting fifty. Too little.”

“Two hundred,” lied Mitrofan Krilov, and noticed an expression of delight on the porter’s face.

“Really? Two hundred! I can understand that. Won’t you have a cigarette?”

Mitrofan took a cigarette from the porter’s fingers with thanks, and recalled sadly his own Japanese cigarette case, his study, his dear blue copy books. It was nauseating. The tobacco was strong, foul odoured—tobacco for spies. It was nauseating.

“Do you often get a drubbing?”

“Look here—”

“The light-haired fellow told me that he had never been thrashed yet. I suppose he lied. How is it possible that you people shouldn’t get any thrashing,” the porter smiled good naturedly.

“I must find out—”

“One must have ability and a suitable face. I have seen a spy whose face was crooked and one eye was missing. What is a man like that good for? His face was crooked, and in place of an eye there was

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a hole. You, for instance—”

“Look here!” Mitrofan exclaimed softly. “I have no time. I have other things to attend to.”

Unwillingly dropping this interesting theme, the porter questioned Mitrofan about the girl, what she looked like, and said:

“I know her. She comes here often. No. 7, Ivanova. Why do you throw the cigarette on the floor? There is a stove. All I have to do is to sweep here after you.”

“Blockhead!” Mitrofan replied quietly, and walked out into the side street, looking for an izvozchik.

“Home, I must go home at once! My God. Why didn’t I think of it before. I was so absent-minded.” He recalled that he had a diary, in which he had written long ago, when he was still a student, during his first term, something liberal, very strong, free and even beautiful. He recalled clearly that evening, and his room, and the tobacco that lay scattered on the table, and the feeling of pride, enthusiasm, and delight with which he wrote down those energetic, firm lines. He would tear out those pages and send them to her—and that would settle it. She would see, she would understand—she was a sensible and noble girl. How fine! and how hungry he was!

In the hallway Mitrofan was met by his alarmed wife.

“Where were you? What happened to you? Why do you look so upset?”

And throwing off his coat quickly, he shouted:

“With you I might be still more upset! The house is full of people and yet there is nobody to sew a button on my coat. The devil knows what you are doing here. I have told you a hundred times. Sew on this button. It’s disgraceful, disgraceful!”

And he walked away to his study.

“And how about dinner?”

“Later. Don’t bother me! Don’t follow me!”

There were many books there, many copy books, but the diary was not there. Sitting on the floor, he threw out of the lower drawer of the closet various papers, books, copy-books, sighing and despairing, angry at his cold, stiff fingers—until at last! There was the blue, slightly grease-stained cover, his careful hand-writing, dried flowers, the stale, sourish odour of perfume—how young he had been at that time!

Mitrofan seated himself at the table and for a long time turned the leaves of the diary, but the desired place was not to be found. And he recalled that five years ago, when the police had searched Anton’s house, he became so frightened that he tore out of his diary all the pages that might compromise him, and he burned them. It was useless to look for them—they were no more—they had been burned.

With lowered head, his face covered with his hands, he sat for a long time, motionless, before the desolate diary. But one candle was

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burning—it was unusually dark in the room, and from the black, formless chairs came the breath of cold, desolate loneliness. Far away in those rooms children were playing, shouting, laughing; in the dining-room tea was being served; people were walking, talking—while here all was silent as in a graveyard. If an artist had peeped into the room, felt this cold, gloomy darkness and noticed the heap of scattered papers and books, the dark figure of the man with his covered face, bent over the table in helpless grief—he would have painted a picture and would have called it “The Suicide.”

“But I can recall that passage,” thought Mitrofan. “I can recall it. Even if the paper was burned, the sentiments remained somewhere; they existed. I must recall them.”

But he recalled only that which was unimportant—the size of the paper, the handwriting, even the commas and the periods, but the essential part, the dear, beloved, bright part that could clear him—that was dead forever. It had lived and died, even as human beings die, as everything dies. If he knelt, cried, prayed that it come to life again—if he threatened, gnashed his teeth—the enormous emptiness would have remained silent, for it will never give up that which has fallen into its hands. Did ever tears or sobs bring a dead man back to life? There is no forgiveness, no mercy, no return—such is the law of cruel death.

It was dead. It had been killed. Base murderer! He himself had burned with his own hands the best flowers that had perhaps once in his life blossomed in his fruitless, beggarly soul! Poor perished flowers! Perhaps they were not bright, perhaps they had no power or beauty of creative thought, but they were the best that his soul had brought forth, and now they were no more and they will never blossom again. There is no forgiveness, no mercy, no return—such is the law of cruel death.

“What’s this? Wait,” he muttered to himself. “I have convinced myself that you, Ivanov, copied the problem—nonsense! I must speak to my wife. Masha! Masha!”

Maria entered. Her face was round, kind natured; her hair was thin and colourless. In her hands she held some work—a child’s dress.

“Well, Mitroscha, will you have dinner now?”

“No. Wait. I want to speak to you.”

Maria put her work aside with alarm and gazed into her husband’s face. Mitrofan turned away and said:

“Sit down.”

Maria sat down, adjusted her dress, folded her arms, and prepared to listen to him.

“I am listening,” she said, adjusting her dress once more.

“Do you know, Masha—I am a spy!” he said in a whisper, his voice quivering.

“What?”

“A spy, do you understand?”

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Maria wrung her hands quietly and exclaimed:

“I knew it, unfortunate woman that I am—my God! my God!”

Jumping over to his wife, Mitrofan waved his fist at her very face, restrained himself with difficulty from striking her, and shouted so loudly that all became quiet in the house.

“Fool! Blockhead! You knew it. My God! How could you know it? My wife—my friend, all my thoughts—my money, everything—”

He stationed himself at the stove and began to cry.

Mitrofan turned furiously to her and asked:

“Am I a spy? Well! Speak! Am I a spy, or am I not?”

“How do I know? Perhaps you are a spy.”

Avoiding certain details, Mitrofan confusedly told his wife the story of the student girl and of that meeting.

“Nonsense!” exclaimed Maria carelessly. “I thought there was really something seriously wrong. Is it worth bothering about this? Just shave yourself, take off your spectacles, and there’s the end of it. And at school, during the lesson, you may even wear your spectacles.”

“Do you think so? Is this what you call a beard?”

“Never mind it. Say what you like, you leave the beard alone. I have always said that your beard was all right, and I will say so now, too.”

Mitrofan recalled that the students called him “goat,” and he was very glad now. If his beard were not a good one they would never have nicknamed him “goat.” And in this joy he kissed his wife and, jestingly, even tickled her ear with his beard.

At about twelve o’clock at night, when all grew quiet in the house, and his wife had gone to sleep, Mitrofan brought a mirror, warm water, and soap into his study and sat down to shave himself. In addition to the lamp, he had to light two candles, and he felt somewhat ashamed and restless because of the bright light, and he looked only at the side of the face he was shaving.

He shaved his cheek; then he thought awhile, lathered his moustaches, and shaved them off. He looked at his face again. To-morrow people would laugh at that face.

Pressing his razor resolutely, Mitrofan threw his head back and carefully passed the dull side of the knife across his neck.

“It would be good to kill myself,” he thought, “but how could I?”

“Coward! Scoundrel!” he said aloud, indifferently.

To-morrow people would laugh at him—his comrades, his pupils. And his wife would also laugh at him.

He longed to be sunk in despair, to cry, to strike the mirror, to do something, but his soul was empty and dead, and he was sleepy.

“Perhaps that is due to the fact that I was out long in the fresh air,” he thought, yawning.

He removed his shaving cup, put out the light of the lamp and candles, and scraping with his slippers he went to his bedroom. He soon fell asleep, having pushed into the pillow his shaven face, at

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which everybody would laugh to-morrow: his friends, his wife—and he himself.

THE END