

# THE CHORUS GIRL

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

ANTON CHEKHOV

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# THE TALES OF CHEKHOV

## THE CHORUS GIRL

ONE day when she was younger and better-looking, and when her voice was stronger, Nikolay Petrovitch Kolpakov, her adorer, was sitting in the outer room in her summer villa. It was intolerably hot and stifling. Kolpakov, who had just dined and drunk a whole bottle of inferior port, felt ill-humoured and out of sorts. Both were bored and waiting for the heat of the day to be over in order to go for a walk.

All at once there was a sudden ring at the door. Kolpakov, who was sitting with his coat off, in his slippers, jumped up and looked inquiringly at Pasha.

"It must be the postman or one of the girls," said the singer.

Kolpakov did not mind being found by the postman or Pasha's lady friends, but by way of precaution gathered up his clothes and went into the next room, while Pasha ran to open the door. To her great surprise in the doorway stood, not the postman and not a girl friend, but an unknown woman, young and beautiful, who was dressed like a lady, and from all outward signs was one.

The stranger was pale and was breathing heavily as though she had been running up a steep flight of stairs.

"What is it?" asked Pasha.

The lady did not at once answer. She took a step forward, slowly looked about the room, and sat down in a way that suggested that from fatigue, or perhaps illness, she could not stand; then for a long time her pale lips quivered as she tried in vain to speak.

"Is my husband here?" she asked at last, raising to Pasha her big eyes with their red tear-stained lids.

"Husband?" whispered Pasha, and was suddenly so frightened that her hands and feet turned cold. "What husband?" she repeated, beginning to tremble.

"My husband, . . . Nikolay Petrovitch Kolpakov."

"N . . . no, madam. . . I . . . I don't know any husband."

A minute passed in silence. The stranger several times passed her handkerchief over her pale lips and held her breath to stop her inward trembling, while Pasha stood before her motionless, like a post, and looked at her with astonishment and terror.

"So you say he is not here?" the lady asked, this time speaking with a firm voice and smiling oddly.

"I . . . I don't know who it is you are asking about."

"You are horrid, mean, vile . . ." the stranger muttered, scanning Pasha with hatred and repulsion. "Yes, yes . . . you are horrid. I am very, very glad that at last I can tell you so!"

Pasha felt that on this lady in black with the angry eyes and white









































































































































































































































































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running boats and killing geese—what a fortune he would have made! But nothing of this had happened, even in his dreams; life had passed uselessly without any pleasure, had been wasted for nothing, not even a pinch of snuff; there was nothing left in front, and if one looked back—there was nothing there but losses, and such terrible ones, it made one cold all over. And why was it a man could not live so as to avoid these losses and misfortunes? One wondered why they had cut down the birch copse and the pine forest. Why was he walking with no reason on the grazing ground? Why do people always do what isn't needful? Why had Yakov all his life scolded, bellowed, shaken his fists, ill-treated his wife, and, one might ask, what necessity was there for him to frighten and insult the Jew that day? Why did people in general hinder each other from living? What losses were due to it! what terrible losses! If it were not for hatred and malice people would get immense benefit from one another.

In the evening and the night he had visions of the baby, of the willow, of fish, of slaughtered geese, and Marfa looking in profile like a bird that wants to drink, and the pale, pitiful face of Rothschild, and faces moved down from all sides and muttered of losses. He tossed from side to side, and got out of bed five times to play the fiddle.

In the morning he got up with an effort and went to the hospital. The same Maxim Nikolaitch told him to put a cold compress on his head, and gave him some powders, and from his tone and expression of face Yakov realized that it was a bad case and that no powders would be any use. As he went home afterwards, he reflected that death would be nothing but a benefit; he would not have to eat or drink, or pay taxes or offend people, and, as a man lies in his grave not for one year but for hundreds and thousands, if one reckoned it up the gain would be enormous. A man's life meant loss: death meant gain. This reflection was, of course, a just one, but yet it was bitter and mortifying; why was the order of the world so strange, that life, which is given to man only once, passes away without benefit?

He was not sorry to die, but at home, as soon as he saw his fiddle, it sent a pang to his heart and he felt sorry. He could not take the fiddle with him to the grave, and now it would be left forlorn, and the same thing would happen to it as to the birch copse and the pine forest. Everything in this world was wasted and would be wasted! Yakov went out of the hut and sat in the doorway, pressing the fiddle to his bosom. Thinking of his wasted, profitless life, he began to play, he did not know what, but it was plaintive and touching, and tears trickled down his cheeks. And the harder he thought, the more mournfully the fiddle wailed.

The latch clicked once and again, and Rothschild appeared at the gate. He walked across half the yard boldly, but seeing Yakov he

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stopped short, and seemed to shrink together, and probably from terror, began making signs with his hands as though he wanted to show on his fingers what o'clock it was.

"Come along, it's all right," said Yakov in a friendly tone, and he beckoned him to come up. "Come along!"

Looking at him mistrustfully and apprehensively, Rothschild began to advance, and stopped seven feet off.

"Be so good as not to beat me," he said, ducking. "Moisey Ilyitch has sent me again. 'Don't be afraid,' he said; 'go to Yakov again and tell him,' he said, 'we can't get on without him.' There is a wedding on Wednesday. . . . Ye—es! Mr. Shapovalov is marrying his daughter to a good man. . . . And it will be a grand wedding, oo-oo!" added the Jew, screwing up one eye.

"I can't come," said Yakov, breathing hard. "I'm ill, brother."

And he began playing again, and the tears gushed from his eyes on to the fiddle. Rothschild listened attentively, standing sideways to him and folding his arms on his chest. The scared and perplexed expression on his face, little by little, changed to a look of woe and suffering; he rolled his eyes as though he were experiencing an agonizing ecstasy, and articulated, "Vachhh!" and tears slowly ran down his cheeks and trickled on his greenish coat.

And Yakov lay in bed all the rest of the day grieving. In the evening, when the priest confessing him asked, Did he remember any special sin he had committed? straining his failing memory he thought again of Marfa's unhappy face, and the despairing shriek of the Jew when the dog bit him, and said, hardly audibly, "Give the fiddle to Rothschild."

"Very well," answered the priest.

And now everyone in the town asks where Rothschild got such a fine fiddle. Did he buy it or steal it? Or perhaps it had come to him as a pledge. He gave up the flute long ago, and now plays nothing but the fiddle. As plaintive sounds flow now from his bow, as came once from his flute, but when he tries to repeat what Yakov played, sitting in the doorway, the effect is something so sad and sorrowful that his audience weep, and he himself rolls his eyes and articulates "Vachhh! . . ." And this new air was so much liked in the town that the merchants and officials used to be continually sending for Rothschild and making him play it over and over again a dozen times.

## IVAN MATVEYITCH

BETWEEN five and six in the evening. A fairly well-known man of learning—we will call him simply the man of learning—is sitting in his study nervously biting his nails.

"It's positively revolting," he says, continually looking at his watch. "It shows the utmost disrespect for another man's time and

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work. In England such a person would not earn a farthing, he would die of hunger. You wait a minute, when you do come. . . .”

And feeling a craving to vent his wrath and impatience upon someone, the man of learning goes to the door leading to his wife’s room and knocks.

“Listen, Katya,” he says in an indignant voice. “If you see Pyotr Danilitch, tell him that decent people don’t do such things. It’s abominable! He recommends a secretary, and does not know the sort of man he is recommending! The wretched boy is two or three hours late with unfailing regularity every day. Do you call that a secretary? Those two or three hours are more precious to me than two or three years to other people. When he does come I will swear at him like a dog, and won’t pay him and will kick him out. It’s no use standing on ceremony with people like that!”

“You say that every day, and yet he goes on coming and coming.”

“But to-day I have made up my mind. I have lost enough through him. You must excuse me, but I shall swear at him like a cabman.”

At last a ring is heard. The man of learning makes a grave face; drawing himself up, and, throwing back his head, he goes into the entry. There his amanuensis, Ivan Matveyitch, a young man of eighteen, with a face oval as an egg and no moustache, wearing a shabby, mangy overcoat and no goloshes, is already standing by the hatstand. He is in breathless haste, and scrupulously wipes his huge clumsy boots on the doormat, trying as he does so to conceal from the maidservant a hole in his boot through which a white sock is peeping. Seeing the man of learning he smiles with that broad, prolonged, somewhat foolish smile which is seen only on the faces of children or very good-natured people.

“Ah, good evening!” he says, holding out a big wet hand. “Has your sore throat gone?”

“Ivan Matveyitch,” says the man of learning in a shaking voice, stepping back and clasping his hands together. “Ivan Matveyitch.”

Then he dashes up to the amanuensis, clutches him by the shoulders, and begins feebly shaking him.

“What a way to treat me!” he says with despair in his voice. “You dreadful, horrid fellow, what a way to treat me! Are you laughing at me, are you jeering at me? Eh?”

Judging from the smile which still lingered on his face Ivan Matveyitch had expected a very different reception, and so, seeing the man of learning’s countenance eloquent of indignation, his oval face grows longer than ever, and he opens his mouth in amazement.

“What is . . . what is it?” he asks.

“And you ask that?” the man of learning clasps his hands. “You know how precious time is to me, and you are so late. You are two hours late! . . . Have you no fear of God?”

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"I haven't come straight from home," mutters Ivan Matveyitch, untying his scarf irresolutely. "I have been at my aunt's name-day party, and my aunt lives five miles away. . . . If I had come straight from home, then it would have been a different thing."

"Come, reflect, Ivan Matveyitch, is there any logic in your conduct? Here you have work to do, work at a fixed time, and you go flying off after name-day parties and aunts! But do make haste and undo your wretched scarf! It's beyond endurance, really!"

The man of learning dashes up to the amanuensis again and helps him to disentangle his scarf.

"You are done up like a peasant woman. . . . Come along. . . . Please make haste!"

Blowing his nose in a dirty, crumpled-up handkerchief and pulling down his grey reefer jacket, Ivan Matveyitch goes through the hall and the drawing-room to the study. There a place and paper and even cigarettes had been put ready for him long ago.

"Sit down, sit down," the man of learning urges him on, rubbing his hands impatiently. "You are an unsufferable person. . . . You know the work has to be finished by a certain time, and then you are so late. One is forced to scold you. Come, write. . . . Where did we stop?"

Ivan Matveyitch smoothes his bristling cropped hair and takes up his pen. The man of learning walks up and down the room, concentrates himself, and begins to dictate:

"The fact is . . . comma . . . that so to speak fundamental forms . . . have you written it? . . . forms are conditioned entirely by the essential nature of those principles . . . comma . . . which find in them their expression and can only be embodied in them. . . . New line. . . . There's a stop there, of course. . . . More independence is found . . . is found . . . by the forms which have not so much a political. . . comma . . . as a social character . . ."

"The high-school boys have a different uniform now . . . a grey one," said Ivan Matveyitch, "when I was at school it was better: they used to wear regular uniforms."

"Oh dear, write please!" says the man of learning wrathfully. "Character . . . have you written it? Speaking of the forms relating to the organization . . . of administrative functions, and not to the regulation of the life of the people . . . comma . . . it cannot be said that they are marked by the nationalism of their forms . . . the last three words in inverted commas. . . . Aie, aie . . . tut, tut . . . so what did you want to say about the high school?"

"That they used to wear a different uniform in my time."

"Aha! . . . indeed. . . . Is it long since you left the high school?"

"But I told you that yesterday. It is three years since I left school. . . . I left in the fourth class."

"And why did you give up high school?" asks the man of learning, looking at Ivan Matveyitch's writing.

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“Oh, through family circumstances.”

“Must I speak to you again, Ivan Matveyitch? When will you get over your habit of dragging out the lines? There ought not to be less than forty letters in a line.”

“What, do you suppose I do it on purpose?” says Ivan Matveyitch, offended. “There are more than forty letters in some of the other lines. . . . You count them. And if you think I don’t put enough in the line, you can take something off my pay.”

“Oh dear, that’s not the point. You have no delicacy, really. . . . At the least thing you drag in money. The great thing is to be exact, Ivan Matveyitch, to be exact is the great thing. You ought to train yourself to be exact.”

The maidservant brings in a tray with two glasses of tea on it, and a basket of rusks. . . . Ivan Matveyitch takes his glass awkwardly with both hands, and at once begins drinking it. The tea is too hot. To avoid burning his mouth Ivan Matveyitch tries to take a tiny sip. He eats one rusk, then a second, then a third, and, looking sideways, with embarrassment, at the man of learning, timidly stretches after a fourth. . . . The noise he makes in swallowing, the relish with which he smacks his lips, and the expression of hungry greed in his raised eyebrows irritate the man of learning.

“Make haste and finish, time is precious.”

“You dictate, I can drink and write at the same time. . . . I must confess I was hungry.”

“I should think so after your walk!”

“Yes, and what wretched weather! In our parts there is a scent of spring by now. . . . There are puddles everywhere; the snow is melting.”

“You are a southerner, I suppose?”

“From the Don region. . . . It’s quite spring with us by March. Here it is frosty, everyone’s in a fur coat, . . . but there you can see the grass . . . it’s dry everywhere, and one can even catch tarantulas.”

“And what do you catch tarantulas for?”

“Oh! . . . to pass the time . . .” says Ivan Matveyitch, and he sighs. “It’s fun catching them. You fix a bit of pitch on a thread, let it down into their hole and begin hitting the tarantula on the back with the pitch, and the brute gets cross, catches hold of the pitch with his claws, and gets stuck. . . . And what we used to do with them! We used to put a basinful of them together and drop a bihorka in with them.”

“What is a bihorka?”

“That’s another spider, very much the same as a tarantula. In a fight one of them can kill a hundred tarantulas.”

“H’m! . . . But we must write. . . . Where did we stop?”

The man of learning dictates another twenty lines, then sits plunged in meditation.

Ivan Matveyitch, waiting while the other cogitates, sits and,

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craning his neck, puts the collar of his shirt to rights. His tie will not set properly, the stud has come out, and the collar keeps coming apart.

"H'm! . . ." says the man of learning. "Well, haven't you found a job yet, Ivan Matveyitch?"

"No. And how is one to find one? I am thinking, you know, of volunteering for the army. But my father advises my going into a chemist's."

"H'm! . . . But it would be better for you to go into the university. The examination is difficult, but with patience and hard work you could get through. Study, read more. . . . Do you read much?"

"Not much, I must own . . ." says Ivan Matveyitch, lighting a cigarette.

"Have you read Turgenev?"

"N-no. . . ."

"And Gogol?"

"Gogol. H'm! . . . Gogol. . . . No, I haven't read him!"

"Ivan Matveyitch! Aren't you ashamed? Aie! aie! You are such a nice fellow, so much that is original in you . . . you haven't even read Gogol! You must read him! I will give you his works! It's essential to read him! We shall quarrel if you don't!"

Again a silence follows. The man of learning meditates, half reclining on a soft lounge, and Ivan Matveyitch, leaving his collar in peace, concentrates his whole attention on his boots. He has not till then noticed that two big puddles have been made by the snow melting off his boots on the floor. He is ashamed.

"I can't get on to-day . . ." mutters the man of learning. "I suppose you are fond of catching birds, too, Ivan Matveyitch?"

"That's in autumn. . . . I don't catch them here, but there at home I always did."

"To be sure . . . very good. But we must write, though."

The man of learning gets up resolutely and begins dictating, but after ten lines sits down on the lounge again.

"No. . . . Perhaps we had better put it off till to-morrow morning," he says. "Come to-morrow morning, only come early, at nine o'clock. God preserve you from being late!"

Ivan Matveyitch lays down his pen, gets up from the table and sits in another chair. Five minutes pass in silence, and he begins to feel it is time for him to go, that he is in the way; but in the man of learning's study it is so snug and light and warm, and the impression of the nice rusks and sweet tea is still so fresh that there is a pang at his heart at the mere thought of home. At home there is poverty, hunger, cold, his grumbling father, scoldings, and here it is so quiet and unruffled, and interest even is taken in his tarantulas and birds.

The man of learning looks at his watch and takes up a book.

"So you will give me Gogol?" says Ivan Matveyitch, getting up.

"Yes, yes! But why are you in such a hurry, my dear boy? Sit

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down and tell me something . . .”

Ivan Matveyitch sits down and smiles broadly. Almost every evening he sits in this study and always feels something extraordinarily soft, attracting him, as it were akin, in the voice and the glance of the man of learning. There are moments when he even fancies that the man of learning is becoming attached to him, used to him, and that if he scolds him for being late, it's simply because he misses his chatter about tarantulas and how they catch goldfinches on the Don.

### ZINOTCHKA

THE party of sportsmen spent the night in a peasant's hut on some newly mown hay. The moon peeped in at the window; from the street came the mournful wheezing of a concertina; from the hay came a sickly sweet, faintly troubling scent. The sportsmen talked about dogs, about women, about first love, and about snipe. After all the ladies of their acquaintance had been picked to pieces, and hundreds of stories had been told, the stoutest of the sportsmen, who looked in the darkness like a haycock, and who talked in the mellow bass of a staff officer, gave a loud yawn and said:

“It is nothing much to be loved; the ladies are created for the purpose of loving us men. But, tell me, has any one of you fellows been hated—passionately, furiously hated? Has any one of you watched the ecstasies of hatred? Eh?”

No answer followed.

“Has no one, gentlemen?” asked the staff officer's bass voice. “But I, now, have been hated, hated by a pretty girl, and have been able to study the symptoms of first hatred directed against myself. It was the first, because it was something exactly the converse of first love. What I am going to tell, however, happened when I knew nothing about love or hate. I was eight at the time, but that made no difference; in this case it was not *he* but *she* that mattered. Well, I beg your attention. One fine summer evening, just before sunset, I was sitting in the nursery, doing my lesson with my governess, Zinotchka, a very charming and poetical creature who had left boarding school not long before. Zinotchka looked absent-mindedly towards the window and said:

“Yes. We breathe in oxygen; now tell me, Petya, what do we breathe out?”

“Carbonic acid gas,’ I answered, looking towards the same window.

“Right,’ assented Zinotchka. ‘Plants, on the contrary, breathe in carbonic acid gas, and breathe out oxygen. Carbonic acid gas is contained in seltzer water, and in the fumes from the samovar. . . . It is a very noxious gas. Near Naples there is the so-called Cave of Dogs,



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which contains carbonic acid gas; a dog dropped into it is suffocated and dies.'

"This luckless Cave of Dogs near Naples is a chemical marvel beyond which no governess ventures to go. Zinotchka always hotly maintained the usefulness of natural science, but I doubt if she knew any chemistry beyond this Cave.

"Well, she told me to repeat it. I repeated it. She asked me what was meant by the horizon. I answered. And meantime, while we were ruminating over the horizon and the Cave, in the yard below, my father was just getting ready to go shooting. The dogs yapped, the trace horses shifted from one leg to another impatiently and coquetted with the coachman, the footman packed the waggonette with parcels and all sorts of things. Beside the waggonette stood a brake in which my mother and sisters were sitting to drive to a name-day party at the Ivanetskys'. No one was left in the house but Zinotchka, me, and my eldest brother, a student, who had toothache. You can imagine my envy and my boredom.

"'Well, what do we breathe in?' asked Zinotchka, looking at the window.

"'Oxygen. . . .'

"'Yes. And the horizon is the name given to the place where it seems to us as though the earth meets the sky . . .'

"Then the waggonette drove off, and after it the brake. . . . I saw Zinotchka take a note out of her pocket, crumple it up convulsively and press it to her temple, then she flushed crimson and looked at her watch.

"'So, remember,' she said, 'that near Naples is the so-called Cave of Dogs. . . .' She glanced at her watch again and went on: 'where the sky seems to us to meet the earth. . . .'

"The poor girl in violent agitation walked about the room, and once more glanced at her watch. There was another half-hour before the end of our lesson.

"'Now arithmetic,' she said, breathing hard and turning over the pages of the sum-book with a trembling hand. 'Come, you work out problem 325 and I . . . will be back directly.'

"She went out. I heard her scurry down the stairs, and then I saw her dart across the yard in her blue dress and vanish through the garden gate. The rapidity of her movements, the flush on her cheeks and her excitement, aroused my curiosity. Where had she run, and what for? Being intelligent beyond my years I soon put two and two together, and understood it all: she had run into the garden, taking advantage of the absence of my stern parents, to steal in among the raspberry bushes, or to pick herself some cherries. If that were so, dash it all, I would go and have some cherries too. I threw aside the sum-book and ran into the garden. I ran to the cherry orchard, but she was not there. Passing by the raspberries, the gooseberries, and the watchman's shanty, she crossed the kitchen garden and reached

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the pond, pale, and starting at every sound. I stole after her, and what I saw, my friends, was this. At the edge of the pond, between the thick stumps of two old willows, stood my elder brother, Sasha; one could not see from his face that he had toothache. He looked towards Zinotchka as she approached him, and his whole figure was lighted up by an expression of happiness as though by sunshine. And Zinotchka, as though she were being driven into the Cave of Dogs, and were being forced to breathe carbonic acid gas, walked towards him, scarcely able to move one leg before the other, breathing hard, with her head thrown back. . . . To judge from appearances she was going to a rendezvous for the first time in her life. But at last she reached him. . . . For half a minute they gazed at each other in silence, as though they could not believe their eyes. Thereupon some force seemed to shove Zinotchka; she laid her hands on Sasha's shoulders and let her head droop upon his waistcoat. Sasha laughed, muttered something incoherent, and with the clumsiness of a man head over ears in love, laid both hands on Zinotchka's face. And the weather, gentlemen, was exquisite. . . . The hill behind which the sun was setting, the two willows, the green bank, the sky—all together with Sasha and Zinotchka were reflected in the pond . . . perfect stillness . . . you can imagine it. Millions of butterflies with long whiskers gleamed golden above the reeds; beyond the garden they were driving the cattle. In fact, it was a perfect picture.

“Of all I had seen the only thing I understood was that Sasha was kissing Zinotchka. That was improper. If *maman* heard of it they would both catch it. Feeling for some reason ashamed I went back to the nursery, not waiting for the end of the rendezvous. There I sat over the sum-book, pondered and reflected. A triumphant smile strayed upon my countenance. On one side it was agreeable to be the possessor of another person's secret; on the other it was also very agreeable that such authorities as Sasha and Zinotchka might at any moment be convicted by me of ignorance of the social proprieties. Now they were in my power, and their peace was entirely dependent on my magnanimity. I'd let them know.

“When I went to bed, Zinotchka came into the nursery as usual to find out whether I had dropped asleep without undressing and whether I had said my prayers. I looked at her pretty, happy face and grinned. I was bursting with my secret and itching to let it out. I had to drop a hint and enjoy the effect.

“‘I know,’ I said, grinning. ‘Gy—y.’

“‘What do you know?’

“‘Gy—y! I saw you near the willows kissing Sasha. I followed you and saw it all. . . .’

“Zinotchka started, flushed all over, and overwhelmed by ‘my hint’ she sank down on the chair, on which stood a glass of water and a candlestick.

“‘I saw you . . . kissing . . .’ I repeated, sniggering and enjoying

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her confusion. 'Aha! I'll tell mamma!'

"Cowardly Zinotchka gazed at me intently, and convincing herself that I really did know all about it, clutched my hand in despair and muttered in a trembling whisper:

"Petya, it is low. . . . I beg of you, for God's sake. . . . Be a man . . . don't tell anyone. . . . Decent people don't spy. . . . It's low. . . . I entreat you.'

"The poor girl was terribly afraid of my mother, a stern and virtuous lady—that was one thing; and the second was that my grinning countenance could not but outrage her first love so pure and poetical, and you can imagine the state of her heart. Thanks to me, she did not sleep a wink all night, and in the morning she appeared at breakfast with blue rings round her eyes. When I met Sasha after breakfast I could not refrain from grinning and boasting:

"I know! I saw you yesterday kissing Mademoiselle Zina!"

"Sasha looked at me and said:

"You are a fool.'

"He was not so cowardly as Zinotchka, and so my effect did not come off. That provoked me to further efforts. If Sasha was not frightened it was evident that he did not believe that I had seen and knew all about it; wait a bit, I would show him.

"At our lessons before dinner Zinotchka did not look at me, and her voice faltered. Instead of trying to scare me she tried to propitiate me in every way, giving me full marks, and not complaining to my father of my naughtiness. Being intelligent beyond my years I exploited her secret: I did not learn my lessons, walked into the schoolroom on my head, and said all sorts of rude things. In fact, if I had remained in that vein till to-day I should have become a famous blackmailer. Well, a week passed. Another person's secret irritated and fretted me like a splinter in my soul. I longed at all costs to blurt it out and gloat over the effect. And one day at dinner, when we had a lot of visitors, I gave a stupid snigger, looked fiendishly at Zinotchka and said:

"I know. Gy—y! I saw! . . ."

"What do you know?" asked my mother.

"I looked still more fiendishly at Zinotchka and Sasha. You ought to have seen how the girl flushed up, and how furious Sasha's eyes were! I bit my tongue and did not go on. Zinotchka gradually turned pale, clenched her teeth, and ate no more dinner. At our evening lessons that day I noticed a striking change in Zinotchka's face. It looked sterner, colder, as it were, more like marble, while her eyes gazed strangely straight into my face, and I give you my word of honour I have never seen such terrible, annihilating eyes, even in hounds when they overtake the wolf. I understood their expression perfectly, when in the middle of a lesson she suddenly clenched her teeth and hissed through them:

"I hate you! Oh, you vile, loathsome creature, if you knew how

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I hate you, how I detest your cropped head, your vulgar, prominent ears!

“But at once she took fright and said:

“I am not speaking to you, I am repeating a part out of a play...”

“Then, my friends, at night I saw her come to my bedside and gaze a long time into my face. She hated me passionately, and could not exist away from me. The contemplation of my hated pug of a face had become a necessity to her. I remember a lovely summer evening . . . with the scent of hay, perfect stillness, and so on. The moon was shining. I was walking up and down the avenue, thinking of cherry jam. Suddenly Zinotchka, looking pale and lovely, came up to me, she caught hold of my hand, and breathlessly began expressing herself:

“Oh, how I hate you! I wish no one harm as I do you! Let me tell you that! I want you to understand that!”

“You understand, moonlight, her pale face, breathless with passion, the stillness . . . little pig as I was I actually enjoyed it. I listened to her, looked at her eyes. . . . At first I liked it, and enjoyed the novelty. Then I was suddenly seized with terror, I gave a scream, and ran into the house at breakneck speed.

“I made up my mind that the best thing to do was to complain to *maman*. And I did complain, mentioning incidentally how Sasha had kissed Zinotchka. I was stupid, and did not know what would follow, or I should have kept the secret to myself. . . . After hearing my story *maman* flushed with indignation and said:

“It is not your business to speak about that, you are still very young. . . . But, what an example for children.”

“My *maman* was not only virtuous but diplomatic. To avoid a scandal she did not get rid of Zinotchka at once, but set to work gradually, systematically, to pave the way for her departure, as one does with well-bred but intolerable people. I remember that when Zinotchka did leave us the last glance she cast at the house was directed at the window at which I was sitting, and I assure you, I remember that glance to this day.

“Zinotchka soon afterwards became my brother’s wife. She is the Zinaida Nikolaevna whom you know. The next time I met her I was already an ensign. In spite of all her efforts she could not recognize the hated Petya in the ensign with his moustache, but still she did not treat me quite like a relation. . . . And even now, in spite of my good-humoured baldness, meek corpulence, and unassuming air, she still looks askance at me, and feels put out when I go to see my brother. Hatred it seems can no more be forgotten than love. . .

·  
“Tchoo! I hear the cock crowing! Good-night. Milord! Lie down!”

## BAD WEATHER

BIG raindrops were pattering on the dark windows. It was one of those disgusting summer holiday rains which, when they have begun, last a long time—for weeks, till the frozen holiday maker grows used to it, and sinks into complete apathy. It was cold; there was a feeling of raw, unpleasant dampness. The mother-in-law of a lawyer, called Kvashin, and his wife, Nadyezhda Filippovna, dressed in waterproofs and shawls, were sitting over the dinner table in the dining-room. It was written on the countenance of the elder lady that she was, thank God, well-fed, well-clothed and in good health, that she had married her only daughter to a good man, and now could play her game of patience with an easy conscience; her daughter, a rather short, plump, fair young woman of twenty, with a gentle anaemic face, was reading a book with her elbows on the table; judging from her eyes she was not so much reading as thinking her own thoughts, which were not in the book. Neither of them spoke. There was the sound of the pattering rain, and from the kitchen they could hear the prolonged yawns of the cook.

Kvashin himself was not at home. On rainy days he did not come to the summer villa, but stayed in town; damp, rainy weather affected his bronchitis and prevented him from working. He was of the opinion that the sight of the grey sky and the tears of rain on the windows deprived one of energy and induced the spleen. In the town, where there was greater comfort, bad weather was scarcely noticed.

After two games of patience, the old lady shuffled the cards and took a glance at her daughter.

“I have been trying with the cards whether it will be fine tomorrow, and whether our Alexey Stepanovitch will come,” she said. “It is five days since he was here. . . . The weather is a chastisement from God.”

Nadyezhda Filippovna looked indifferently at her mother, got up, and began walking up and down the room.

“The barometer was rising yesterday,” she said doubtfully, “but they say it is falling again to-day.”

The old lady laid out the cards in three long rows and shook her head.

“Do you miss him?” she asked, glancing at her daughter.

“Of course.”

“I see you do. I should think so. He hasn’t been here for five days. In May the utmost was two, or at most three days, and now it is serious, five days! I am not his wife, and yet I miss him. And yesterday, when I heard the barometer was rising, I ordered them to kill a chicken and prepare a carp for Alexey Stepanovitch. He likes them. Your poor father couldn’t bear fish, but he likes it. He always eats it with relish.”

## THE CHORUS GIRL AND OTHER STORIES

"My heart aches for him," said the daughter. "We are dull, but it is duller still for him, you know, mamma."

"I should think so! In the law-courts day in and day out, and in the empty flat at night alone like an owl."

"And what is so awful, mamma, he is alone there without servants; there is no one to set the samovar or bring him water. Why didn't he engage a valet for the summer months? And what use is the summer villa at all if he does not care for it? I told him there was no need to have it, but no, 'It is for the sake of your health,' he said, and what is wrong with my health? It makes me ill that he should have to put up with so much on my account."

Looking over her mother's shoulder, the daughter noticed a mistake in the patience, bent down to the table and began correcting it. A silence followed. Both looked at the cards and imagined how their Alexey Stepanovitch, utterly forlorn, was sitting now in the town in his gloomy, empty study and working, hungry, exhausted, yearning for his family. . . .

"Do you know what, mamma?" said Nadyezhda Filippovna suddenly, and her eyes began to shine. "If the weather is the same to-morrow I'll go by the first train and see him in town! Anyway, I shall find out how he is, have a look at him, and pour out his tea."

And both of them began to wonder how it was that this idea, so simple and easy to carry out, had not occurred to them before. It was only half an hour in the train to the town, and then twenty minutes in a cab. They said a little more, and went off to bed in the same room, feeling more contented.

"Oho-ho-ho. . . . Lord, forgive us sinners!" sighed the old lady when the clock in the hall struck two. "There is no sleeping."

"You are not asleep, mamma?" the daughter asked in a whisper. "I keep thinking of Alyosha. I only hope he won't ruin his health in town. Goodness knows where he dines and lunches. In restaurants and taverns."

"I have thought of that myself," sighed the old lady. "The Heavenly Mother save and preserve him. But the rain, the rain!"

In the morning the rain was not pattering on the panes, but the sky was still grey. The trees stood looking mournful, and at every gust of wind they scattered drops. The footprints on the muddy path, the ditches and the ruts were full of water. Nadyezhda Filippovna made up her mind to go.

"Give him my love," said the old lady, wrapping her daughter up. "Tell him not to think too much about his cases. . . . And he must rest. Let him wrap his throat up when he goes out: the weather—God help us! And take him the chicken; food from home, even if cold, is better than at a restaurant." The daughter went away, saying that she would come back by an evening train or else next morning.

But she came back long before dinner-time, when the old lady

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was sitting on her trunk in her bedroom and drowsily thinking what to cook for her son-in-law's supper.

Going into the room her daughter, pale and agitated, sank on the bed without uttering a word or taking off her hat, and pressed her head into the pillow.

"But what is the matter," said the old lady in surprise, "why back so soon? Where is Alexey Stepanovitch?"

Nadyezhda Filippovna raised her head and gazed at her mother with dry, imploring eyes.

"He is deceiving us, mamma," she said.

"What are you saying? Christ be with you!" cried the old lady in alarm, and her cap slipped off her head. "Who is going to deceive us? Lord, have mercy on us!"

"He is deceiving us, mamma!" repeated her daughter, and her chin began to quiver.

"How do you know?" cried the old lady, turning pale.

"Our flat is locked up. The porter tells me that Alyosha has not been home once for these five days. He is not living at home! He is not at home, not at home!"

She waved her hands and burst into loud weeping, uttering nothing but: "Not at home! Not at home!"

She began to be hysterical.

"What's the meaning of it?" muttered the old woman in horror. "Why, he wrote the day before yesterday that he never leaves the flat! Where is he sleeping? Holy Saints!"

Nadyezhda Filippovna felt so faint that she could not take off her hat. She looked about her blankly, as though she had been drugged, and convulsively clutched at her mother's arms.

"What a person to trust: a porter!" said the old lady, fussing round her daughter and crying. "What a jealous girl you are! He is not going to deceive you, and how dare he? We are not just anybody. Though we are of the merchant class, yet he has no right, for you are his lawful wife! We can take proceedings! I gave twenty thousand roubles with you! You did not want for a dowry!"

And the old lady herself sobbed and gesticulated, and she felt faint, too, and lay down on her trunk. Neither of them noticed that patches of blue had made their appearance in the sky, that the clouds were more transparent, that the first sunbeam was cautiously gliding over the wet grass in the garden, that with renewed gaiety the sparrows were hopping about the puddles which reflected the racing clouds.

Towards evening Kvashin arrived. Before leaving town he had gone to his flat and had learned from the porter that his wife had come in his absence.

"Here I am," he said gaily, coming into his mother-in-law's room and pretending not to notice their stern and tear-stained faces. "Here I am! It's five days since we have seen each other!"

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He rapidly kissed his wife's hand and his mother-in-law's, and with the air of man delighted at having finished a difficult task, he lolled in an arm-chair.

"Ough!" he said, puffing out all the air from his lungs. "Here I have been worried to death. I have scarcely sat down. For almost five days now I have been, as it were, bivouacking. I haven't been to the flat once, would you believe it? I have been busy the whole time with the meeting of Shipunov's and Ivantchikov's creditors; I had to work in Galdeyev's office at the shop. . . . I've had nothing to eat or to drink, and slept on a bench, I was chilled through. . . . I hadn't a free minute. I hadn't even time to go to the flat. That's how I came not to be at home, Nadyusha. . . ."

And Kvashin, holding his sides as though his back were aching, glanced stealthily at his wife and mother-in-law to see the effect of his lie, or as he called it, diplomacy. The mother-in-law and wife were looking at each other in joyful astonishment, as though beyond all hope and expectation they had found something precious, which they had lost. . . . Their faces beamed, their eyes glowed. . . .

"My dear man," cried the old lady, jumping up, "why am I sitting here? Tea! Tea at once! Perhaps you are hungry?"

"Of course he is hungry," cried his wife, pulling off her head a bandage soaked in vinegar. "Mamma, bring the wine, and the savouries. Natalya, lay the table! Oh, my goodness, nothing is ready!"

And both of them, frightened, happy, and bustling, ran about the room. The old lady could not look without laughing at her daughter who had slandered an innocent man, and the daughter felt ashamed. . . .

The table was soon laid. Kvashin, who smelt of madeira and liqueurs and who could scarcely breathe from repletion, complained of being hungry, forced himself to munch and kept on talking of the meeting of Shipunov's and Ivantchikov's creditors, while his wife and mother-in-law could not take their eyes off his face, and both thought:

"How clever and kind he is! How handsome!"

"All serene," thought Kvashin, as he lay down on the well-filled feather bed. "Though they are regular tradesmen's wives, though they are Philistines, yet they have a charm of their own, and one can spend a day or two of the week here with enjoyment. . . ."

He wrapped himself up, got warm, and as he dozed off, he said to himself:

"All serene!"

## A GENTLEMAN FRIEND

THE charming Vanda, or, as she was described in her passport, the



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“Honourable Citizen Nastasya Kanavkin,” found herself, on leaving the hospital, in a position she had never been in before: without a home to go to or a farthing in her pocket. What was she to do?

The first thing she did was to visit a pawn-broker’s and pawn her turquoise ring, her one piece of jewellery. They gave her a rouble for the ring . . . but what can you get for a rouble? You can’t buy for that sum a fashionable short jacket, nor a big hat, nor a pair of bronze shoes, and without those things she had a feeling of being, as it were, undressed. She felt as though the very horses and dogs were staring and laughing at the plainness of her dress. And clothes were all she thought about: the question what she should eat and where she should sleep did not trouble her in the least.

“If only I could meet a gentleman friend,” she thought to herself, “I could get some money. . . . There isn’t one who would refuse me, I know. . . .” But no gentleman she knew came her way. It would be easy enough to meet them in the evening at the “Renaissance,” but they wouldn’t let her in at the “Renaissance” in that shabby dress and with no hat. What was she to do?

After long hesitation, when she was sick of walking and sitting and thinking, Vanda made up her mind to fall back on her last resource: to go straight to the lodgings of some gentleman friend and ask for money.

She pondered which to go to. “Misha is out of the question; he’s a married man. . . . The old chap with the red hair will be at his office at this time. . . .”

Vanda remembered a dentist, called Finkel, a converted Jew, who six months ago had given her a bracelet, and on whose head she had once emptied a glass of beer at the supper at the German Club. She was awfully pleased at the thought of Finkel.

“He’ll be sure to give it me, if only I find him at home,” she thought, as she walked in his direction. “If he doesn’t, I’ll smash all the lamps in the house.”

Before she reached the dentist’s door she thought out her plan of action: she would run laughing up the stairs, dash into the dentist’s room and demand twenty-five roubles. But as she touched the bell, this plan seemed to vanish from her mind of itself. Vanda began suddenly feeling frightened and nervous, which was not at all her way. She was bold and saucy enough at drinking parties, but now, dressed in everyday clothes, feeling herself in the position of an ordinary person asking a favour, who might be refused admittance, she felt suddenly timid and humiliated. She was ashamed and frightened.

“Perhaps he has forgotten me by now,” she thought, hardly daring to pull the bell. “And how can I go up to him in such a dress, looking like a beggar or some working girl?”

And she rang the bell irresolutely.

She heard steps coming: it was the porter.

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“Is the doctor at home?” she asked.

She would have been glad now if the porter had said “No,” but the latter, instead of answering ushered her into the hall, and helped her off with her coat. The staircase impressed her as luxurious, and magnificent, but of all its splendours what caught her eye most was an immense looking-glass, in which she saw a ragged figure without a fashionable jacket, without a big hat, and without bronze shoes. And it seemed strange to Vanda that, now that she was humbly dressed and looked like a laundress or sewing girl, she felt ashamed, and no trace of her usual boldness and sauciness remained, and in her own mind she no longer thought of herself as Vanda, but as the Nastasya Kanavkin she used to be in the old days. . . .

“Walk in, please,” said a maidservant, showing her into the consulting-room. “The doctor will be here in a minute. Sit down.”

Vanda sank into a soft arm-chair.

“I’ll ask him to lend it me,” she thought; “that will be quite proper, for, after all, I do know him. If only that servant would go. I don’t like to ask before her. What does she want to stand there for?”

Five minutes later the door opened and Finkel came in. He was a tall, dark Jew, with fat cheeks and bulging eyes. His cheeks, his eyes, his chest, his body, all of him was so well fed, so loathsome and repellent! At the “Renaissance” and the German Club he had usually been rather tipsy, and would spend his money freely on women, and be very long-suffering and patient with their pranks (when Vanda, for instance, poured the beer over his head, he simply smiled and shook his finger at her): now he had a cross, sleepy expression and looked solemn and frigid like a police captain, and he kept chewing something.

“What can I do for you?” he asked, without looking at Vanda.

Vanda looked at the serious countenance of the maid and the smug figure of Finkel, who apparently did not recognize her, and she turned red.

“What can I do for you?” repeated the dentist a little irritably.

“I’ve got toothache,” murmured Vanda.

“Aha! . . . Which is the tooth? Where?”

Vanda remembered she had a hole in one of her teeth.

“At the bottom . . . on the right . . .” she said.

“Hm! . . . Open your mouth.”

Finkel frowned and, holding his breath, began examining the tooth.

“Does it hurt?” he asked, digging into it with a steel instrument.

“Yes,” Vanda replied, untruthfully.

“Shall I remind him?” she was wondering. “He would be sure to remember me. But that servant! Why will she stand there?”

Finkel suddenly snorted like a steam-engine right into her mouth, and said:

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“I don’t advise you to have it stopped. That tooth will never be worth keeping anyhow.”

After probing the tooth a little more and soiling Vanda’s lips and gums with his tobacco-stained fingers, he held his breath again, and put something cold into her mouth. Vanda suddenly felt a sharp pain, cried out, and clutched at Finkel’s hand.

“It’s all right, it’s all right,” he muttered; “don’t you be frightened! That tooth would have been no use to you, anyway . . . you must be brave. . . .”

And his tobacco-stained fingers, smeared with blood, held up the tooth to her eyes, while the maid approached and put a basin to her mouth.

“You wash out your mouth with cold water when you get home, and that will stop the bleeding,” said Finkel.

He stood before her with the air of a man expecting her to go, waiting to be left in peace.

“Good-day,” she said, turning towards the door.

“Hm! . . . and how about my fee?” enquired Finkel, in a jesting tone.

“Oh, yes!” Vanda remembered, blushing, and she handed the Jew the rouble that had been given her for her ring.

When she got out into the street she felt more overwhelmed with shame than before, but now it was not her poverty she was ashamed of. She was unconscious now of not having a big hat and a fashionable jacket. She walked along the street, spitting blood, and brooding on her life, her ugly, wretched life, and the insults she had endured, and would have to endure to-morrow, and next week, and all her life, up to the very day of her death.

“Oh! how awful it is! My God, how fearful!”

Next day, however, she was back at the “Renaissance,” and dancing there. She had on an enormous new red hat, a new fashionable jacket, and bronze shoes. And she was taken out to supper by a young merchant up from Kazan.

## A TRIVIAL INCIDENT

IT was a sunny August midday as, in company with a Russian prince who had come down in the world, I drove into the immense so-called Shabelsky pine-forest where we were intending to look for woodcocks. In virtue of the part he plays in this story my poor prince deserves a detailed description. He was a tall, dark man, still youngish, though already somewhat battered by life; with long moustaches like a police captain’s; with prominent black eyes, and with the manners of a retired army man. He was a man of Oriental type, not very intelligent, but straightforward and honest, not a bully, not a

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fop, and not a rake—virtues which, in the eyes of the public, are equivalent to a certificate of being a nonentity and a poor creature. People generally did like him (he was never spoken of in the district, except as “the illustrious duffer”). I personally found the poor prince extremely nice with his misfortunes and failures, which made up indeed his whole life. First of all he was poor. He did not play cards, did not drink, had no occupation, did not poke his nose into anything, and maintained a perpetual silence but yet he had somehow succeeded in getting through thirty to forty thousand roubles left him at his father’s death. God only knows what had become of the money. All that I can say is that owing to lack of supervision a great deal was stolen by stewards, bailiffs, and even footmen; a great deal went on lending money, giving bail, and standing security. There were few landowners in the district who did not owe him money. He gave to all who asked, and not so much from good nature or confidence in people as from exaggerated gentlemanliness as though he would say: “Take it and feel how *comme il faut I am!*” By the time I made his acquaintance he had got into debt himself, had learned what it was like to have a second mortgage on his land, and had sunk so deeply into difficulties that there was no chance of his ever getting out of them again. There were days when he had no dinner, and went about with an empty cigar-holder, but he was always seen clean and fashionably dressed, and always smelt strongly of ylang-ylang.

The prince’s second misfortune was his absolute solitariness. He was not married, he had no friends nor relations. His silent and reserved character and his *comme il faut* deportment, which became the more conspicuous the more anxious he was to conceal his poverty, prevented him from becoming intimate with people. For love affairs he was too heavy, spiritless, and cold, and so rarely got on with women. . . .

When we reached the forest this prince and I got out of the chaise and walked along a narrow woodland path which was hidden among huge ferns. But before we had gone a hundred paces a tall, lank figure with a long oval face, wearing a shabby reefer jacket, a straw hat, and patent leather boots, rose up from behind a young fir-tree some three feet high, as though he had sprung out of the ground. The stranger held in one hand a basket of mushrooms, with the other he playfully fingered a cheap-watch-chain on his waistcoat. On seeing us he was taken aback, smoothed his waistcoat, coughed politely, and gave an agreeable smile, as though he were delighted to see such nice people as us. Then, to our complete surprise, he came up to us, scraping with his long feet on the grass, bending his whole person, and, still smiling agreeably, lifted his hat and pronounced in a sugary voice with the intonations of a whining dog:

“Aie, aie . . . gentlemen, painful as it is, it is my duty to warn you that shooting is forbidden in this wood. Pardon me for venturing to

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disturb you, though unacquainted, but . . . allow me to present myself. I am Grontovsky, the head clerk on Madame Kandurin's estate."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, but why can't we shoot?"

"Such is the wish of the owner of this forest!" The prince and I exchanged glances. A moment passed in silence. The prince stood looking pensively at a big fly agaric at his feet, which he had crushed with his stick. Grontovsky went on smiling agreeably. His whole face was twitching, exuding honey, and even the watch-chain on his waistcoat seemed to be smiling and trying to impress us all with its refinement. A shade of embarrassment passed over us like an angel passing; all three of us felt awkward.

"Nonsense!" I said. "Only last week I was shooting here!"

"Very possible!" Grontovsky sniggered through his teeth. "As a matter of fact everyone shoots here regardless of the prohibition. But once I have met you, it is my duty . . . my sacred duty to warn you. I am a man in a dependent position. If the forest were mine, on the word of honour of a Grontovsky, I should not oppose your agreeable pleasure. But whose fault is it that I am in a dependent position?"

The lanky individual sighed and shrugged his shoulders. I began arguing, getting hot and protesting, but the more loudly and impressively I spoke the more mawkish and sugary Grontovsky's face became. Evidently the consciousness of a certain power over us afforded him the greatest gratification. He was enjoying his condescending tone, his politeness, his manners, and with peculiar relish pronounced his sonorous surname, of which he was probably very fond. Standing before us he felt more than at ease, but judging from the confused sideways glances he cast from time to time at his basket, only one thing was spoiling his satisfaction—the mushrooms, womanish, peasantish, prose, derogatory to his dignity.

"We can't go back!" I said. "We have come over ten miles!"

"What's to be done?" sighed Grontovsky. "If you had come not ten but a hundred thousand miles, if the king even had come from America or from some other distant land, even then I should think it my duty . . . sacred, so to say, obligation. . ."

"Does the forest belong to Nadyezhda Lvovna?" asked the prince.

"Yes, Nadyezhda Lvovna . . ."

"Is she at home now?"

"Yes . . . I tell you what, you go to her, it is not more than, half a mile from here; if she gives you a note, then I . . . I needn't say! Ha—ha . . . he—he—!"

"By all means," I agreed. "It's much nearer than to go back. . . . You go to her, Sergey Ivanitch," I said, addressing the prince. "You know her."

The prince, who had been gazing the whole time at the crushed

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agaric, raised his eyes to me, thought a minute, and said:

“I used to know her at one time, but . . . it’s rather awkward for me to go to her. Besides, I am in shabby clothes. . . . You go, you don’t know her. . . . It’s more suitable for you to go.”

I agreed. We got into our chaise and, followed by Grontovsky’s smiles, drove along the edge of the forest to the manor house. I was not acquainted with Nadyezhda Lvovna Kandurin, *née* Shabelsky. I had never seen her at close quarters, and knew her only by hearsay. I knew that she was incredibly wealthy, richer than anyone else in the province. After the death of her father, Shabelsky, who was a landowner with no other children, she was left with several estates, a stud farm, and a lot of money. I had heard that, though she was only twenty-five or twenty-six, she was ugly, uninteresting, and as insignificant as anybody, and was only distinguished from the ordinary ladies of the district by her immense wealth.

It has always seemed to me that wealth is felt, and that the rich must have special feelings unknown to the poor. Often as I passed by Nadyezhda Lvovna’s big fruit garden, in which stood the large, heavy house with its windows always curtained, I thought: “What is she thinking at this moment? Is there happiness behind those blinds?” and so on. Once I saw her from a distance in a fine light cabriolet, driving a handsome white horse, and, sinful man that I am, I not only envied her, but even thought that in her poses, in her movements, there was something special, not to be found in people who are not rich, just as persons of a servile nature succeed in discovering “good family” at the first glance in people of the most ordinary exterior, if they are a little more distinguished than themselves. Nadyezhda Lvovna’s inner life was only known to me by scandal. It was said in the district that five or six years ago, before she was married, during her father’s lifetime, she had been passionately in love with Prince Sergey Ivanitch, who was now beside me in the chaise. The prince had been fond of visiting her father, and used to spend whole days in his billiard room, where he played pyramids indefatigably till his arms and legs ached. Six months before the old man’s death he had suddenly given up visiting the Shabelskys. The gossip of the district having no positive facts to go upon explained this abrupt change in their relations in various ways. Some said that the prince, having observed the plain daughter’s feeling for him and being unable to reciprocate it, considered it the duty of a gentleman to cut short his visits. Others maintained that old Shabelsky had discovered why his daughter was pining away, and had proposed to the poverty-stricken prince that he should marry her; the prince, imagining in his narrow-minded way that they were trying to buy him together with his title, was indignant, said foolish things, and quarrelled with them. What was true and what was false in this nonsense was difficult to say. But that there was a portion of truth in it was evident, from the fact that the prince always avoided conversation about

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Nadyezhda Lvovna.

I knew that soon after her father's death Nadyezhda Lvovna had married one Kandurin, a bachelor of law, not wealthy, but adroit, who had come on a visit to the neighbourhood. She married him not from love, but because she was touched by the love of the legal gentleman who, so it was said, had cleverly played the love-sick swain. At the time I am describing, Kandurin was for some reason living in Cairo, and writing thence to his friend, the marshal of the district, "Notes of Travel," while she sat languishing behind lowered blinds, surrounded by idle parasites, and whiled away her dreary days in petty philanthropy.

On the way to the house the prince fell to talking.

"It's three days since I have been at home," he said in a half whisper, with a sidelong glance at the driver. "I am not a child, nor a silly woman, and I have no prejudices, but I can't stand the bailiffs. When I see a bailiff in my house I turn pale and tremble, and even have a twitching in the calves of my legs. Do you know Rogozhin refused to honour my note?"

The prince did not, as a rule, like to complain of his straitened circumstances; where poverty was concerned he was reserved and exceedingly proud and sensitive, and so this announcement surprised me. He stared a long time at the yellow clearing, warmed by the sun, watched a long string of cranes float in the azure sky, and turned facing me.

"And by the sixth of September I must have the money ready for the bank . . . the interest for my estate," he said aloud, by now regardless of the coachman. "And where am I to get it? Altogether, old man, I am in a tight fix! An awfully tight fix!"

The prince examined the cock of his gun, blew on it for some reason, and began looking for the cranes which by now were out of sight.

"Sergey Ivanitch," I asked, after a minute's silence, "imagine if they sell your Shatilovka, what will you do?"

"I? I don't know! Shatilovka can't be saved, that's clear as daylight, but I cannot imagine such a calamity. I can't imagine myself without my daily bread secure. What can I do? I have had hardly any education; I have not tried working yet; for government service it is late to begin. . . . Besides, where could I serve? Where could I be of use? Admitting that no great cleverness is needed for serving in our Zemstvo, for example, yet I suffer from . . . the devil knows what, a sort of faintheartedness, I haven't a ha'p'orth of pluck. If I went into the Service I should always feel I was not in my right place. I am not an idealist; I am not a Utopian; I haven't any special principles; but am simply, I suppose, stupid and thoroughly incompetent, a neurotic and a coward. Altogether not like other people. All other people are like other people, only I seem to be something . . . a poor thing. . . . I met Naryagin last Wednesday—you know

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him?—drunken, slovenly . . . doesn't pay his debts, stupid" (the prince frowned and tossed his head) . . . "a horrible person! He said to me, staggering: 'I'm being balloted for as a justice of the peace!' Of course, they won't elect him, but, you see, he believes he is fit to be a justice of the peace and considers that position within his capacity. He has boldness and self-confidence. I went to see our investigating magistrate too. The man gets two hundred and fifty roubles a month, and does scarcely anything. All he can do is to stride backwards and forwards for days together in nothing but his underclothes, but, ask him, he is convinced he is doing his work and honourably performing his duty. I couldn't go on like that! I should be ashamed to look the clerk in the face."

At that moment Grontovsky, on a chestnut horse, galloped by us with a flourish. On his left arm the basket bobbed up and down with the mushrooms dancing in it. As he passed us he grinned and waved his hand, as though we were old friends.

"Blockhead!" the prince filtered through his teeth, looking after him. "It's wonderful how disgusting it sometimes is to see satisfied faces. A stupid, animal feeling due to hunger, I expect. . . . What was I saying? Oh, yes, about going into the Service. . . . I should be ashamed to take the salary, and yet, to tell the truth, it is stupid. If one looks at it from a broader point of view, more seriously, I am eating what isn't mine now. Am I not? But why am I not ashamed of that. . . . It is a case of habit, I suppose . . . and not being able to realize one's true position. . . . But that position is most likely awful. . . ."

I looked at him, wondering if the prince were showing off. But his face was mild and his eyes were mournfully following the movements of the chestnut horse racing away, as though his happiness were racing away with it.

Apparently he was in that mood of irritation and sadness when women weep quietly for no reason, and men feel a craving to complain of themselves, of life, of God. . . .

When I got out of the chaise at the gates of the house the prince said to me:

"A man once said, wanting to annoy me, that I have the face of a cardsharp. I have noticed that cardsharps are usually dark. Do you know, it seems that if I really had been born a cardsharp I should have remained a decent person to the day of my death, for I should never have had the boldness to do wrong. I tell you frankly I have had the chance once in my life of getting rich if I had told a lie, a lie to myself and one woman . . . and one other person whom I know would have forgiven me for lying; I should have put into my pocket a million. But I could not. I hadn't the pluck!"

From the gates we had to go to the house through the copse by a long road, level as a ruler, and planted on each side with thick, lopped lilacs. The house looked somewhat heavy, tasteless, like a facade on the stage. It rose clumsily out of a mass of greenery, and



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caught the eye like a great stone thrown on the velvety turf. At the chief entrance I was met by a fat old footman in a green swallow-tail coat and big silver-rimmed spectacles; without making any announcement, only looking contemptuously at my dusty figure, he showed me in. As I mounted the soft carpeted stairs there was, for some reason, a strong smell of india-rubber. At the top I was enveloped in an atmosphere found only in museums, in signorial mansions and old-fashioned merchant houses; it seemed like the smell of something long past, which had once lived and died and had left its soul in the rooms. I passed through three or four rooms on my way from the entry to the drawing-room. I remember bright yellow, shining floors, lustres wrapped in stiff muslin, narrow, striped rugs which stretched not straight from door to door, as they usually do, but along the walls, so that not venturing to touch the bright floor with my muddy boots I had to describe a rectangle in each room. In the drawing-room, where the footman left me, stood old-fashioned ancestral furniture in white covers, shrouded in twilight. It looked surly and elderly, and, as though out of respect for its repose, not a sound was audible.

Even the clock was silent . . . it seemed as though the Princess Tarakanov had fallen asleep in the golden frame, and the water and the rats were still and motionless through magic. The daylight, afraid of disturbing the universal tranquillity, scarcely pierced through the lowered blinds, and lay on the soft rugs in pale, slumbering streaks.

Three minutes passed and a big, elderly woman in black, with her cheek bandaged up, walked noiselessly into the drawing-room. She bowed to me and pulled up the blinds. At once, enveloped in the bright sunlight, the rats and water in the picture came to life and movement, Princess Tarakanov was awakened, and the old chairs frowned gloomily.

“Her honour will be here in a minute, sir . . .” sighed the old lady, frowning too.

A few more minutes of waiting and I saw Nadyezhda Lvovna. What struck me first of all was that she certainly was ugly, short, scraggy, and round-shouldered. Her thick, chestnut hair was magnificent; her face, pure and with a look of culture in it, was aglow with youth; there was a clear and intelligent expression in her eyes; but the whole charm of her head was lost through the thickness of her lips and the over-acute facial angle.

I mentioned my name, and announced the object of my visit.

“I really don’t know what I am to say!” she said, in hesitation, dropping her eyes and smiling. “I don’t like to refuse, and at the same time. . . .”

“Do, please,” I begged.

Nadyezhda Lvovna looked at me and laughed. I laughed too. She was probably amused by what Grontovsky had so enjoyed—that is, the right of giving or withholding permission; my visit suddenly

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struck me as queer and strange.

"I don't like to break the long-established rules," said Madame Kandurin. "Shooting has been forbidden on our estate for the last six years. No!" she shook her head resolutely. "Excuse me, I must refuse you. If I allow you I must allow others. I don't like unfairness. Either let all or no one."

"I am sorry!" I sighed. "It's all the sadder because we have come more than ten miles. I am not alone," I added, "Prince Sergey Ivanitch is with me."

I uttered the prince's name with no *arrière pensée*, not prompted by any special motive or aim; I simply blurted it out without thinking, in the simplicity of my heart. Hearing the familiar name Madame Kandurin started, and bent a prolonged gaze upon me. I noticed her nose turn pale.

"That makes no difference . . ." she said, dropping her eyes.

As I talked to her I stood at the window that looked out on the shrubbery. I could see the whole shrubbery with the avenues and the ponds and the road by which I had come. At the end of the road, beyond the gates, the back of our chaise made a dark patch. Near the gate, with his back to the house, the prince was standing with his legs apart, talking to the lanky Grontovsky.

Madame Kandurin had been standing all the time at the other window. She looked from time to time towards the shrubbery, and from the moment I mentioned the prince's name she did not turn away from the window.

"Excuse me," she said, screwing up her eyes as she looked towards the road and the gate, "but it would be unfair to allow you only to shoot. . . . And, besides, what pleasure is there in shooting birds? What's it for? Are they in your way?"

A solitary life, immured within four walls, with its indoor twilight and heavy smell of decaying furniture, disposes people to sentimentality. Madame Kandurin's idea did her credit, but I could not resist saying:

"If one takes that line one ought to go barefoot. Boots are made out of the leather of slaughtered animals."

"One must distinguish between a necessity and a caprice," Madame Kandurin answered in a toneless voice.

She had by now recognized the prince, and did not take her eyes off his figure. It is hard to describe the delight and the suffering with which her ugly face was radiant! Her eyes were smiling and shining, her lips were quivering and laughing, while her face craned closer to the panes. Keeping hold of a flower-pot with both hands, with bated breath and with one foot slightly lifted, she reminded me of a dog pointing and waiting with passionate impatience for "Fetch it!"

I looked at her and at the prince who could not tell a lie once in his life, and I felt angry and bitter against truth and falsehood, which play such an elemental part in the personal happiness of men.

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The prince started suddenly, took aim and fired. A hawk, flying over him, fluttered its wings and flew like an arrow far away.

“He aimed too high!” I said. “And so, Nadyezhda Lvovna,” I sighed, moving away from the window, “you will not permit . . . ?”

Madame Kandurin was silent.

“I have the honour to take my leave,” I said, “and I beg you to forgive my disturbing you. . . .”

Madame Kandurin would have turned facing me, and had already moved through a quarter of the angle, when she suddenly hid her face behind the hangings, as though she felt tears in her eyes that she wanted to conceal.

“Good-bye. . . . Forgive me . . .” she said softly.

I bowed to her back, and strode away across the bright yellow floors, no longer keeping to the carpet. I was glad to get away from this little domain of gilded boredom and sadness, and I hastened as though anxious to shake off a heavy, fantastic dream with its twilight, its enchanted princess, its lustres. . . .

At the front door a maidservant overtook me and thrust a note into my hand: “Shooting is permitted on showing this. N. K.,” I read.

THE END

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