MOLOCH

by

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From the compilation “The Garnet Bracelet and Other Stories”

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow

Translated from the Russian by Stepan Apresyan
Ocr: http://home.freeuk.com/russica2

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I

A long blast from the mill siren announced a new working day. The deep, raucous sound seemed to come up from the bowels of the earth, spreading low above the ground. The murky dawn of a rainy August day tinged it with melancholy and foreboding.

The signal found Engineer Bobrov drinking tea.

During the last few days he had been suffering more than ever before from insomnia. Although he went to bed with a heavy head and started every moment with a jolt, he managed quite soon to drop off into a restless sleep; but he woke up long before dawn, shattered and irritable. This was doubtless due to mental and physical strain, and to his old habit of taking injections of morphia, a habit which he had recently begun to fight in earnest.

He now sat at the window, sipping his tea, which he found flat and tasteless. Raindrops zigzagged down the panes, and ruffled and rippled the puddles. Out of the window he could see a square pond framed by shaggy willows with bare, stumpy trunks and greyish-green leaves. Gusts of wind sent small waves racing over the surface of the pond, while the leaves of the willows took on a silvery hue.

The faded grass, beaten down by the rain, drooped limply to the ground. The neighbouring village, the dark, jagged band of a forest stretching on the horizon, and the field patched with black and yellow showed grey and blurred as in a mist.

It was seven o'clock when Bobrov went out in a hooded oilskin raincoat. Like many nervous people, he felt miserable in the morning; there was a weakness in his body, his eyes ached dully as if someone were pressing them with force, and his mouth had a stale taste. But more painful than anything else was the conflict he had lately noticed in himself. His colleagues, who looked upon life from the most primitive, cheerful, and practical standpoint, would probably have laughed at what caused him so much secret agony; at any rate they would not have understood him. His abhorrence of work at the mill, a feeling that verged on horror, mounted with every passing day.

Considering his cast of mind, his habits and tastes, it would have been best for him to devote himself to armchair work, to professorial activities, or to farming. Engineering did not satisfy him, and he would have left college when he was in the third year but for his mother's insistence.

His delicate, almost feminine nature suffered cruelly under the coarse impact of reality. In this respect he compared himself with one flayed alive. Sometimes trifles unnoticed by others caused him a deep and lasting vexation.

Bobrov was plain and unassuming in appearance. He was shortish and rather lean, but he breathed nervous, impulsive energy. The outstanding, feature of his face was his high white forehead. His dilated pupils, of different size, were so large that the grey eyes seemed black. His bushy, uneven eyebrows joined across the bridge of his nose, giving the eyes a fixedly stern, somewhat ascetic expression. His lips were thin and nervous but not cruel, and slightly unsymmetrical—the right corner of his mouth was a little higher than the left; his fair moustache and beard were small and scanty, for all the world like a young boy's. The charm of his virtually plain face lay in his smile. When he smiled a gay and tender look would come into his eyes, and his whole face would become attractive.

After a half a mile's walk he climbed a hillock. The vast panorama of the mill, covering an area of twenty square miles, sprawled below. It was a veritable town of red brick, bristling with tall, soot-blackened chimneys, reeking of sulphur and molten iron, deafened by a never-ending din. The formidable stacks of four blast-furnaces dominated the scene. Beside them rose eight hot-blast stoves for circulating heated air, eight huge iron towers topped with round domes. Scattered about the blast-furnaces were other structures: repair shops, a cast house, a washing department, a locomotive shed, a rail-rolling mill, open-hearth and puddling furnaces, and so on.

The mill area descended in three enormous natural terraces. Little locomotives scurried in all directions. Coming into view on the lowest level, they sped upwards whistling shrilly, disappeared in the tunnels for a few seconds, rushed out again wrapped in white steam, clanked over bridges, and finally raced along stone trestles as if flying through the air, to empty ore or coke slap into the stack of a blast-furnace.

Farther off, beyond those natural terraces, you were bewildered by the sight of the chaos reigning on the building site of the fifth and sixth blast-furnaces. It was as if a terrific upheaval had thrown up those innumerable piles of crushed stone and bricks of various sizes and colours, those pyramids of sand, mounds of

flagstone, stacks of sheet iron and timber. Everything seemed to be heaped up without rhyme or reason, a freak of chance. Hundreds of carts and thousands of people were bustling there like ants on a wrecked ant-hill. White, acrid lime dust hung in the air like mist.

Still farther away, close to the horizon, workmen crowded near a long goods train, unloading it. From the wagons bricks slid down planks in an unceasing stream, sheets of iron fell with a crash, thin boards flew quivering through the air. As empty carts moved away towards the train, others came in a string, loaded high. Thousands of sounds merged into a long, galloping hubbub: the clear notes of stone-masons' chisels, the ringing blows of riveters pounding away at boiler rivets, the heavy crashing of steam hammers, the powerful hissing and whistling of steam pipes, and occasional muffled, earth-shaking explosions somewhere underground.

It was an engrossing and awe-inspiring sight. Human labour was in full swing like a huge, complex and precise machine. Thousands of people—engineers, stone-masons, mechanics, carpenters, fitters, navvies, joiners, blacksmiths—had come together from various corners of the earth, in order to give their strength and health, their wits and energy, in obedience to the iron law of the struggle for survival, for just one step forward in industrial progress.

That day Bobrov was feeling particularly wretched. Three or four times a year he would lapse into a strange, melancholy, and at the same time irritable mood. Usually it came on a cloudy autumn morning, or in the evening, during a winter thaw. Everything would look dull and lacklustre, people's faces would appear colourless, ugly, or sickly, and their words, sounding as if they came from far away, would cause nothing but boredom. That day he was particularly irritated, when making the round of the rail-mill, by the pallid, coal-stained and fire-dried faces of the workmen. As he watched their toil while the breath of the white-hot masses of iron scorched their bodies and a piercing autumn wind blew in through the wide doorway, he felt as if he were going through part of their physical suffering. He was ashamed of his well-groomed appearance, his fine linen, his yearly salary of three thousand rubles.

II

He stood near a welding furnace, watching. Every moment its enormous blazing maw opened wide to swallow, one by one, hundred-pound pieces of white-hot steel, fresh from a flaming furnace. A quarter of an hour later, having passed with a terrific noise through dozens of machines, they were stacked in the shape of long, shining rails at the far end of the shop.

Someone touched Bobrov's shoulder from behind. He spun round in annoyance and saw Svezhevsky, one of his colleagues.

Bobrov had a strong dislike for this man with his figure always slightly bent, as if he were slinking or bowing, his eternal snigger, and his cold, moist hands which he kept on rubbing. There was something ingratiating, something cringing and malicious, about him. He always knew before anybody else the gossip of the mill, and he reported it with especial relish to those who were likely to be most upset by

it; when speaking he would fuss nervously, touching every minute the sides, shoulders, hands, and buttons of the person to whom he was talking.

"I haven't seen you for ages, old chap," said Svezhevsky with a snigger as he clung to Bobrov's hand. "Reading books, I suppose?"

"Good morning," replied Bobrov reluctantly, withdrawing his hand. "I just wasn't feeling well."

"Everybody's missing you at Zinenko's," Svezhevsky went on significantly. "Why don't you ever go there? The director was there the other day; he asked where you were. The talk turned to blast-furnaces, and he spoke very highly of you."

"How very flattering." Bobrov made a mock bow.

"But he did! He said the Board valued you as a most competent engineer who could go far if he chose to. In his view, we oughtn't to have asked the French to design the mill since we had experienced men like you at home. Only—"

"Now he's going to say something nasty," thought Bobrov.

"Only it's a pity, he says, that you keep away from society as if you were a secretive person. One hardly knows what to make of you or how to talk to you. O yes! Here I am talking about this and that, forgetting to tell you the biggest news. The director wants everybody to be at the station tomorrow for the twelve o'clock train."

"Going to meet somebody again, are we?"

"Exactly. Guess who!"

Svezhevsky's face took on a sly and triumphant look. He rubbed his hands, apparently much pleased, because he was about to give a piece of interesting news.

"I really don't know," said Bobrov. "Besides, I'm no good at guessing."

"Oh, please try. At least name somebody at random."

Bobrov said nothing and made a show of watching a steam crane at work. Svezhevsky, noticing it, became fussier still.

"You couldn't tell, not for the world. Well, I won't tantalize you any longer. They're expecting Kvashnin in person."

The frankly servile tone in which he uttered the name sounded disgusting to Bobrov.

"What's so awfully important about that?" he asked casually.

"How can you ask that? Why, on the Board of Directors he does as he pleases, and everybody listens to him as to an oracle. This time the Board has entrusted him with speeding up construction—that is, he's entrusted himself with it. You'll see the hell that'll be raised here when he arrives. Last year he inspected the mill—that was before you came, wasn't it? Well, the manager and four engineers were kicked out. How soon will you finish putting in the blast?"*

[Heating a blast-furnace before operation to the melting point of ore, which is about 3,000° F. Sometimes it lasts several months. —Author's note.]

"It's as good as done."

"That's fine. In that case we can celebrate that and the laying of foundations when Kvashnin's here. Have you ever met him?"

"No, never. Of course, I've heard the name."

"I've had the pleasure. You wouldn't come across another character like him, I can tell you. All Petersburg knows him. To begin with, he's so fat he can't join his hands across his belly. You don't believe me? Upon my word. He even has a special carriage with the whole of the right side opening on hinges. And he's tall as a steeple, too, with red hair and a booming voice. But what a clever dog he is! God! He's on the board of all joint-stock companies—gets two hundred thousand rubles just for attending seven meetings a year. When something has to be put over at a general meeting, there's no one half so good as he. He can present the fishiest annual report in such a way that the shareholders will take black for white, and will lay themselves out to thank the Board. The amazing thing is that he never really knows what he's talking about, and makes his point by a lot of assurance. When you hear him talk tomorrow you'll probably think that all his life he's done nothing but fuss about with blast-furnaces, and yet he knows as much about them as I do about Sanskrit."

"Tra-la-la-la!" Bobrov sang, out of tune and with a deliberate carelessness, turning away.

"I'll give you an example. Do you know how he receives in Petersburg? He sits in his bath, with just his red head, shining above the water, while some privy councillor or other stands before him, bowing respectfully, and reports. He's a terrific glutton and can choose his food, too. Rissoles a la Kvashnin are a specialty in all the best restaurants. As for women—ahem! There was a most humorous incident three years ago."

Seeing that Bobrov was about to walk off, Svezhevsky took hold of his button.

"Don't go," he whispered entreatingly. "It's so funny! I'll make it short. This is how it was. Some three years ago, in autumn, a poor young man came to Petersburg. He was a clerk or something—I can't recall his name at the moment. He was trying to secure a disputed inheritance and every morning, after making his round of the various offices, he dropped into Summer Garden to rest on a bench for a quarter of an hour. Well, then. He did that for three and four and five days, and every day he saw an unusually fat, red-haired gentleman strolling in the garden. They got to talking. Redhead, who turned out to be Kvashnin, learned from the young man all about his circumstances, and sympathized with him. But he didn't tell him his name. Well, then. One day Redhead says to the young man, 'Would you be willing to marry a certain lady and part with her right after the wedding, and never see her again?' The young man was starving at the time.

'I'm willing,' he says. 'Only it depends on how much I get, and, besides, I want the money first.' You'll observe that the young man was not born yesterday. Well, then. They made it a deal. A week later, Redhead made the young man put on a dress-coat, and look him to church out in the country, at the crack of dawn. There was no crowd; the bride was waiting, carefully veiled, but you could see she was pretty and quite young. The ceremony started. Only, the young man noticed that his bride was rather melancholy. So he says to her in a whisper, 'It looks as if you've come here against your will.' And she answers, 'So have you, it seems.' In that way they found out all about it. It appeared that the girl's own mother had forced her into marriage. You see, her conscience wouldn't after all let her give away her daughter to Kvashnin outright. Well, then. They talked like that for a while, and then the young man says to her, 'Let's play a trick, shall we? We're both of us young, and there may yet be good luck in store for us, so let's leave Kvashnin standing.' The girl had a resolute temper and a quick wit. 'All right,' she says, 'let's

do it.' When the wedding was over everybody walked out of the church, and Kvashnin was beaming with happiness. Now the young man had made him pay in advance, and a lot of money it was, because for that kind of thing Kvashnin spares no expense. Kvashnin walked up to the newlyweds and congratulated them as mockingly as he could. They listened to him and thanked him and called him their benefactor, and suddenly off they hopped into the carriage. 'What's this, now? Where are you going?' 'Why, we're going to the station to start on our honeymoon trip. Get going, cabbie!' And they left Kvashnin gaping. On another occasion—What? You're going already, Andrei Ilyich?" Svezhevsky broke off his chatter as he saw Bobrov slouching his hat and buttoning his overcoat with the most determined air.

"Sorry, I've no time," Bobrov answered drily. "As regards your story, I think I've heard or read about it somewhere before. Goodbye."

And turning his back on Svezhevsky, who was put out by his brusque manner, he walked swiftly out of the shop.

III

On coming hack from the mill Bobrov had a hurried meal and stepped out on to the porch. His driver Mitrofan, whom he had told to saddle Fairway, a bay Don, was straining at the girths of the English saddle. Fairway would inflate his belly and quickly twist his neck several times, snapping at the sleeve of Mitrofan's shirt. Then Mitrofan would shout at him in an angry and unnaturally deep voice, "Stand still, you beggar!" and add, gasping with the strain, "Just look at him."

Fairway—a stallion of middle height, with a powerful chest, a long trunk, and a spare, somewhat drooping rump—stood with graceful ease on his strong shaggy legs, with dependable hoofs and fine pasterns. A connoisseur would have disapproved of the curved profile and the long neck with the sharply protruding Adam's apple. But Bobrov held that these features, which distinguish any Don horse, made up Fairway's beauty in the same way as the dachshund's crooked legs and the setter's long ears made up theirs. And there was no horse at the mill that could outrun Fairway.

Like any good Russian driver, Mitrofan considered it his duty to treat horses severely, never allowing himself or the beast any show of tenderness, and called it names like "convict," "carrion," "murderer," and even "bastard." Nevertheless, in his heart, he was very fond of Fairway. His affection found expression in seeing that Fairway was groomed better and got more oats than Swallow and Sailor, the two other mill horses in Bobrov's use.

"Did you water him, Mitrofan?" asked Bobrov.

Mitrofan did not answer at once. As a good driver he was deliberate and dignified in conversation.

"Yes, Andrei Ilyich, of course I did. Stop fretting, you devil!" he shouted angrily at the horse. "I'll teach you to fret! He's just itching for the saddle, sir, he's that eager."

No sooner did Bobrov walk up to Fairway and take the reins with his left hand than the very same thing happened which occurred almost daily. Fairway, who had

long been squinting a big angry eye at the approaching Bobrov, started to chafe and fret, arching his neck and throwing up lumps of mud with his hind feet. Bobrov hopped beside him on one leg, trying to thrust his foot into the stirrup.

"Let go the bridle, Mitrofan!" he cried as he at last caught the stirrup; the next moment he swung himself into the saddle.

Feeling his rider's spurs, Fairway gave in at once; he changed pace several times snorting and tossing his head, and started off from the gate at a broad, swinging gallop.

Very soon the swift ride, the chilly wind whistling in his ears, and the fresh smell of the autumnal, slightly damp earth soothed and roused Bobrov's lax nerves. Besides, each time he set out for Zinenko's, he felt pleasantly and excitingly elated.

The Zinenko family consisted of father, mother, and five daughters. The father was in charge of the mill warehouse. An indolent and seemingly good-natured giant, he was actually a most pushing and insidious fellow. He was one of those who under cover of speaking the truth to everybody's face flatter their superiors agreeably if crudely, inform brazenly against their colleagues, and treat their subordinates in a monstrously despotic fashion. He would argue over the least trifle, shouting hoarsely and refusing to listen to any objections; he liked good food and had a weakness for Ukrainian choral songs, which he invariably sang out of tune. He was unwittingly henpecked by his wife, a little, sickly woman with mincing manners and tiny grey eyes set absurdly close to each other.

The daughters' names were Maka, Beta, Shura, Nina, and Kasya.

Each of the daughters had been assigned a role in the family.

Maka, a girl with the profile of a fish, was reputed to have an angelic disposition. "Our Maka is modesty itself," her parents would say when, during a stroll or an evening party, she effaced herself in the interest of her younger sisters (she was already on the wrong side of thirty).

Beta was considered clever, wore a pince-nez, and they even said that once she had wanted to enter courses for women. She held her head bent to one side, like an old trace-horse, and walked with a dipping gait. She would assail every fresh visitor with the contention that women are better and more honest than men, or say with a naive playfulness, "You're so shrewd—won't you guess my character?" When conversation drifted to one of the standard domestic topics, such as "Who is greater: Lermontov or Pushkin?" or "Does Nature make people kinder?" Beta would be pushed to the fore like a battle elephant.

The third daughter, Shura, had made it her specialty to play cards with every bachelor in turn. As soon as she found out that her partner was going to get married she would pick a new one, subduing her vexation and annoyance. And the game was sure to be accompanied by sweet little jokes and bewitching roguery, her partner being called "mean" and rapped on the hands with cards.

Nina was considered the family's favourite, a spoilt but lovely child. She stood out strikingly among her sisters, with their bulky figures and rather coarse, vulgar faces. Perhaps Mme Zinenko alone could have explained the origin of Nina's delicate, fragile little figure, her nearly aristocratic hands, her pretty, darkish face with its fascinating moles, her small pink ears, and her luxuriant, slightly curly hair. Her parents set great hopes upon her and therefore indulged her in everything; she was free to eat her fill of sweets, speak with a charming burr, and even dress better than her sisters.

The youngest, Kasya, was just over fourteen, but the extraordinary child was already head and shoulders taller than her mother, and had far outstripped her older sisters by the powerful prominence of her forms. Her figure had long been attracting the eyes of the young men at the mill, who were completely deprived of feminine company because the mill was far removed from town, and Kasya received their stares with the naive impudence of a precocious girl.

This distribution of the family charms was well known at the mill, and a wag had once said that one ought to marry all the five Zinenko girls at once, or none at all. Engineers and students doing their practical course looked upon Zinenko's house as a hotel and thronged it from morning till night; they ate a great deal and drank even more, but avoided the meshes of wedlock with amazing dexterity.

Bobrov was rather disliked in the Zinenko family. Mme Zinenko, who sought to bring everything into line with trite and happily tedious provincial decorum, was shocked in her philistine tastes by Bobrov's behaviour. The sarcastic jokes he cracked when in good spirits made all eyes open wide; and when he kept a close mouth for many an evening on end because he was tired and irritated, he was suspected of being secretive, proud, and tacitly ironic; moreover, he was suspected—worst of all—of "writing stories for magazines and picking characters for them."

Bobrov was aware of this vague hostility expressed by lack of attention at table, or by the surprised shrugs of Mme Zinenko, but still he continued to call at the house. He could not tell whether he loved Nina. When he chanced to stay away from the house for three or four days he could not think of her without his heart beating with a sweet and disturbing sadness. He pictured her slender, graceful figure, her shaded languid eyes as they smiled, and the fragrance of her body, which for some reason reminded him of the scent of young, sticky poplar buds.

But he had only to spend with the Zinenkos three evenings in a row to feel bored by their company, by their talk —always the same in the same circumstances—by the banal and unnatural expression of their faces. Trivially playful relations had been established once and for all between the five "young ladies" and the "admirers" who "courted" them (terms used by the Zinenkos). Both sides pretended to make up two warring camps. Every now and again one of the admirers stole some object from his young lady for fun, and assured her that he would never give it hack; the young ladies sulked and whispered among themselves, calling the joker "mean" and laughing loudly the while, with a stiff, grating laughter. This sort of thing recurred daily, the words and gestures used being absolutely the same as the day before. Bobrov would return from the Zinenkos' with a headache and with nerves set on edge by their provincial frills.

Thus the yearning for Nina, for the nervous grasp of her always warm hands, alternated in Bobrov's heart with aversion to the monotony and affected manners of her family. There were moments when he was quite ready to propose to her, although he realized that she, with her vulgar coquetry and spiritual inanity, would turn their married life into hell, and that they thought and talked in different languages, as it were. But he could not make up his mind and kept silent.

Now, as he rode to Shepetovka, he knew in advance what they were going to say in this or that case and how, and could even picture the expression on their faces. He knew that when from their veranda they sighted him coming on horseback, the young ladies, who were always waiting for "nice young men," would start a long dispute over who was coming. And when he drew near, the one

who had guessed rightly would jump and clap her hands and click her tongue, exclaiming perkily, "Well, now? I guessed it, didn't I?" Then she would run to Anna Afanasyevna. ' Bobrov's coming, Mamma, I guessed it first!" And her mother, who would be lazily drying the teacups, would say to Nina—none other than Nina—as if she were telling her something funny and unexpected, "You know, Nina, Bobrov's coming." And finally they would all be loud in their surprise at seeing Bobrov step in.

IV

Fairway trotted along, snorting sonorously and tugging at the reins. The Shepetovka estate came into view ahead. Its white walls and red roof hardly showed through the thick green of lilacs and acacias. Below, a small pond stood out from its setting of green shores.

A woman was standing on the house steps. From afar Bobrov recognized Nina by the bright yellow blouse which set off her dusky complexion so beautifully, and at once, reining in the horse, he straightened up, and pulled back his feet, thrust deeply into the stirrups.

"Riding your treasure again, eh? I simply can't bear the sight of that monster!" cried Nina in the gay and wayward tone of a spoilt child. She had long been in the habit of teasing him about his horse to whom he was so much attached. Someone was always being teased at Zinenko's for something or other.

Bobrov threw the reins to the mill groom who had run up, patted the horse's strong neck, dark with sweat, and followed Nina into the drawing-room. Anna Afanasyevna, who was sitting by the samovar all alone, affected great amazement at Bobrov's arrival.

"Well, well! Andrei Ilyich!" she cried in a singsong. "Here you come at last!"

She pushed her hand against his lips as he greeted her, and asked him with her nasal twang, "Tea? Milk? Apples? What will you have?"

"Merci, Anna Afanasyevna."

"Merci oui, ou merci non?"

French phrases like these were common in the Zinenko family. Bobrov would not have anything.

"Then go to the veranda," Mme Zinenko permitted him graciously. "The young people are playing forfeits or something there."

When he appeared on the veranda all the four young ladies exclaimed in unison, in exactly the same tone, and with the same twang, as their mother, "Well, well! Andrei Ilyich! Here's someone we haven't seen for ages! What will you have? Tea? Apples? Milk? Nothing? You don't mean that! Perhaps you will have something, after all? Well, then sit down here and join in."

They played "The Lady's Sent a Hundred Rubles," "Opinions," and a game which lisping Kasya called "playing bowlth." The guests were three students, who kept on sticking out their chests and striking dramatic attitudes, with one foot forward and one hand in the back pocket of their frock-coats; Miller, a technician distinguished by his good looks, stupidity, and wonderful baritone; and lastly a taciturn gentleman in grey, of whom nobody took any notice.

The game was not going well. The men performed their forfeits with a condescending, bored air, and the young ladies refused to perform theirs at all, whispering among themselves and laughing unnaturally.

Dusk was falling. A huge red moon floated up from behind the house-tops of the nearby village.

"Come inside, children!" Anna Afanasyevna shouted from the dining-room. "Ask Miller to sing for us,"

A moment later the young ladies' voices rang through the rooms.

"We had a very good time," they chirped round their mother. "We laughed so much!"

Nina and Bobrov remained on the veranda. She sat on the handrail, hugging a post with her left arm and nestling against it in an unconsciously graceful posture. Bobrov placed himself at her feet, on a low garden bench; as he looked up into her face he saw the delicate outlines of her throat and chin.

"Come on, tell me something interesting, Andrei Ilyich," she commanded impatiently.

"I really don't know what to tell you," he replied. "It's awfully hard to speak to order. So I'm wondering if there's some collection of dialogues on various topics."

"Fie! What a bo-ore you are," she drawled. "Tell me, are you ever in good spirits?"

"And you tell me why you're so afraid of silence. You feel uneasy the moment talk runs low. Is it so bad to talk silently?"

" 'Let's be silent tonight,' " Nina sang, teasingly.

"Yes, let's. Look: the sky is clear, the moon is red and big, and it's so quiet out here. What else do we need?"

" 'And this barren and silly moon in these barren and silly heavens,' " Nina recited. "A propos, have you heard that Zina Makova is engaged to Protopopov? Going to marry him, after all! I can't make out that Protopopov."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Zina refused him three times, but still he wouldn't give up, and proposed for the fourth time. Well, he'll have only himself to blame. She may come to respect him, but she'll certainly never love him!"

These words were enough to make Bobrov's gorge rise. He was always exasperated by the Zinenkos' shallow, small-town vocabulary, made up of expressions like "She loves him, but doesn't respect him," or "She respects him, but doesn't love him." To their minds, these words fully described the most intricate relationships between man and woman. Likewise, they had only two expressions— "dark-haired" and "fair-haired"—to cover the whole range of the moral, intellectual, and physical peculiarities of any person.

Prompted by a vague desire to goad his anger, Bobrov asked, "And what sort of a man is this Protopopov?"

"Protopopov?" Nina reflected for a second. "He's— well, he's rather tall, with brown hair."

"Is that all?"

"What else do you want? Oh, yes, he's an exciseman."

"And that is all? But can't you really describe a man any better than that he has brown hair and is an exciseman, Nina Grigoryevna? Just think how many interesting, gifted and clever people we come across in life. Are they all nothing but 'brown-haired excisemen'? See how eagerly peasant children watch life and how apt their judgement is. But you, an alert and sensitive girl, take no interest in

anything, because you have a stock of a dozen battered drawing-room phrases. I know that if somebody mentions the moon in conversation you're sure to put in 'Like this barren and silly moon,' etc. And if I tell you, say, about an unusual occurrence, I know beforehand that your comment will be, 'A legend fresh but difficult to credit.' It's always like that, always. Believe me, for goodness' sake, that all that is original and distinctive—"

"I beg you not to lecture me!" Nina retorted.

He fell silent, with a bitter taste in his mouth, and they both sat for fully five minutes or so without speaking or moving. Suddenly rich chords rang out from the drawing-room, and they heard Miller start singing in a voice which, though slightly spoiled, was very expressive:

Where dancing was loudest and maddest,
In vanity's violent pace,
I saw thee—the saddest of secrets
Look'd out from thy lovely face.

Bobrov's anger soon subsided, and he felt sorry that he had vexed Nina. "What made me expect original daring from her fresh, naive mind?" he thought. "Why, she's like a little bird: she chirps the first thing that comes into her head, and who knows whether her chirping isn't much better than talk about women's emancipation, Nietzsche, or the decadents?"

"Please don't be cross with me, Nina Grigoryevna," he said under his breath. "I let my tongue run away with me and said a lot of foolish things."

Nina made no reply, but sat looking away at the rising moon. In the darkness he found her hand hanging down and clasped it tenderly.

"Please, Nina Grigoryevna," he whispered.

She suddenly turned to him and responded with a swift, nervous handshake.

"What a bad temper you have!" she exclaimed in a tone of forgiveness and reproach. "You always hurt me, knowing that I can't be cross with you!"

Pushing away his hand, which trembled suddenly, and almost breaking away from him, she ran across the veranda and into the house.

Miller sang with passion and melancholy:

And through unknown visions I rove.
I know not if thee my love glories,
I only know well that I love.

"'I only know well that I love'!" Bobrov repeated in an excited whisper, drawing a deep breath and pressing his hand to his throbbing heart.

"Why, then, do I exhaust myself in fruitless dreams of an unknown, lofty happiness while there is a plain but deep happiness here beside me?" he thought, moved. "What else do I want of a woman, of a wife who is so tender, so fetching, so gentle, and attentive? We poor nervous wrecks can't take the joys of life as they are, but must poison them with our insatiable desire to rake in every feeling and every intention, whether it's ours or somebody else's. This still night, the proximity of the girl I love, her sweet, artless talk, a momentary flash of anger and then a sudden caress—Heavens! Isn't this what makes life worth living?"

When he entered the drawing-room he looked cheerful, nearly triumphant. His eyes met Nina's, and he read in her gaze a tender answer to his thoughts. "She shall be my wife," he said to himself, calmly happy.

They were talking about Kvashnin. Filling the room with the ring of her confident voice, Anna Afanasyevna said that she too was going to take her "little girls" to the station on the following day.

"Vasily Terentyevich may well wish to pay us a visit. Anyway, Liza Belokonskaya—she's a niece of my cousin's husband—wrote me about his trip a month ago."

"Isn't that Belokonskaya the one whose brother is married to Princess Mukhovetskaya?" Zinenko humbly put in the usual comment.

"Yes." Anna Afanasyevna nodded with condescension. "She's also a distant relative on her grandmother's side of the Stremoukhovs, whom you know. Well, she wrote me she had met Vasily Terentyevich at a party and had recommended him to call on us if it ever occurred to him to visit the mill."

"Shall we be able to receive him properly, Anna?" Zinenko asked anxiously.

"The funny way you talk! We'll do our best. But of course we can't expect to impress a man who has a yearly income of three hundred thousand rubles."

"Dear me! Three hundred thousand!" groaned Zinenko. "It gives you the creeps to think of it."

"Three hundred thousand!" Nina echoed with a sigh.

"Three hundred thousand!" exclaimed the other young ladies in an ecstatic chorus.

"Yes, and he spends all of it, to the last kopek," said Anna Afanasyevna. Then, in reply to an unexpressed thought of her daughters, she added: "He's married. Only they say his marriage is a failure. His wife has no personality and isn't distinguished at all. And a wife should give tone to her husband's business activities, whatever you may say."

"Three hundred thousand!" said Nina once more, as if in delirium. "The things you could do with that money!"

Anna Afanasyevna ran her hand over Nina's luxuriant hair.

"It wouldn't be bad to have a husband like him, my child, would it?"

That income of three hundred thousand rubles, which belonged to another man, seemed to have galvanized the whole company. Stories were told, and listened to, with gleaming eyes and flushed faces, about the life of millionaires, their fabulous dinners, their magnificent horses, the dancing-parties they gave, the unheard-of extravagance of their spending.

Bobrov's heart went cold and shrank painfully. Quietly he took his hat and walked stealthily out on to the porch. However, no one would have noticed his departure anyway.

Riding home at a smart trot and recalling Nina's languid, dreamy eyes as she whispered, almost distractedly, "Three hundred thousand!" he suddenly thought of the story which Svezhevsky had insisted on telling him that morning.

"This one's just as capable of selling herself," he whispered, clenching his teeth and furiously laying his whip on Fairway's neck.

V

As he rode up to his flat Bobrov saw a light in the windows. "The doctor must have arrived while I was away, and now he's probably lolling on my sofa, waiting for me," he thought, pulling up his lathered horse. Just then Dr. Goldberg was the only person whose presence he could bear without painful irritation.

He was sincerely fond of the light-hearted, gentle Jew for his versatile wit, his youthful liveliness, and his good-natured passion for abstract argument. No matter what topic Bobrov brought up, Dr. Goldberg would dispute his point with equal interest and unvarying ardour. And though so far they had done nothing but clash in their interminable arguments, they missed each other, and met almost daily.

The doctor was actually lying on the sofa, his feet on its back, reading a book which he held close to his shortsighted eyes. Bobrov recognized Mevius' Handbook of Metallurgy at a glance, and smiled. He was familiar with the doctor's habit of reading with equal absorption whatever he came upon, always starting from the middle.

"You know, I had some tea while you were out," said the doctor, throwing away the book and looking at Bobrov over his spectacles, "Well, how's my lord Andrei Ilyich hopping along? My, how angry you look! What is it? A fresh spell of delightful misery?"

"Life is so sickening, doctor," Bobrov said wearily.

"Why, my friend?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's just that way. Well, how's your hospital?"

"The hospital's all right. I had a most interesting case of surgery today. Really, it was both laughable and touching. A Masalsk stone-mason came to me this morning. Those Masalsk lads are all athletes, without a single exception. 'What d'you want?' I asked him. 'You see, doctor, I was cutting bread for the whole team and scratched my finger a bit, and can't stop the blood nohow.' I examined his finger; it was a mere scratch, nothing to worry about, but festering a little. I told my assistant to bandage it. But the lad wouldn't go. 'Well, what else do you want? You've got your hand bandaged, you can go now.' 'That's right,' he says, 'thank you. Only, you see, my head's kind of splitting, so I thought perhaps you'd give me some medicine for that too.' 'What's the matter with your head? Got a sock on it, I suppose?' He fairly jumped with delight, and started laughing. 'Can't say no,' he says. 'We went on a bust the other day, on Saviour's Day it was'— that would be about three days ago—'and drank a good bucketful of vodka. Well, we started fooling among ourselves. Then—you know how it is in a fight, don't you? —I got a reg'lar crack on my nob with a chisel—had it repaired, sort of. It wasn't so bad at first—it didn't hurt, but now my head's splitting.' I examined his 'nob' and was downright horrified. His skull was smashed right in, there was a hole in it the size of a five-kopek piece, and bone splinters stuck in his brain. Now he's lying unconscious in hospital. I must say they are marvellous people: babies and heroes all in one. I'm quite certain that only the patient Russian muzhik can stand having his skull 'repaired' like that. Anyone else would have given up the ghost on the spot. Besides, what simple good humour! 'You know how it is in a fight, don't you?' he says, God!"

Bobrov was pacing the room, cracking his whip across the tops of his high boots and listening absent-mindedly to the doctor. He still could not shake off the bitterness that had settled on his soul at Zinenko's.

The doctor paused for a moment, and then said sympathetically, seeing that Bobrov did not feel like talking, "I tell you what, Andrei Ilyich. Try to get some sleep, and take one or two spoonfuls of bromide for the night. It'll do you good in your present frame of mind—at least it won't harm you."

They both lay down in the same room, Bobrov taking the bed and the doctor staying on the sofa. But neither could sleep. For a long time Goldberg listened to Bobrov tossing and sighing in bed, and at last he spoke.

"What is it, friend? What's worrying you? Hadn't you better tell me frankly what's on your mind? After all, I'm not a stranger asking questions out of idle curiosity."

These simple words moved Bobrov. Although he and the doctor were on friendly terms, neither had ever confirmed it by a single word: both were keenly sensitive and shrank from the embarrassment of mutual confessions. The doctor had opened his heart first, helped by the darkness and his compassion for Bobrov.

"Everything weighs heavily on me and disgusts me so, Osip Osipovich," Bobrov said softly. "First of all, I'm disgusted because I'm working at the mill and getting a lot of money for it, when I loathe the whole business. I consider myself honest and so I ask myself frankly, 'What are you doing? Who benefits by your work?' I'm beginning to see things clearly, and I realize that, thanks to my efforts, a hundred French rentiers and a dozen Russian sharks will eventually pocket millions. And there's no other aim or sense in the work which I've wasted the better half of my life preparing for!"

"But that is simply ridiculous, Andrei Ilyich," the doctor protested, turning to Bobrov in the darkness. "You want a bunch of money-bags to go soft. My friend, ever since the world came into being things have been governed by the law of the belly. It has never been otherwise, nor ever will be. But the point is that you don't give a damn for the money-bags, because you're far above them. Aren't you satisfied with the proud manly consciousness that you're pushing forward 'the chariot of progress,' as they say in leading articles? Damn it, shipping-company shares bring huge dividends, but does that prevent Fulton from being considered mankind's benefactor?"

"My dear doctor!" Bobrov made a grimace of annoyance, "You didn't go to the Zinenkos' today, did you, but somehow you're voicing their philosophy of life. Luckily I shan't have to search far for an argument to refute yours, because I'm going to beat you with your own pet theory."

"What theory do you mean? I'm afraid I can't remember any theory. I really can't, my friend—it's slipped my mind."

"It has, has it? Then who shouted, sitting on this sofa here and foaming at the mouth, that by our discoveries we engineers and inventors quicken the heartbeat of society to a feverish speed? Who compared this life with the condition of an animal sealed up in an oxygen jar? I remember perfectly, believe me, what a terrible list of children of the twentieth century—neurasthenics, madmen, overworked men, suicides—you hurled in the face of those same benefactors of mankind. You said the telegraph, the telephone, trains racing at eighty miles an hour, had reduced distance to a minimum, had in fact done away with it. Time has become so valuable, you said, that they'll soon begin to turn night into day to make

day twice as long. Negotiations which used to take months are now finished in five minutes. But even this hellish speed is no longer enough for us. Soon we'll be able to see each other by wire hundreds and thousands of miles away! And yet, only fifty years ago, whenever our ancestors had to make a trip from the country to the provincial centre, they'd hold a service in church and set out with enough time to spare for a polar expedition. And we keep rushing on headlong, stunned by the rumbling and clanking of monstrous machines, dazed by the furious race, with irritated nerves, perverse tastes, and thousands of new diseases. Do you remember, doctor? It was you, a champion of beneficial progress, who said all that."

The doctor, who had been making futile attempts to protest, profited by Bobrov's momentary pause.

"Yes, my friend, I did say all that," he cut in, a little doubtfully. "I will say that again. But then we must adapt ourselves, so to speak. How else are we to live? There are these tricky little points in every profession. Take us doctors. Do you imagine we have no doubts or difficulties at all? Why, we're sure of nothing whatsoever beyond surgery. We think up new remedies and systems, but we completely forget that, among a thousand living beings, no two are alike in blood composition, heart activity, heredity, and God knows what else! We've moved away from real therapeutics—the medicine of wild creatures and quacks—and flooded the chemists' shops with cocaine, atropine, phenacetin, and all that sort of stuff; but we've forgotten that if you give a sick man a glass of pure water and earnestly assure him it's a strong medicine he'll recover from his illness. Nevertheless, in ninety cases out of a hundred, what helps us in our practice is the confidence inspired by our professional sacerdotal self-assurance. Believe it or not, but a fine physician, who was also a clever, honest man, once confessed to me that sportsmen treat their sick dogs more rationally than we do people. Their only medicine is flower of brimstone —it can't do much harm, and sometimes it even helps. A lovely picture, isn't it, my friend? But we, too, do what we can. It's the only way, for in this life we all must compromise. Sometimes you can relieve the suffering of a fellow-man by behaving like an omniscient augur if by nothing else. Thank God for even that much."

"You talk about compromise," said Bobrov gloomily, "but today you extracted the splinters from that Masalsk stone-mason's skull, didn't you?"

"Ah, my friend, what difference does one repaired skull make? Think how many bellies you keep full and how many people you give work to. Ilovaisky says in his History that 'Tsar Boris, being desirous of winning the favour of the people, undertook the construction of public buildings in the years of famine,' or something like that. Now try to work out what tremendous good you—"

The doctor's last words seemed to jolt Bobrov, who sat up quickly in bed and swung his bare feet over the side.

"Good?" he shouted frenziedly. "Are you talking to me about good? In that case, if you really want to sum up what's good or bad, allow me to give you some statistics." And he began in sharp, measured tones, as if speaking from a platform: "It has long been known that work in a mine, metal works, or large factory shortens the workman's life by roughly a quarter, to say nothing of (accidents or back-breaking toil. As a physician you know better than I do how many workmen suffer from syphilis or drink, or live in appalling conditions in those accursed barracks and mud-huts. Wait, doctor—before you object, try to remember how many workmen over forty or forty-five you've seen in factories. *I* haven't met any.

That means the workman gives his employer three months of his life a year, one week a month, or, in short, six hours a day. Now listen to this. Our six blast-furnaces will require some thirty thousand men—I suppose Tsar Boris never dreamt of such a figure. Thirty thousand men who burn up, so to speak, altogether a hundred and eighty thousand hours of their own lives every day, that is, seven thousand five hundred days, or—how many years does that add up to?"

"About twenty years," the doctor prompted, after a brief pause.

"About twenty years a day!" cried Bobrov. "Two days of work swallow up one man. Damn it! Do you remember those Assyrians or Moabites in the Bible who offered human sacrifices to their gods? But, really, those brass gentlemen, Moloch and Dagon, would have blushed with shame and mortification at the figures I've quoted."

This peculiar calculation had just occurred to Bobrov, who, like many impressionable people, discovered new ideas only in the heat of debate. Nevertheless, both he and Goldberg were struck by the unusual statistics.

"Hang it all, you bewilder me," said the doctor. "The figures may be inaccurate, though."

"And do you know anything," Bobrov went on, with even greater vehemence, "about another statistical table which enables you to compute with devilish accuracy the price in human lives of each step forward of your damnable chariot, the invention of each paltry winnowing-fan, seeder, or rail-mill? A fine thing is your civilization, whose fruits are figures, the units being steel machines, and the ciphers human lives!"

"But look here, my friend," said the doctor, taken aback by Bobrov's violence, "do you mean to say, then, that we'd better fall back on primitive labour? Why do you consider only the black side? After all, in spite of your statistics, the mill has provided a school, a church, a good hospital, and a low-interest credit society for the workmen."

Bobrov jumped out of bed and began to run about barefoot.

"Those hospitals and schools of yours don't mean a thing! They're no more than sops for humanists like you, concessions to public opinion. I can tell you, if you like, what we actually think of all that. Do you know what a finish is?"

"A finish? Hasn't that got something to do with horses—with racing?"

"That's it. A finish is the last seven-hundred foot spurt before the winning-post. The horse makes it at top speed - it's the supreme effort, and to get the horse to make that effort they lash it till it bleeds. Then, when it's passed the mark, it may die for all anybody cares. We're like that, too. When we've squeezed the last spurt out of the horse and it drops with a broken back and shattered legs, to hell with it, it's no longer good for anything! Your schools and hospitals mean a fat lot to a horse that's breathed its last after the finish. Have you ever watched smelting or rolling? If you have, you ought to know that it takes deucedly strong nerves, steel muscles, and the agility of a circus performer. You ought to know that everyone on the job escapes death several times a day thanks only to his wonderful self-control. And would you like to know how much a workman gets for work of that sort?"

"Still, as long as the mill's there, the workman's sure of a job," Goldberg persisted.

"Don't be naive, doctor!" cried Bobrov, sitting on the window-sill. "The workman depends today more than ever on market demand, on stock-jobbing, on

various intrigues. Each big enterprise passes through different hands three or four times before it gets under way. Do you know how our company came into being? A sum of money was put up by a small group of business men. At first the business was planned on a small scale. But a whole gang of engineers, directors and contractors frittered away the capital before the owners could see what was what. Enormous buildings were erected that turned out to be good for nothing. They were scrapped—blown up with dynamite. Only when the concern was sold at ten kopeks to the ruble did it transpire that the whole dirty gang had been acting by arrangement, for which they were paid by a more powerful and astute company. Now the business is being conducted on a much larger scale, but I know very well that the first failure cost eight hundred workmen their two months' wages. That's your safe employment for you! Why, as soon as the shares drop wages slide down too. I suppose you know how shares rise or drop? To bring that about you have to go to Petersburg and whisper in a broker's ear that you want to sell, say, three hundred thousand rubles' worth of shares, adding that it's strictly between you and him and that you'll pay him a nice brokerage if only he keeps his mouth shut. Then you whisper the same to another couple of brokers, and the shares instantly drop by several dozen rubles. And the greater the secrecy the sooner and surer the drop. Safe employment, indeed!"

With a vigorous push Bobrov flung the window open. Cold air rushed into the room.

"Look, doctor!" cried Bobrov, pointing to the mill.

Goldberg raised himself on his elbow and peered into the night darkness outside. The immense expanse spreading out in the distance was alight with innumerable heaps of red-hot lime-stone, whose surface flared up into bluish and green sulphur flames every now and again. Those were limekilns* burning. [A limekiln is a man-high pile of lime-stone, kindled with wood or coal. The pile is heated for a week or so, till the lime-stone turns into quick-lime.—Author's note.] A blood-red glow wavered over the mill, showing in dark relief the slender tops of the great chimneys, whose lower parts were blurred by grey mist rising from the ground. Ceaselessly those giants belched clouds of dense smoke that merged into a chaotic mass trailing eastwards, with patches like balls of dirty grey or rust-coloured cotton wool. Bright shafts of burning gas trembled and danced above the tall, thin smoke deflectors, making them look like giant torches. The gas flames threw on the smoke cloud above the mill strange, ominous reflections. From time to time, following the sharp clank of the signal hammer, the bell of a blast-furnace would go down, and a whirlwind of flames and soot would hurtle skywards from the orifice of the furnace, roaring like distant thunder. Then, with startling suddenness, the whole mill would flash into view for a few seconds, and the serried row of black round hot-blast stoves would look like the towers of a fabulous iron castle. The burning coke ovens stretched in long, regular rows. Occasionally one of them flared up and blazed like a huge red eye. Electric light added its bluish, lifeless shine to the glare of red-hot iron. There was a continuous clangour and crashing of iron.

In the glow of the mill lights Bobrov's face had taken on a sinister coppery hue, his eyes glistened bright red, and tousled hair hung over his forehead. His voice was piercing and angry.

"There he is—that Moloch who wants warm human blood!" he cried, stretching his thin arm out of the window. "To be sure, this is progress and machine labour

and cultural advancement. But, for heaven's sake, think of it—twenty years! Twenty years of human life a day! At moments I feel like a murderer, I swear!"

"Good God, the man's mad," thought the doctor, shuddering. He set about soothing Bobrov.

"Come, come, Andrei Ilyich, my friend. Why worry about foolish things! It's damp outside, and you've opened the window. Go to bed, and take some bromide— here."

"He's a maniac, he really is," he thought, with a feeling of both compassion and fear.

Exhausted by his outburst, Bobrov put up little resistance. But when he got into bed he suddenly broke into hysterical sobs. And the doctor sat by his side for a long time, stroking his head as if he had been a child, and soothing him with what words of sympathy occurred to him.

VI

Next day Vasily Terentyevich Kvashnin was welcomed in grand style at the Ivankovo station. The entire mill management was gathered there by eleven o'clock. Everyone seemed ill at ease. The manager, Sergei Valerianovich Shelkovnikov, drank glass after glass of seltzer and pulled out his watch every moment, only to put it back in his pocket mechanically without glancing at the dial—an absent-minded gesture that betrayed his uneasiness. His face—the handsome, well-groomed, self-confident face of a man of society—remained unchanged. Only a few men knew that as manager of the construction project he was a mere figure-head. The real manager was Andreas, a Belgian engineer of mixed Polish and Swedish ancestry, whose role at the mill none of the uninitiated could make out. The offices of the two managers had a connecting door and Shelkovnikov dared not take decision on any important paper without consulting the pencil tick which Andreas would put somewhere in a corner of the sheet. In urgent cases, when consultation was not possible, he would look worried and say to the solicitor in a casual tone, "I'm sorry, but I positively can't spare a moment for you—I'm terribly busy. Kindly state your business to Mr. Andreas, and he will refer it to me later by special note."

The services rendered to the Board by Andreas were innumerable. He had conceived the brilliantly fraudulent plan to ruin the original company, and he, too, had carried the intrigue to the end with a firm but invisible hand. His designs were distinguished by astounding simplicity and coherence, and were considered the last word in mining. He spoke many European languages and, in addition to his special subject, was well informed in a great variety of other subjects—a rare phenomenon among engineers.

Among those gathered at the station, Andreas, a man with a consumptive figure and the face of an old ape, was the only one who retained his habitual stolidity. He had arrived last and was slowly pacing the platform, his hands elbow-deep in the pockets of his wide, baggy trousers as he chewed his eternal cigar. His light grey eyes, which bespoke the powerful mind of a scientist and the strong will of an adventurer, stared indifferently as always from under the tired, swollen eyelids.

No one was surprised at the arrival of the Zinenko family. Somehow everybody had long been used to looking upon them as part and parcel of life at the mill. Into the cold and gloomy station hall, the young ladies brought their forced animation and unnatural laughter. They were surrounded by the younger engineers, who were tired of waiting. The young ladies at once took up their customary defensive position and began to lavish right and left their charming but stale naivetes. Anna Afanasyevna, little and flustered, looked like a restless brood-hen among her fussing daughters.

Bobrov, tired and almost ill after his fit of the previous night, sat all alone in a corner of the hall, smoking a great deal. When the Zinenko family came in and sat down chirping loudly at a round table, he had two very vague feelings. On the one hand, he was ashamed—a heart-searing shame for another—of the tactlessness which he felt the family had shown by coming. On the other hand, he was glad to see Nina, ruddy with the swift drive, her eyes shining with excitement; she was very prettily dressed and, as always happens, looked much more beautiful than his imagination had painted her. His sick, harassed soul suddenly flamed up with irrepressible desire for a tender, fragrant love, with longing for a woman's habitual, soothing caress.

He sought for a chance to approach Nina, but she was busy chatting with two mining students, who were vying with each other to make her laugh. And she did laugh, more cheerful and coquettish than ever, her small white teeth gleaming. Nevertheless, twice or three times her gaze met Bobrov's, and he fancied that her eyebrows were slightly raised in a silent, but not hostile query.

The bell rang on the platform, announcing that the train had left the previous station. There was a commotion among the engineers. Smiling sarcastically, Bobrov from his corner watched twenty-odd men gripped by the same cowardly thought; their faces suddenly became grave and worried, their hands ran for the last time over the buttons of their frock-coats, their neckties and caps, and their eyes turned towards the bell. Soon no one was left in the hall.

Bobrov went out on to the platform. The young ladies, abandoned by the men who had been entertaining them, crowded helplessly round Anna Afanasyevna, near the door. Nina turned to face Bobrov, who had been gazing at her fixedly, and walked over to him, as if guessing that he wanted to talk to her in private.

"Good morning. Why are you so pale today? You don't feel well?" she asked, holding his hand in a firm, tender grasp and looking him in the eyes, earnestly and caressingly. "Why did you leave so early last night, without even saying goodbye? Were, you angry?"

"Yes and no," replied Bobrov, with a smile. "No, because I have no right to be angry, have I?"

"I think anybody has a right to be angry. Especially if he knows that his opinion is valued highly. Why 'yes'?"

"Because— You see, Nina Grigoryevna," said Bobrov, feeling a surge of boldness, "last night when you and I were sitting on the veranda—remember?—I had a few wonderful moments, thanks to you. And I realized that if you'd wanted to, you could have made me the happiest man on earth— But why should I be afraid or hesitate? You know, don't you—you must have guessed, you must have known for a long time that I—"

He could not finish. The boldness that had surged over him was suddenly gone.

"That you what? What were you going to say?" asked Nina, with feigned indifference, but in a voice which quivered in spite of her, and casting down her eyes.

She expected a confession of love, which always thrills the hearts of young girls so strongly and so sweetly, no matter whether they share the sentiment or not. Her cheeks had paled slightly.

"Not now—some other time," Bobrov stammered. "I'll tell you some other day. But not now, for goodness' sake," he added entreatingly.

"All right. But still, why were you angry?"

"Because, after those few moments, I walked into the dining-room in a most—how shall I put it?—in a most tender mood, and when I walked in—"

"You were shocked by the talk about Kvashnin's income, is that it?" Nina prompted, with that instinctive perspicacity which sometimes comes to the most narrow-minded women. "Am I right?" She faced him squarely, and once more enveloped him in a deep, caressing gaze. "Be frank. You mustn't keep anything from your friend.'"

Some three or four months before, while boating with a crowd of others, Nina, excited and softened by the beauty of the warm summer night, had offered Bobrov her friendship to the end of time. He had accepted the offer' very earnestly, and for a whole week had called her his' friend, just as she had called him hers. And whenever; she had said my friend, slowly and significantly, with her usual languorous air, the two short words had gone straight to his heart. Now he recalled the joke, and replied with a sigh:

"Good, 'my friend,' I'll tell you the whole truth though it won't be easy. You always inspire me with a painfully divided feeling. As we talk there are moments when, by just one word, one gesture, or even one look, you suddenly make me so happy! Ah, but how can I put such a sensation into words? Have you ever noticed it?"

"Yes," she replied almost in a whisper, and lowered her eyes, with a sly flutter of lashes.

"And then, all of a sudden, you would become a provincial young lady, with a standard vocabulary of stock phrases and an affected manner. Please don't be cross with me for my frankness. I wouldn't have spoken if it hadn't tormented me so terribly." "I've noticed that, too."

"Well, there you are. I've always been sure that you have a responsive and tender heart. But why don't you want to be always as you are at this moment?"

She turned to face him again, and even moved her hand, as if to touch his. They were walking up and down the vacant end of the platform.

"You never tried to understand me, Andrei Ilyich," she said reproachfully. "You're nervous and impatient. You exaggerate all that is good in me, but then you won't forgive me for being what I am, though, in the environment in which I live, I can't really be anything else. It would be ridiculous if I were—it would bring discord into our family. I'm too weak and, to tell the truth, too insignificant to fight and be independent. I go where everybody else does, and I look on things and judge them as everybody else does. And don't imagine I don't know I'm common. But when I'm with the others I don't feel it as I do with you. In your presence I lose all sense of proportion because—" She faltered. "Oh, well—because you're quite different, because I've never met anyone like you in my life."

She thought she was speaking sincerely. The invigorating freshness of the autumn air, the bustle at the station, the consciousness of her own beauty, and the pleasure she felt sensing Bobrov's loving gaze fixed upon her, electrified her, like all hysterical characters, into lying with inspiration and charm, and quite unwittingly. Admiring herself in her new role of a young lady craving for moral support, she wanted to say agreeable things to Bobrov.

"I know you look on me as a flirt. Please don't deny it—I admit I give you cause to think that. For example, I often chat with Miller and laugh at his jokes. But if you only knew how I detest that oily cherub! Or take those two students. A handsome man is disagreeable because he's always admiring himself, if for no other reason. Believe me, although it may sound strange, plain men have always appealed to me particularly."

As she uttered this charming sentence in her most tender accents, Bobrov drew a mournful sigh. Alas! he had heard this cruel consolation from women more than once, a consolation they never refuse to their ugly admirers.

"So I may hope to appeal to you some day?" he asked in a joking tone which, however, clearly suggested bitter self-mockery.

Nina hastened to make up for her blunder. "See what a man you are. I positively can't talk with you. Must you fish for compliments, sir? Shame on you!"

She was a little embarrassed by her own gaucherie, and to change the subject she asked in a playfully imperious voice, "Well, now, what was it you were going to tell me in different circumstances? Kindly answer me at once!"

"I don't know—I don't remember," Bobrov stammered, his ardour damped.

"Then I'll remind you, my secretive friend. You began by speaking of last night. You said something about wonderful moments, and then you said that I must have noticed long ago—but noticed what? You didn't finish. So kindly say it now. I demand it, do you hear?"

She was looking at him with a smile shining in her eyes—a smile at once sly and promising and tender. For one sweet moment his heart stood still in his chest, and he felt a fresh surge of his former courage. "She knows, she wants me to speak," he thought, bracing himself.

They halted on the very edge of the platform, where they were quite alone. Both were excited. Nina was awaiting his reply, enjoying the piquancy of the game she had started, while Bobrov was casting about for words, breathing heavily with agitation. But just then, following the shrill sound of signal horns, a hubbub broke out on the platform.

"I'm waiting, do you hear?" Nina whispered, walking away from Bobrov. "It's more important for me than you think."

An express train, wrapped in black smoke, leapt into view from beyond a curve. A few minutes later, clattering over the points, it slowed down smoothly, and pulled up at the platform. At its tail end was a long service carriage shining with fresh blue paint, and the crowd rushed towards it.

The conductors hurried respectfully to open the carriage door; a ladder was unfolded instantly. Red with running and excitement, a frightened look on his face, the station master was urging the workmen uncoupling the service carriage. Kvashnin was one of the principal shareholders of the X Railway and travelled on its branch-lines with greater pomp than was sometimes accorded even to the highest railway officials.

Only four men entered the carriage: Shelkovnikov, Andreas, and two influential Belgian engineers. Kvashnin was sitting in an easy chair, his enormous legs thrown apart and his belly thrust forward. He wore a round felt hat, his fiery hair shining under it; his face, shaved like an actor's, with flabby jowls and a triple chin, and mottled with big freckles, seemed drowsy and annoyed; his lips were curled in a contemptuous, sour grimace.

With an effort he rose to greet the engineers.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said in a husky, deep voice, holding out his huge chubby hand for them to touch respectfully by turns. "How's everything at the mill?"

Shelkovnikov began to report in the stiff language of an official account. Everything was all right at the mill, he said. They had been waiting for Vasily Terentyevich's arrival to blow in the blast-furnace and lay the foundations of new buildings. The workmen and foremen had been hired at suitable rates. The great flow of orders induced the management to start the construction as early as possible.

Kvashnin listened, his face turned away to the window, viewing absent-mindedly the crowd which pressed round the carriage. His face expressed nothing but disgusted weariness.

Suddenly he interrupted the manager to ask, "Look here—who's that girl?"

Shelkovnikov glanced out of the window.

"There, that one with the yellow feather in her hat." Kvashnin pointed impatiently.

"Oh, that one?" With an eager look the manager bent to Kvashnin's ear and whispered mysteriously in French, "She's the daughter of our warehouse manager. His name is Zinenko."

Kvashnin. nodded heavily. Shelkovnikov resumed his report, but his chief interrupted him again.

"Zinenko?" he drawled thoughtfully, staring out of the window. "Which Zinenko is that? Where have I heard the name?"

"He's in charge of our warehouse," Shelkovnikov said again respectfully, with deliberate indifference.

"Oh, yes, now I remember," said Kvashnin. "They told me about him in Petersburg. All right, go on, please."

Nina realized by her infallible feminine intuition that just then Kvashnin was looking at her and speaking about her. She turned slightly away, but still Kvashnin could see her face, rosy with coquettish pleasure and showing all its pretty moles.

At last the report was finished, and Kvashnin passed into the roomy glass compartment built at the end of the carriage.

It was a moment which Bobrov thought would have been well worth perpetuating with a good camera. Kvashnin lingered for some reason behind the glass wall, his bulky figure towering above the group that clustered round the carriage entrance, his feet planted wide apart and his face wearing a sullen look, the whole giving the impression of a crudely wrought Japanese idol. The great man's immobility apparently dismayed those who had come to meet him: the prepared smiles froze on their lips as they stared up at Kvashnin with a servility that bordered on fear. The dashing conductors had stiffened into soldierly postures on either side of the door. Glancing by chance at Nina, Bobrov with a pang

noticed on her face the same smile as he saw on the other faces, and the same fear of a savage looking at his idol.

"Is this really nothing but a disinterested, respectful amazement at a yearly income of three hundred thousand rubles?" he thought. "If so, what makes all these people wag their tails so cringingly before a man who never so much as looks at them? Perhaps what's at work here is some inconceivable psychological law of servility?"

Having stood above for a while, Kvashnin decided to start, and descended the steps, preceded by his belly and carefully supported by the train crew.

In response to the respectful bows of the crowd, which parted quickly to let him pass, he nodded carelessly, thrusting out his thick lower lip, and said in a nasal voice, "Gentlemen, you're dismissed till tomorrow."

Before reaching the exit he beckoned to the manager.

"You'll introduce him to me, Sergei Valerianovich," he said in an undertone.

"You mean Zinenko?" asked Shelkovnikov obligingly.

"Who else, damn it!" growled Kvashnin, suddenly irritated. "No, not here!" He held the manager by the sleeve as he was about to rush off. "You'll do it at the mill."

VII

The laying of the foundations and the blowing in of the new blast-furnace were to start four days after Kvashnin's arrival. It was planned to celebrate the two events with the utmost pomp, and printed invitations had been sent to the iron and steel mills in the neighbouring towns of Krutogori, Voronino, and Lvovo.

Two more members of the Board of Directors, four Belgian engineers, and several big shareholders arrived from Petersburg after Kvashnin. It was rumoured among the mill personnel that the Board had allocated about two thousand rubles for the celebration dinner, but so far nothing had happened to bear out these rumours, and the contractors had to shoulder the whole burden of buying wines and food.

Luckily the day of the celebration was fine—one of those bright, limpid days of early autumn when the sky seems so intensely blue and deep and the cool air is like exquisite, strong wine. The square pits, dug out for the foundations of the new blower and bessemer, were surrounded by a dense crowd of workers forming a U. In the middle of this living wall, on the edge of the pit, stood & plain, unpainted table covered with a white cloth, on which a cross and a gospel-book lay beside a sprinkler and a tin bowl for holy water. The priest, attired in a green chasuble embroidered with golden crosses, was standing a little way off, at the head of fifteen workmen who had volunteered to serve as choristers. The open side of the U was taken up by engineers, contractors, senior foremen, clerks—a motley, bustling crowd of two hundred-odd people. A photographer was busy on the embankment, with a black cloth thrown over his head and the camera.

Ten minutes later Kvashnin arrived at the site in a troika of magnificent greys. He was all alone in the carriage, for no one else could possibly have squeezed in beside him. He was followed by five or six more vehicles. Instinctively the

workmen at once recognized him as "the boss" and took off their caps as one man. Kvashnin stalked past them and nodded to the priest.

The hush that fell was broken by the jarring little nasal tenor of the priest, who chanted meekly, "Bless'd be the Lord, for ever and ever."

"Amen," the improvised choir responded, harmoniously enough.

The workmen—there were some three thousand of them—crossed themselves broadly, doing it simultaneously as they had greeted Kvashnin, bowed their heads, raised them again, and tossed back their hair. Bobrov could not help looking at them closely. Standing in the two front rows were staid stone-masons, all of them wearing white aprons, and nearly all tow-haired and red-' bearded; behind them were smelters and forge workers in wide, dark blouses styled after those worn by the French and British workmen, their faces grimy with iron dust which could not be washed off; among them appeared the hook-nosed faces of foreign ouvriers; still farther away, behind the smelters and forge workers, you could catch glimpses of limekiln workers, recognizable from afar by their faces, which seemed to be thickly powdered with flour, and by their inflamed, bloodshot eyes.

Whenever the choir chanted in loud unison, "Save Thy servants from calamity, O Lady!" all the three thousand people assiduously crossed themselves with a soft, monotonous rustle, and bowed deeply. Bobrov fancied that there was something elemental and powerful, and at the same time childish and touching, in that common prayer of the huge grey crowd. Next day the workmen would set about their hard twelve-hour toil. Who knew which of them was already doomed to pay for that toil with his life—to fall from a high scaffold, to be scorched with molten metal, or to be buried under a pile of broken stone or bricks? And was it by any chance this immutable decision of fate that they were thinking of as they made deep bows and tossed back their fair locks, while the choir prayed Our Lady to save her servants from calamity? And in whom but the Virgin could they trust, these big children with stout, simple hearts, these humble heroes who came out daily from their dank, cold mud-huts to carry out their habitual feat of patience and daring?

Such, or almost such, were the thoughts of Bobrov, who had an inclination for vast, poetic pictures; and although he had long since grown out of the habit of praying, a thrill of nervous excitement ran down his spine whenever the priest's jarring, distant voice was succeeded by the harmonious response of the choir. There was something powerful, submissive, and self-sacrificing in the naive prayer of those simple toilers, who had come together from God knew what far-away regions, snatched from their homes for hard and perilous work.

The service was over. With a careless air Kvashnin threw a gold coin into the pit, but was unable to bend down with the little spade he held, and so Shelkovnikov did it for him. Then the group started for the blast-furnaces whose black towers rose on stone foundations.

The newly-built Fifth Furnace was going "full blast," to use the technical jargon. A seething white-hot stream of molten slag sent blue sulphur flames darting about as it gushed from a hole pierced in the furnace, about thirty inches above the ground. It flowed down a shoot into ladles placed against the vertical base of the fur-mace, and there hardened into a thick greenish mass like barley sugar. The workmen standing on top of the furnace kept on feeding it with ore and coal, which went up every other minute in trolleys.

The priest sprinkled the furnace on all sides with holy water and hurried off timidly, with the stumbling gait of an old man. The foreman in charge of the furnace, a sinewy, black-faced old man, crossed himself and spat into his palms. His four assistants did the same. Then they picked up a long steel crow-bar, swung it back and forth for a long time and, with one big gasp, rammed it into the lowest part of the furnace. The crow-bar clanked against the clay plug. The onlookers shut their eyes in nervous expectation, and some of them stepped back. The five men struck for the second, third, and fourth time, and suddenly a dazzling-white jet of molten metal burst forth from where the crow-bar had struck. Then the foreman widened the hole by rotating the crow-bar, and the cast iron flowed sluggishly down a sand furrow, taking the colour of fiery ochre. Clusters of big shining stars came flying out of the hole, crackling and melting in the air. Flowing at a seemingly lazy pace, the metal sent out such an unbearable heat that the unaccustomed visitors kept on moving farther and farther back, shielding their faces with their hands.

From the blast-furnaces the engineers made for the blower department. Kvashnin had seen to it that the visiting shareholders got a full view of the enormous mill bustling with activity. He had calculated with absolute accuracy that these gentlemen would be overwhelmed by the wealth of new impressions, and would later report wonders to the general meeting which had sent them. And knowing very well the psychology of business men, he confidently looked forward to a new issue of stock, which would greatly profit him personally and which the general meeting had so far refused.

And the shareholders were overwhelmed, so much so that their heads ached and their knees trembled. In the blower shop, pale with excitement, they heard the air, forced into pipes by four vertical fifteen-foot pistons, rush through them with a roar that rocked the stone walls of the building. Along these massive iron pipes, which were about ten feet in circumference, the air passed through the hot-blast stoves, where burning gases heated it to a thousand degrees, and from there went into the blast-furnace, melting ore and coal with its hot breath. The engineer in charge of the blower department was giving explanations. He bent to the ear of one shareholder after another, and shouted at the top of his voice, straining till his lungs hurt, but the terrific din of the machinery drowned his words and it seemed as if he were just moving his lips, silently and strenuously.

Then Shelkovnikov led the visitors to the puddling-furnace shed, a tall building of such immense length that its far end looked like a barely visible small hole. Along one wall of the shed ran a stone platform with twenty puddling furnaces shaped like railway wagons without wheels. In these furnaces molten iron was mixed with ore and processed into steel, which flowed down pipes and filled high iron moulds—rather like bottomless cases with handles on top— and there hardened to puddles weighing each about three-quarters of a ton. The other side of the shed was laid with rails along which steam cranes moved up and down like obedient, agile animals, with tensile trunks, snorting, hissing, clanking. One of the cranes would seize & mould by the handle and raise it, and a dazzling red bar of steel would slip out. But before the bar could reach the floor, a workman would with extraordinary alacrity sling a wrist-thick chain round it. Another crane would hook the chain, waft away the bar, and put it down next to others on the platform attached to a third crane. The third crane would haul the load to the far end of the shed where a fourth crane, equipped with pincers instead of a hook, would lift the

bars from the truck and lower them into the gas furnaces built under the floor. Lastly, a fifth crane would pull them, white with heat, out of the furnaces, put them one by one under a sharp-toothed wheel revolving on a horizontal axle at a terrific speed, and the huge steel bar would be halved in five seconds like a slab of butter. Each half would then go under the twenty-five thousand pound press of a steam hammer, which shingled it as easily as if it were wax. Workmen would at once grab and load the pieces on trolleys and push them away at a run, the red-hot iron sending a wave of glowing heat against all who came that way.

Shelkovnikov went on to show his visitors the rail-rolling mill. A huge bar of red-hot metal would pass through a series of machines, moving from one to another over rollers that were turning under the floor, with only their top parts showing. Squeezed between two steel cylinders revolving in opposite directions, it would force them apart, the rollers trembling with tension. Farther away was a machine with an even smaller space between its cylinders. As it passed through each machine the bar became thinner and longer; after running several times up and down the rail-mill it would take the shape of a red-hot rail, seventy feet long. In control of the complex operations of the fifteen machines was a single man who was posted above the steam engine, on a raised platform not unlike a ship's bridge. He would pull a handle and all the cylinders and rollers would start to turn one way, then he would push it back and they would turn the other way. When the rail had been stretched to its final length a circular saw would cut it into three parts with a deafening scream, throwing up a myriad of golden sparks.

Now the group proceeded to the turnery where mostly wagon and locomotive wheels were finished. Leather transmission belts coming down from a stout steel shaft running the whole length of the ceiling set in motion two or three hundred machines of the most varied sizes and shapes. There were so many belts criss-crossing in all directions that they seemed like one tangled, vibrating network. The wheels of some of the machines were making twenty revolutions per second, while others were turning so slowly that you could hardly notice it. Steel, iron, and brass shavings thickly littered the floor in thin long spirals. Drilling machines filled the air with an unbearable screeching. The visitors were shown a nut-making machine—rather like two huge steel jaws munching steadily. Two workmen were busy feeding the end of a long red-hot rod into the machine, which bit off its tip regularly to spit out a completely finished nut.

When they left the turnery Shelkovnikov, who had been addressing his explanations exclusively to the shareholders, suggested that they should inspect the nine-hundred h.p. "Compound," the mill's pride. By then the gentlemen from Petersburg were sufficiently overwhelmed and exhausted by what they had already seen and heard. Every new impression, far from interesting them, wearied them still more. Their faces were red from the heat of the rail-mill, and their hands and clothes were sooty. They therefore accepted the manager's invitation with apparent reluctance, and only because they had to maintain the prestige of those who had sent them.

The "Compound" was installed in a separate building, very neat and nice-looking, with bright windows and an inlaid floor. Despite its huge size the machine made hardly any noise. Two pistons, each about thirty feet long, moved smoothly and swiftly up and down their cylinders encased in wood. A wheel twenty feet in diameter, with twelve ropes gliding over it, was revolving just as noiselessly and swiftly. Its sweeping motion sent the hot, dry air rushing through

the machine room in strong, regular gusts. The machine supplied power to the blowers and rolling mills and the machinery in the turnery.

Having inspected the "Compound," the shareholders felt quite certain that their trials were at an end; but the tireless Shelkovnikov obligingly made a fresh suggestion.

"Now, gentlemen, I'll show you the heart of the mill, its life-centre."

He dragged rather than led them into the steam-boiler house. But after all that they had seen the "heart of the mill"—twelve cylindrical boilers each thirty-five feet in length and ten feet in height—failed to impress the weary shareholders much. Their thoughts had long been centring round the dinner awaiting them, and they no longer asked questions but nodded with absent-minded indifference at whatever explanations Shelkovnikov gave. When he had finished they sighed with obvious relief and heartily shook hands with him.

Bobrov was now the only one left near the boilers. Standing at the edge of the deep, half-dark stone pit where the furnaces were, he looked for a long time down on the hard work of six men, bare to the waist. It was their duty to stoke the furnaces with coal day and night, without let-up. Now and again the round" iron doors opened with a clang, and Bobrov could see the dazzling white flames roaring and raging in the furnaces. Now and again the half-naked figures of the workmen, withered by fire and black with the coal dust ingrained in their skin, bent down, all the muscles and vertebrae standing out on their backs. Now and again their lean, wiry hands scooped up a shovelful of coal and thrust it into the blazing orifice with a swift, deft movement. Another two workmen, standing above, were kept ;as busy shovelling down fresh coal from the huge black piles round the boiler house. There was something depressing and inhuman, Bobrov thought, in the stokers' endless work. It seemed as if a supernatural power had chained them for life to those yawning maws and they must, under penalty of a terrible death, tirelessly feed the insatiable, gluttonous monster.

"Watching them fattening your Moloch, are you?" said a cheerful, good-humoured voice behind Bobrov's back.

Bobrov started and all but fell into the pit. He was staggered by the unexpected coincidence of the doctor's facetious exclamation with his own thoughts. For a long time after he regained his composure he could not stop wondering at the strange coincidence. He was always interested and mystified to hear someone beside him suddenly bring up what he had just been reading or thinking about.

"Did I frighten you, old chap?" said the doctor, looking closely at Bobrov. "I'm sorry."

"Yes—a little. You came up so quietly—it was quite a surprise.."

"Andrei Ilyich, you'd better look after your nerves. They're no good at all. Take my advice: ask for leave of absence and go somewhere abroad. Why worry yourself here? Enjoy six months or so of easy life; drink good wine, ride a lot, try I'amour."

The doctor walked to the edge of the furnace pit and glanced down.

"A regular inferno!" he cried. "How much would those little samovars weigh? Close to fifteen tons each, I should think?"

"A bit more than that. Upwards of twenty-five tons."

"Oh! And suppose it occurred to one of them to—er— pop? It would make a fine sight, wouldn't it?"

"It certainly would, doctor. All these buildings would probably be razed to the ground."

Goldberg shook his head and whistled significantly.

"But what might cause such a thing?"

"Oh, there may be many causes; but more often than not this is what happens: when there's very little water left in the boiler, its walls grow hotter and hotter, till they're almost red-hot. If you let water in at a moment like that an enormous quantity of steam would form at once, the walls wouldn't be able to stand the pressure, and the boiler would blow up."

"So you could do it on purpose?"

"Any time you wish. Would you like to try? When the water runs quite low in the gauge, you only have to turn that small round lever. That's all there is to it."

Bobrov was jesting, but his tone was strangely earnest, and there was a stern, unhappy look in his eyes.

"Damn it," the doctor said to himself, "he's a fine chap all right, but cranky just the same."

"Why didn't you go to the dinner, Andrei Ilyich?" he asked, stepping back from the pit. "You should at least see what a winter garden they've made of the lab. And the spread—you'd be amazed."

"To hell with it all! I can't bear those engineers' dinners." Bobrov made a grimace. "Bragging, yelling, fawning on each other, and then those invariable drunken toasts when the speakers spill their wine on themselves or their neighbours. Disgusting!"

"Yes, you're quite right." The doctor laughed. "I saw the beginning. Kvashnin was splendid. 'Gentlemen! he said, 'the engineer's calling is a lofty and important one. Along with railways, blast-furnaces, and mines he carries into the remote corners of the country the seeds of education, the flowers of civilization, and—' He mentioned some sort of fruits, but I don't remember which. A super-swindler if there ever was one! 'So let us rally, gentlemen,' he said, 'and bear high the sacred banner of our beneficent art!' He got furious applause, of course."

They walked on a few paces in silence. Suddenly a shadow came over the doctor's face.

"Beneficent art, is it!" he said angrily. "And the workmen's barracks are built of chips. No end of sick people, children dying like flies. That's what they call seeds of education! They are in for a nice surprise when typhoid fever breaks loose in Ivankovo."

"But, doctor! Do you mean to say there've been cases already? It would be dreadful with their barracks crammed the way they are."

The doctor stopped to catch his breath.

"What did you think?" he said with bitterness. "Two men were brought in yesterday. One of them died this morning, and the other's sure to die tonight, if he hasn't died yet. And we have neither medicines, beds, nor skilled nurses. Just wait, they'll pay for it yet!" he added angrily, shaking his fist at someone invisible.

VIII

Busy-bodies had begun to wag their tongues. Even before Kvashnin arrived there were so many piquant stories bandied about the mill that now no one doubted the real motive of his sudden intimacy with the Zinenko family. The ladies spoke about it with ambiguous smiles and the men, talking among themselves, called a spade a spade with frank cynicism. But nobody knew anything for certain. Everyone was agog for a spicy scandal.

The gossip was not wholly groundless. After paying a visit to the Zinenko family Kvashnin began to spend all his evenings with them. About eleven o'clock every morning, his fine troika of greys would pull up at the Shepetovka estate, and the driver would invariably announce, "My master begs the lady and the young ladies to have breakfast with him." No other people were invited to those breakfasts. The food was prepared by a French cook whom Kvashnin always took with him on his frequent trips, even when he went abroad.

Kvashnin's attentions to his new acquaintances were of a most peculiar nature. Towards the five girls he at once assumed the blunt manner of a genial unmarried uncle. In three days he was calling them by their diminutive names, to which he added their patronymic; as for the youngest, Kasya, he often took her by the plump, dimpled chin and teased her by calling her a "baby" and a "chick," which made her blush to tears although she did not protest.

Anna Afanasyevna reproached him with playful querulousness, saying that he would completely spoil her girls. Indeed, no sooner did any one of them express a fleeting wish than it was fulfilled. Hardly did Maka mention, quite innocently, that she would like to learn bicycle-riding when, the very next day, a messenger brought from Kharkov an excellent bicycle, which must have cost no less than three hundred rubles. He lost ten pounds of sweets to Beta, with whom he made a bet over some trifle, and for Kasya, as a result of another bet, he bought a brooch set with a coral, an amethyst, a sapphire, and a jasper, indicating the letters of her name.

[In Russian the name Kasya is spelt with four letters, the last corresponding to ya.—Tr.]

Once he heard that Nina was fond of riding. Two days after, there was brought to her an English thoroughbred mare, perfectly broken in for lady riders. The young ladies were fascinated by this kind fairy who could guess, and at once fulfil, their every whim. Anna Afanasyevna had a vague feeling that there was something improper about this generosity, but she lacked both the courage and the tact to make that clear to Kvashnin in a discreet manner. Whenever she obsequiously reprimanded him, he would dismiss the matter with a wave of his hand, saying in his rough, firm voice, "It's all right, my dear, stop worrying about trifles."

Nevertheless, he did not show preference for any one of her daughters but tried to please them all alike, and unceremoniously made sport of all of them.. The young men who had once called at the house had obligingly disappeared, but Svezhevsky had become a habitue, whereas formerly he had called no more than twice or three times in all. No one had asked him to come—he came of his own accord, as if at some mysterious invitation, and at once managed to become indispensable to all the members of the family.

However, a little incident preceded his appearance in the Zinenko house. About five months ago he had let fall among his colleagues that he dreamt of becoming a millionaire some day and was sure he would by the time he was forty.

"But how?" they had asked him.

Svezhevsky had tittered and answered, rubbing his moist hands mysteriously, "All roads lead to Rome."

He felt intuitively that the situation at the Shepetovka estate was shaping most favourably for his future career. Anyway, he might be of service to his all-powerful superior. So he staked his all and boldly thrust himself into Kvashnin's presence with his servile titter. He made advances to him as a gay pup might to a ferocious mastiff, both his face and his voice suggesting his constant readiness to do anything, however dirty, at a wink from Kvashnin.

Kviashnin did not mind it. He, who used to sack factory directors and managers without bothering to give the reason, silently put up with the presence of a Svezhevsky. There must be an important service afoot, and the future millionaire was eagerly biding his time.

Passed on by word of mouth, the rumour reached Bobrov's ear. He was not surprised, for he had formed a firm and accurate opinion of the Zinenko family. The only thing which vexed him was that the gossip was bound to brush Nina with its filthy tail. After the talk at the station, the girl had become dearer to him than ever. To him alone she had trustingly revealed her soul, a soul that was beautiful even in its vacillation and weakness. Everybody else knew only her costume and appearance, he thought. Jealousy—with its cynical distrust, with the constantly piqued pride attending it, with its pettiness and coarseness—was foreign to his trusting and delicate nature.

Bobrov had never yet known the warmth of genuine, deep woman's love. He was too shy and diffident to take from life what was perhaps his due. No wonder that his heart had rushed joyfully out to meet the new, strong feeling.

Throughout the last few days he had been under the spell of the talk they had had at the station. He recalled it again and again in minutest detail, each time seeing a deeper meaning in Nina's words. Every morning he woke up with a vague feeling that something big and joyful had entered >his soul, something that held out hopes of great felicity.

He was irresistibly drawn to the Zinenkos'; he wanted once more to make sure of his happiness, once more to hear from Nina those half-confessions—now timid, now naively bold. But he was restrained by Kvashnin's presence, and he tried to set his mind at ease by telling himself that in no circumstances could Kvashnin stay in Ivankovo for more than a fortnight.

By a lucky chance he saw Nina before Kvashnin left. It happened on a Sunday, three days after the ceremony of blowing in the blast-furnace. Bobrov was riding on Fairway down a broad, hard-beaten road leading from the mill to the station. It was about two o'clock, and the day was cool and cloudless. Fairway was going along at a brisk pace, pricking up his ears and tossing his shaggy head. At a curve near a warehouse, Bobrov saw a lady in riding-habit coming downhill on a large bay, followed by a rider on a small white Kirghiz horse. Soon he recognized her as Nina wearing a long, flowing dark green skirt, yellow gauntlets, and a low, glossy top hat. She was sitting in the saddle with a confident grace. The slim English mare raised its slender legs high as it carried her along at a round, springy trot, its neck arched into a steep curve. Nina's companion, Svezhevsky, was lagging far

behind; working his elbows, jerking and bouncing, he was trying to catch the dangling stirrup with the toe of his boot.

As she sighted Bobrov Nina broke her mount into a gallop. Coming alongside Bobrov, she reined in the horse abruptly, and it began to fidget, dilating its fine wide nostrils, and fretting loudly at the bit which dripped lather. Nina's face was flushed from the ride, and her hair, which had slipped out of the hat at the temples, fell back in long, thin curls.

"Where did you get such a beauty?" asked Bobrov, when he had at last managed to pull up the prancing Fairway and, bending forward in the saddle, squeeze Nina's fingertips.

"Isn't she? It's a present from Kvashnin."

"I would have refused a present like that," said Bobrov rudely, angered by Nina's careless reply.

Nina blushed.

"Just why?"

"Because—what's Kvashnin to you, after all? A relative? Or your fiance?"

"Goodness, how squeamish you are on other people's behalf!" Nina exclaimed caustically.

But seeing the pained look on his face, she softened at once.

"You know he can afford it easily. He's so rich!"

Svezhevsky was now a dozen paces from them. Suddenly Nina bent forward to Bobrov, gently touched his hand with the tip of her whip, and said under her breath, in the tone of a little girl confessing her guilt, "Don't be cross, now, please. I'll give him back the horse, you grumpy man! You see how much your opinion means to me."

Bobrov's eyes shone with happiness, and he could not help holding out his hands to Nina. But he said nothing and merely drew a deep sigh. Svezhevsky was riding up, bowing and trying to sit his horse carelessly.

"I expect you know about our picnic?" he shouted from a distance.

"Never heard of it," answered Bobrov.

"I mean the picnic that Vasily Terentyevich is getting up. We're going to Beshenaya Balka."

"Haven't heard about it."

"It's true. Please come, Andrei Ilyich," Nina put in. "Next Wednesday, at five o'clock. We'll start from the station."

"Is it a subscription picnic?"

"I think so. But I'm not certain."

Nina looked questioningly at Svezhevsky.

"That's right—a subscription picnic," he confirmed. "Vasily Terentyevich has asked me to make certain arrangements. It's going to be a stupendous affair, I can tell you. Something extra smart. But it's a secret so far. You'll be surprised."

Nina could not help adding playfully, "I started all this. The other day I was saying that it would be fun to go on an outing to the woods, and Vasily Terentyevich—"

"I'm not coming," said Bobrov brusquely.

"Oh, yes, you are!" Nina's eyes flashed. "Now march, gentlemen!" she cried, starting off at a gallop. "Listen to what I have to tell you, Andrei Ilyich!"

Svezhevsky was left behind. Nina and Bobrov were riding side by side, Nina smiling and looking into his eyes, and he frowning resentfully.

"Why, I thought up that picnic specially for you, my unkind, suspicious friend," she said with deep tenderness. "I insist on knowing what it was you didn't finish telling me at the station that time. Nobody'll be in our way at the picnic."

And once again an instant change came over Bobrov's heart. He felt tears o-f tender emotion welling up in his eyes, and exclaimed passionately, "Oh, Nina, how I love you!"

But Nina did not seem to have heard his sudden confession. She drew in the reins and forced the horse to change to a walk.

"So you will come, won't you?" she asked.

"Yes, by all means!"

"See that you do. And now let's wait for my companion and—goodbye. I must be riding home."

As he took leave of her he felt through the glove the warmth of her hand which responded with a long, firm grasp. Her dark eyes were full of love.

IX

At four o'clock next Wednesday, the station was packed with the picnickers. Everybody felt gay and at ease. For once Kvashnin's visit was winding up more happily than anybody had dared to expect. He had neither stormed nor hurled thunderbolts at anyone, and nobody had been told to go; in fact, it was rumoured that most of the clerical staff would get a rise in the near future. Besides, the picnic bid fair to be very entertaining. Beshenaya Balka, where it was to be, was less than ten miles away if you rode on horseback, and the road was extremely picturesque. The sunny weather which had set in a week earlier enhanced the trip.

There were some ninety guests; they clustered in animated groups on the platform, talking and laughing loudly. French, German, and Polish phrases could be heard along with Russian conversation. Three Belgians had brought their cameras, hoping to take flash snapshots. General curiosity was roused by the complete secrecy about the details of the picnic. Svezhevsky with a mysterious and important air hinted at certain "surprises" but refused to be more specific.

The first surprise was a special train. At five o'clock sharp, a new ten-wheeled locomotive of American make left its shed. The ladies could not keep hack cries of amazement and delight: the huge engine was decked with bunting and fresh flowers. Green garlands of oak leaves, intermingled with bunches of asters, dahlias, stocks, and carnations, entwined its steel body in a spiral, wound up the chimney, hung from it down to the whistle, and climbed up again to form a blossoming wall against the cab. In the golden rays of the setting autumn sun, the steel and brass parts of the engine glistened showily through the greenery and flowers. The six first-class carriages stretching along the platform were to take the picnickers to the 200th Mile station, from which it was only two hundred yards or so to Beshenaya Balka.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Vasily Terentyevich has asked me to inform you that he's paying all the picnic expenses," Svezhevsky said again and again, hurrying from one group to another.

A large number of people flocked round him, and he gave them further explanations.

. "Vasily Terentyevich was greatly pleased with the welcome extended to him here, and he is happy to be able to reciprocate. He's paying all the expenses."

Unable to restrain the kind of impulse which makes a valet boast of his master's generosity, he added weightily, "We spent three thousand five hundred and ninety rubles on the picnic!"

"You mean you went halves with Mr. Kvashnin?" asked a mocking voice from behind. Svezhevsky spun round to find that the venomous question had come from Andreas, who, impassive as usual, was looking at him, hands deep in his trouser pockets.

"I beg your pardon? What was it you said, please?" asked Svezhevsky, his face reddening painfully.

"It was you who said something. 'We spent three thousand'. you said, and so I assume that you meant yourself and Mr. Kvashnin. If that's the case, it is my agreeable duty to tell you that, while I accept the favour from Mr. Kvashnin, I may very well refuse to accept it from Air. Svezhevsky."

"Oh, no, no! You've misunderstood me," stammered Svezhevsky. "It's Vasily Terentyevich who's done it all. I'm simply—er—his confidant. An agent or something like that," he added with a wry smile.

The Zinenkos, accompanied by Kvashnin and Shelkovnikov, arrived almost simultaneously with the train. But no sooner did Kvashnin alight from the carriage than a tragicomic incident occurred that no one could have foreseen. Since early morning, having heard about the planned picnic, workmen's wives, sisters, and mothers had begun to gather at the station, many of them bringing their babies with them. With a look of stolid patience on their sunburnt, haggard faces, they had been sitting for many long hours on the station steps or on the ground, in the shadow cast by the walls. There were more than two hundred of them. Asked by the station staff what they wanted, they said they must see "the fat, red-headed boss." The watchman tried to send them away but the uproar they raised made him give up the attempt and leave them alone.

Each carriage that pulled up caused a momentary stir among the women, but they settled back the moment they saw that this was not the "fat, red-headed boss."

Hardly had Kvashnin stepped down on the footboard, clutching at the box, puffing and tilting the carriage, when the women closed in on him and dropped on their knees. The young, high-mettled horses shied and started at the noise of the crowd; it was all the driver could do to keep them in check by straining hard at the reins. At first Kvashnin could not make head or tail of it: the women were shouting all together, holding out their babies; tears were streaming down their bronzed faces.

Kvashnin saw that there was no breaking through the live ring in which he found himself.

"Quiet, women! Stop yelling!" he boomed, drowning their voices. "This isn't a market, is it? I can't hear a thing. Let one of you tell me what's up."

But each of the women thought she should be the one to speak. The hubbub grew louder, and the tears flew even more freely.

"Please, master, help us! We can't stand it any more! It's worn us thin! We're dying—children and all! The cold's just killing us!"

"Well, what do you want? What are you dying of?" Kvashnin bellowed again. "But don't shout all at once! You there, speak up." He poked his finger at a tall woman who was handsome in spite of the pallor of her weary face. "And let the others keep quiet!"

Most of the women stopped shouting, but continued to sob and wail softly, wiping their eyes and noses on the dirty hems of their skirts.

Even so, there were no less than twenty speaking at a time.

"We're dying of cold, master! Please do something. It's more than we can stand. They put us into barracks for the winter, but how can you live there? They call 'em barracks, sure enough, but it's chips they're built of. Even now it's terrible cold in them at night—makes your teeth chatter. And what :are we going to do in winter? At least have pity on our little ones—help us, dear master! At least get stoves built. There's no place to cook our meals —we do our cooking outside. The men are at work all day, soaked and shivering. And when they get back home they can't dry their clothes."

Kvashnin was trapped. Whichever way he turned, his path was barred by prostrate or kneeling women. And when he tried to force his way out, they would cling to his feet and the skirts of his long grey coat. Seeing that he was helpless, he beckoned to Shelkovnikov and, when the other had elbowed his way through the dense crowd, he asked him angrily in French, "Did you hear? What's the meaning of this?"

Shelkovnikov was taken aback.

"I wrote to the Board more than once," he mumbled. "There was a shortage of labour—it was summer-time, mowing was on—and the high prices—the Board wouldn't authorize it. It couldn't be helped."

"So when are you going to start rebuilding the workmen's barracks?" asked Kvashnin sternly.

"I can't tell for certain. They'll have to put up with it somehow. We must first make haste about quarters for the clerical staff."

"The outrageous things that are going on here under your management!" grumbled Kvashnin. He turned to the women and said aloud, "Listen, women! Tomorrow they'll start building stoves for you, and they'll roof your barracks with shingles. D'you hear?"

"Yes, master! Thank you so much! Of course we heard you!" cried joyous voices. "That's fine—you can rely on it when the master himself has ordered it. Thank you! Please allow us also to pick up the chips at the building site."

"All right, you may do that."

"Because there are Circassians posted everywhere, and they threaten us with their whips when we come."

"Never mind—you come and take the chips. Nobody'll harm you," Kvashnin said reassuringly. "And now, women, off you go and cook your soup! And be quick about it!" he shouted, with an encouraging dash. "Have a couple of cartloads of bricks delivered to the barracks tomorrow," he said to Shelkovnikov in an undertone. "That'll comfort them for a long time. Let them look and be happy."

The women were scattering in quite a cheerful mood.

"Mind you, if those stoves aren't built we'll ask the engineers to come and warm us," cried the woman whom Kvashnin had told to speak up for the others.

"So we shall!" added another woman pertly. "Then let the boss himself warm us. See how fat and jolly he is. We'll he warmer with him than by the stove."

This incident, which ended so happily, raised everybody's spirits. Even Kvashnin, who at first had been frowning at the manager, laughed when the women asked to be warmed, and took Shelkovnikov by the elbow as a sign of reconciliation.

"You see, my friend," he said to Shelkovnikov, heavily climbing up the station steps with him, "you must know how to talk to those people. You may promise them anything you like—aluminium homes, an eight-hour working day, or a steak every morning, but you must do it with a great deal of assurance. I swear I could put down the stormiest popular demonstration in half an hour with mere promises."

Kvashnin got on the train, laughing heartily as he recalled the details of the women's rebellion which he had just quelled. Three minutes later the train started. The coachmen were told to drive straight to Beshemaya Balka, as the company planned to come back by carriage, with torches.

Nina's behaviour perplexed Bobrov. He had awaited her arrival at the station with an excited impatience that had beset him the night before. His former doubts were gone; he believed that happiness was near, and never had the world seemed to him so beautiful, people so kind, or life so easy and joyful, as they did now. As he thought of his meeting with Nina, he tried involuntarily to picture it in advance, composing tender, passionate and eloquent phrases and then laughing at himself. Why think up words of love? They would come of themselves when they were needed, and would be much more beautiful, much warmer.

He recalled a poem he had read in a magazine, in which the poet said to his sweetheart that they were not going to swear to each other because vows would have been an insult to their trusting and ardent love.

Bobrov saw the Zinenkos' two carriages arrive after Kvashnin's troika. Nina was in the first. Wearing a pale-yellow dress trimmed with broad lace of the same colour at the crescent-shaped low neck, and a broad-brimmed white Italian hat adorned with a bouquet of tea-roses, she seemed to him paler and graver than usual. She caught sight of him from afar, but did not give him a significant look as he would have expected. In fact, he fancied that she deliberately turned away from him. And when he ran up to the carriage to help her to alight, she jumped nimbly out on the other side, as if to forestall him. He felt a pang of foreboding, but hastened to reassure himself. "Poor Nina, she's ashamed of her decision and her love. She imagines that now anyone can easily read her inmost thoughts in her eyes. The delightful naivete of it!"

He was sure that Nina would herself make an opportunity, as she had done previously at the station, to exchange a few confidential words with him. But she was apparently absorbed by Kvashnin's parley with the women and she never looked back at Bobrov, not even stealthily. Suddenly his heart began to beat in alarm and anguish. He made up his mind to walk up to the Zinenko family who kept together in a close group—the other ladies seemed to cut them—and, taking advantage of the noise which held the general attention, ask Nina at least by a look why she was so indifferent to him.

Bowing to Anna Afanasyevna and kissing her hand, he tried to read in her eyes whether she knew anything. Yes, she dearly did: her thin, angular eyebrows—-suggesting a false character, as Bobrov often thought—were knitted resentfully, and her lips wore a haughty expression. Bobrov inferred that Nina had told everything to her mother, who had scolded her.

He stepped up to Nina, but she did not so much as glance at him. Her hand lay limp and cold in his trembling hand as he clasped it. Instead of responding to his greeting she turned her head to Beta and exchanged some trivial remarks with her. He read into that hasty manoeuvre of hers something guilty, something cowardly that shrank from a forthright answer. He felt his knees give way, and a chill feeling came into his mouth. He did not know what to think. Even if Nina had let out her secret to her mother, she could have said to him by one of those swift, eloquent glances that women instinctively command, "Yes, you've guessed right, she does know about our talk. But I haven't changed, dear, I haven't changed, don't worry." But she had preferred to turn away. "Never mind, I'll get an answer from her at the picnic," he thought, with a vague presentiment of something disastrous and dastardly. "She'll have to tell me anyway."

At the 200th Mile stop the picnickers got out of the carriages and started for Beshenaya Balka in a long, colourful file down a narrow road that led past the watchman's house. The pungent freshness of autumnal woods floated to their flushed faces from afar. The road grew steeper and steeper, disappearing beneath a dark canopy of hazel bushes and honeysuckle. Dead leaves, yellow and curled, rustled underfoot. A scarlet sunset showed through the thicket far ahead.

The bushes ended. A wide clearing, flattened and strewn with fine sand, came into view unexpectedly. At one end of it stood an octagonal pavilion decked with bunting and greenery, and at the other was a covered platform for the band. As soon as the first couples came out of the thicket the band struck up a lively march. The gay brass sounds sped playfully through the woods, reverberating among the trees and merging far away into another band that sometimes seemed to outrace, and sometimes to lag behind the first. In the pavilion waiters were bustling round the tables, set in a U shape and covered with white cloths.

As soon as the hand stopped the picnickers broke into enthusiastic applause. They had reason to be delighted, for only a fortnight ago the clearing had been a hillside scantily covered with shrubs.

The band began to play a waltz.

Bobrov saw Svezhevsky, who was standing beside Nina, at once put his arm round her waist without asking permission and whirl with her about the clearing.

Scarcely had he released her when a mining student ran up to her, land then someone else. Bobrov was a poor dancer; he did not care for dancing. Nevertheless, it occurred to him to invite Nina for a quadrille. "It may give me a chance to ask for an explanation," he thought. He walked over to her when, having danced two turns, she sat down, fanning herself.

"I hope you've reserved a quadrille for me, Nina Grigoryevna?"

"Oh, my goodness! Such a pity. I've promised all my quadrilles," she replied, without looking at him. "You have? So soon?" Bobrov said thickly. "Of course." She shrugged her shoulders, impatiently and ironically. "Why do you come so late? I gave away all my quadrilles while we were on the train."

"So you completely forgot about me," he said sadly. His tone moved Nina. She nervously folded and opened her fan, but did not look up.

"It's ail your fault. Why didn't you ask me before?" "I only came to this picnic because I wanted to see you. Was the whole thing simply a joke, Nina Grigoryevna?" She made no answer, fumbling with her fan in confusion. She was rescued by a young engineer who rushed up to her. Quickly she rose and, without glancing at Bobrov, laid her thin hand in a long white glove on the engineer's

shoulder. Bobrov followed her with his eyes. After dancing one turn she sat down at the other end of the clearing—no doubt purposely, he thought. She seemed almost afraid of him, or else she felt ashamed in his presence.

The dull, listless melancholy, so long familiar to him, gripped him afresh. All the faces about him appeared vulgar and pitiful, almost comical. The cadeneed beat of the music resounded painfully in his brain. But he had not yet lost hope and sought comfort in various conjectures. "She may be cross with me because I didn't send her flowers. Or perhaps she simply doesn't care to dance with a clumsy bear like me? Well, she's probably right. These trifles mean such an awful lot to girls. In fact, they make up all their joys and sorrows, all the poetry of their lives."

At dusk Chinese lanterns were lit in long chains round the pavilion. But it was not enough—they shed hardly any light on the clearing. Suddenly the bluish light of two electric suns, carefully camouflaged in the foliage until then, flared up blindingly at both ends of the clearing. The surrounding birches and hornbeams stood out instantly. Their motionless curly boughs, brought out by the unnatural glare, looked like stage scenery set in the foreground. In the grey-green haze beyond them, the round and jagged tops of other trees were dimly silhouetted against a pitch black sky. The music could not drown the chirping of grasshoppers in the steppe, a strange chorus that sounded like a single grasshopper chirping simultaneously to right and left and overhead.

The ball went on, growing livelier and noisier as one dance followed another, the band being given hardly any respite. The women were drunk with music and the fairytale setting.

The smell of perfume and heated bodies mixed oddly with the scent of wormwood, withering leaves, and damp woods, with the remote, subtle fragrance of new-mown hay. Fans were waving everywhere like the wings of beautifully coloured birds about to take flight. Loud conversation, laughter, and the shuffling of feet on the sand-strewn earth blended into a monotonous yet lively hubbub that sounded extra loud whenever the band stopped playing.

Bobrov did not take his eyes off Nina. Once or twice she almost brushed him with her dress. He even felt a whiff of air as she swept past. While she danced her left arm lay on her partner's shoulder, bent gracefully and. with seeming helplessness, and she tilted her head as if she were going to put it on his shoulder. Occasionally he caught a glimpse of the lace edging of her white petticoat flying with her rapid motion, and of her black-stockinged little foot, with a fine ankle and steeply curving calf. At such moments he somehow felt ashamed, and was angry with all who could see her.

The mazurka came. It was already about nine o'clock. Profiting by the moment when her partner, Svezhevsky, who was conducting the mazurka, got busy with an intricate figure, Nina ran to the dressing-room, lightly gliding to the rhythm of the music and holding her dishevelled hair with both hands. Bobrov, who saw this from the far end of the clearing, hastily followed her, and placed himself by the door. It was almost dark there; the small dressing-room, built of planks behind the pavilion, was hidden in dense shade. Bobrov decided to wait till Nina came out and to make her speak. His heart was throbbing painfully; his fingers, which he clenched nervously, were moist and cold.

Nina stepped out five minutes later. Bobrov walked out of the shade and barred her way. She started back with a faint cry.

"Why are you torturing me like this, Nina Grigoryevna?" said Bobrov, clasping his hands in an involuntary gesture of entreaty. "Don't you see how you hurt me? Ah! You're making fun of my sorrow. You're laughing at me."

"I don't understand what you want," replied Nina, with wilful arrogance. "I never dreamed of laughing at you."

It was her family traits showing through.

"You didn't?" said Bobrov dejectedly. "Then what's the meaning of your behaviour tonight?"

"What behaviour?"

"You're cold to me, almost hostile. You keep turning, away from me. My very presence is disagreeable to you."

"It makes absolutely no difference to me."

"That's worse still. I sense that some dreadful change I can't understand has come over you. Please be frank, Nina, be as truthful as I thought you were till today. Tell me the truth, no matter how terrible it may be. We'd better settle the matter once and for all."

"What is there to settle? I don't know what you mean."

Bobrov pressed his hands to his temples in which the blood was pulsating feverishly.

"O yes, you do. Don't pretend. There is something to settle. We said loving words to each other, words that were almost a confession, we lived some beautiful moments that wove tender and delicate bonds between us. I know you'll be telling me I'm mistaken. Perhaps I am. But wasn't it you who told me to come to this picnic so that we might talk without being disturbed?"

Nina suddenly felt sorry for him.

"Yes, I did ask you to come," she said, bending her head low. "I was going to tell you—to tell you that we must part for ever."

"He reeled as if he had been struck in the chest. The pallor which spread over his face could be seen even in the dark.

"Part?" he gasped. "Nina Grigoryevna! Parting words are hard and bitter. Don't say them!"

"I must."

"You must?"

"Yes. It isn't I who want it."

"Who then?"

Someone was approaching them. Nina peered into the darkness.

"Here's who," she whispered.

It was Anna Afanasyevna. She eyed Bobrov and Nina suspiciously and took her daughter by the hand.

"Why did you run away, Nina?" she said in $ tone of censure. "Standing here chattering in the darkness. A fine thing to do, indeed. And here I am looking for you in every corner. As for you, sir," she said suddenly, in a loud railing voice, turning to Bobrov, "if you can't or don't care to dance yourself, you should at least keep out of the way of young ladies, instead of compromising them by tete-a-tetes in shady nooks."

She walked oft", towing Nina after her.

"Don't worry, madam, nothing can compromise your young lady!" Bobrov shouted after her, and suddenly he burst into laughter so strange and bitter that mother and daughter could not help looking back.

"There! Didn't I tell you he was a fool and an impudent fellow?" Anna Afanasyevna tugged at Nina's hand. "You can spit in his face, but still he'll laugh and get over it. Now the ladies are going to pick partners," she added more calmly. "Go and invite Kvashnin. He's just finished playing. There he is, in the doorway of the pavilion."

"But, Mother! How can he dance? He can hardly move."

"Do as I tell you. He was once considered one of the best dancers in Moscow. Anyway, he'll be pleased."

A grey mist swam before Bobrov's eyes. In it he saw Nina run nimbly across the clearing and stop in front of Kvashnin with a coquettish smile, her head tilted to one side in enticing appeal. Kvashnin listened to her, bending slightly over her. Suddenly a guffaw rocked his huge frame, and he shook his head. Nina insisted for a long time, then made a sulky face, and turned to walk away. But Kvashnin overtook her with an agility that contrasted with his size, and shrugged his shoulders as if to say, "Well, it can't be helped. You've got to humour children." He put out his hand to Nina. All the dancers stopped, staring at the new pair with curiosity. The sight of Kvashnin dancing a mazurka promised to be very funny.

Kvashnin waited for the beat and, suddenly turning to his partner with a heavy grace that was majestic in its own way, did his first step with such confident dexterity that everyone sensed in him a former excellent dancer.

Looking down at Nina, with a proud, challenging, and gay turn of his head, he at first walked rather than danced to the music with an elastic, slightly waddling gait. It seemed that his enormous height and bulk, far from handicapping him, added at the moment to the ponderous grace of his figure. As he reached the curve he halted for a second, clicked his heels, swung Nina round, and sped smoothly on his thick, springy legs across the centre of the clearing, an indulgent smile on his face. In front of the spot where he had started the dance, he again whirled her in a swift, graceful movement, and suddenly seating her on a chair, stood facing her with bowed head.

Ladies surrounded him at once, begging him to dance another turn. But the unaccustomed effort had exhausted him, and he was panting as he fanned his face with his handkerchief.

"That'll do, mesdames, have pity on an old man," he said, laughing and breathing heavily. "I'm past the dancing age. Let's have supper instead."

The picnickers started to take their seats at the tables, moving the chairs up with a grating noise. Bobrov remained standing where Nina had left him. He was alternately agonized by a feeling of humiliation and by a hopeless, desperate anguish. There were no tears, but he felt a burning sensation in his eyes, and a dry, prickly lump clogged his throat. The music continued to echo in his brain with painful monotony.

"Why, I've been looking for you for such a long time!" he heard the doctor's cheerful voice beside him. "Where have you been hiding? The moment I arrived they dragged me to the card table. I've just managed to get away. Let's go and have some food. I've reserved two seats so that we can eat together."

"Go along yourself, doctor!" replied Bobrov with an effort. "I'm not coming—I don't feel like eating."

"You aren't coming? Well, well!" The doctor gazed fixedly at Bobrov's face. "But, my dear friend, what's the matter with you? You're quite down in the

mouth." He was now speaking with earnest sympathy. "Say what you like, I won't leave you alone. Come along, don't let's argue any more."

"I feel shabby, doctor, I feel terrible," said Bobrov softly as he mechanically followed Goldberg who was pulling him away.

"Nonsense, come along! Be a man, snap your fingers at the whole thing. 'Would your heart be aching sorely, or your conscience put to test?' " he recited, putting his arm round Bobrov in a strong friendly embrace and looking affectionately into his eyes. "I'm going to prescribe a universal remedy: 'Lets have a drink, friend Vanya, to warm our hearts!' To tell you the truth, I've had a fair load of cognac with that man Andreas. How he drinks, that son of a gun! Come, be a man. You know, Andreas is very much interested in you. Come on!"

As he spoke the doctor dragged Bobrov into the pavilion. They sat down side by side. Bobrov's other table companion turned out to be Andreas.

He had been smiling at Bobrov from some way off; now he made room for him to sit down and patted his back affectionately.

"Very glad to have you here with us," he said in a friendly voice. "You're a nice chap—the sort of man I like. Cognac?"

He was drunk. His glassy eyes shone with a strange light in his pale face. Not until six months later was it discovered that every evening this irreproachably reserved, hard-working, gifted man drank himself unconscious in complete solitude.

"I might really feel better if I had a drink," Bobrov thought. "I must try, damn it!"

Andreas was waiting, holding the bottle tilted and ready. Bobrov put up a tumbler.

"Want to use that?" asked Andreas, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes," replied Bobrov, with a meek, melancholy smile.

"Good! Say when."

"The glass'll say."

"Splendid. One might think you'd served in the Swedish Navy. Enough?"

"Keep pouring."

"But, my friend, don't forget this is Martel of the VSOP brand—real, strong old cognac."

"Keep pouring—don't worry."

"Well, suppose I do get soaked," he said to himself with malice. "Let her see it."

The glass was full. Andreas put down the bottle and curiously watched Bobrov who gulped down the liquor at a draught, and shuddered.

"Is anything eating you, my child?" asked Andreas, looking earnestly into Bobrov's eyes.

"Yes." Bobrov shook his head dolefully.

"Gnawing at your heart?"

"Yes."

"Humph! Then you'll want more."

"Fill it," said Bobrov, sadly submissive.

He guzzled cognac with disgust, trying hard to dull his pain. But, strangely enough, the liquor had not the least effect on him. In fact, he felt sadder as he drank, and tears burned his eyes more than ever.

Meanwhile the waiters passed champagne round. Kvashnin rose from his seat, holding his glass with two fingers and peering through it at the light of the high candelabrum. A hush fell. All that could be heard was the hissing of the arc lamps and the tireless chirring of a grasshopper.

Kvashnin cleared his throat.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he began, and paused impressively. "I believe none of you will doubt the heartfelt gratitude with which I drink this toast. I shall never forget the warm welcome I have been given at Ivankovo, and I'll always recall tonight's little picnic with especial pleasure, thanks to the charming kindness of the ladies who attended it. To your health, Mesdames!"

He raised his glass higher, described a sweeping semi-circle with it, and took a sip.

"It's to you, my associates and colleagues, that I address myself now," he went on. "Don't censure me if what I'm going to say sounds like a lecture; I'm an old man compared with most of you here, and old men must be allowed to lecture."

Andreas bent to Bobrov's ear.

"Look at the faces that rascal Svezhevsky's making," he whispered.

Svezhevsky was trying to express the most servile and profound attention, and when Kvashnin mentioned his age he protested with both his hands and his head.

"I must repeat an old, battered expression used in editorials," Kvashnin continued. "Let us hold our banner aloft. Don't let us forget that we're the salt of the earth, that the future belongs to us. Haven't we criss-crossed the globe with railways? Don't we lay open the bowels of the earth and transform its treasures into guns, bridges, locomotives, rails, and huge machines? Don't we, by applying our genius to almost incredible enterprises, set thousands of millions of capital in motion? You should know, ladies and gentlemen, that wise Nature bends her creative energies to bring a whole nation into being for the sole purpose of moulding from it two or three dozen of the elect. So have the courage and strength to be the elect, ladies and gentlemen! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" the picnickers shouted, Svezhevsky's voice ringing loudest of all.

They all rose and walked over to Kvashnin to clink glasses with him.

"An infamous toast," said the doctor under his breath.

The next to speak was Shelkovnikov.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he shouted. "To the health of our esteemed patron, our beloved preceptor, and at the moment our host, Vastly Terentyevich Kvashnin! Hurrah!"

"Hurra-a-ah!" the picnickers shouted in unison, and once more they went to Kvashnin to clink glasses with him.

An orgy of oratory ensued. Toasts were offered to the success of the enterprise, to the absent shareholders, to the ladies attending the picnic, and to ladies in general. Some of the toasts sounded ambiguous and playfully indecent.

The champagne, consumed by the dozen bottles, was telling already; the buzz of voices filled the pavilion, and each speaker had to bang for a long time with a knife on a glass before he could begin his toast. On a email table set apart, handsome Miller was making hot punch in a large silver bowl. Suddenly Kvashnin rose again; a sly smile played on his face.

"I'm very happy to say, ladies and gentlemen, that tonight's celebration coincides with a family event," he said with charming courtesy. "Let us congratulate and give our best wishes to a betrothed couple—let us drink to the

health of Nina Grigoryevna Zinenko and—" he faltered because he had forgotten Svezhevsky's name and patronymic "and our associate, Mr. Svezhevsky."

The shouts which greeted Kvashnin's words were all the louder as the news was completely unexpected. Andreas, who had heard beside him an exclamation that sounded rather like a painful groan, turned to look at Bobrov, and saw that his pale face was distorted with suffering.

"You don't know the whole story, my dear colleague," he whispered. "Just listen to the nice speech I'm going to make."

He rose with confidence, overturning his chair and spilling half his wine.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he cried. "Our highly esteemed host didn't finish his toast out of a magnanimous discretion that is easy to understand. We must congratulate our dear associate, Mr. Svezhevsky, on his promotion: beginning with next month, he will assume the high office of business manager of the company's Board of Directors. The appointment is to be a sort of wedding present to the young couple from the highly esteemed Vasily Terentyevich. I see a look of displeasure on the face of our venerable patron. I must have inadvertently given away a surprise he held in store, and so I offer my apologies. Still, prompted by friendship and respect, I cannot but express the hope that our dear associate, Mr. Svezhevsky, may at his new post in Petersburg continue to be as energetic a worker and as beloved a comrade as he is here. But I know, ladies and gentlemen, that none of you will envy him"—he paused to glance ironically at Svezhevsky—"because we all wish him good luck so earnestly that—"

His toast was interrupted by a clatter of hooves. A hatless rider on a lathered horse dashed out of the thicket, his face frozen into a ghastly mask of horror. He was one of the foremen working under the contractor Dekhterev. He left his mount, which was trembling with exhaustion, in the middle of the clearing, ran over to Kvashnin, and began to whisper in his ear, bending familiarly over him. A deathly silence fell in the pavilion, except for the hissing lights and the grasshopper chirring importunately.

Kvashnin's wine-shot face went pale. Nervously he put down the glass he held in his hand, spilling the wine on the table-cloth.

"What about the Belgians?" he asked hoarsely.

The foreman shook his head and began once more to whisper in Kvashnin's ear.

"Damn it!" Kvashnin exclaimed, rising from his seat and crumpling his napkin. "What a mess! Wait, you'll take a telegram to the governor this very moment. Ladies and gentlemen," he said in a loud, shaking voice, "there is rioting at the mill. Something must be done about it and —I think we all had better break up at once."

"I knew it was coming," said Andreas contemptuously, with a calm anger.

And while everyone started up in a flurry, he slowly took a fresh cigar, felt in his pocket for the match-box, and filled his glass with cognac.

XI

There began a flustered, crazy bustle. Everyone got up and started to scurry about the pavilion, pushing, shouting, stumbling over fallen chairs. The ladies

with trembling hands were hastily putting on their hats. To make things worse, someone had ordered the electric lights to be switched off. Hysterical women's cries rang out in the darkness.

It was about five o'clock. The sun had not yet risen, but the sky had brightened visibly, its grey, monotonous hue heralding a rainy day. In the dismal twilight of daybreak, which had so unexpectedly succeeded the brightness of electricity, the general confusion seemed still more terrible and depressing, almost unreal. The human figures looked like ghosts from a weird, nightmarish fairy-tale. The faces, crumpled after a sleepless night, were horrible. The supper table, stained with wine and littered with plates, glasses, bottles, suggested some monstrous feast broken off all of a sudden.

The hurry-scurry round the carriages was even uglier; frightened horses snorted and reared, starting away from the bridle; wheels caught in wheels, and axles snapped; engineers called their drivers who were wrangling furiously among themselves. The general effect was that of the dazing havoc wrought by a big night fire. There was a scream—someone had been run over, or perhaps crushed to death.

Bobrov could not find Mitrofan. Once or twice he thought he heard his driver calling back to him from the thick of the tangle of vehicles. But it was quite impossible to get there, for the jam grew worse every moment.

Suddenly a huge paraffin torch flared up in the darkness, high above the crowd. There were shouts of "Out of the way! Stand back, ladies and gentlemen! Out of the way!" An irresistible human wave, driven by an impetuous pressure, swept Bobrov away, almost knocking him down, and wedged him between the rear of one cab and the pole of another. From there he saw a wide roadway form quickly between the vehicles, and saw Kvashnin drive along it in his troika. The flame of the torch wavering above the troika cast a lurid, blood-red light on Kvashnin's bulky figure.

Mad with pain, fear, and fury, and crushed on all sides, the crowd was howling round the troika. Bobrov felt his temples throb. For an instant it seemed to him that the rider was not Kvashnin, but some blood-stained, monstrous and terrible deity like those Oriental idols under whose carriages fanatics, wild with ecstasy, would fling themselves during religious processions. And he trembled with impotent rage.

After Kvashnin drove past, the crush diminished somewhat, and, turning, Bobrov saw that the pole butting into his back was that of his own phaeton. Mitrofan stood by the box, kindling a torch.

"Quick, to the mill* Mitrofan!" he shouted, climbing in. "We've got to be there in ten minutes, d'you hear?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mitrofan sullenly.

He walked round the phaeton in order to get on to the box from the right, as befitted a respectable driver, and picked up the reins.

"Only don't blame me if we kill the horses, master," he added, half-turning.

"Oh, I don't care!"

Cautiously and with great difficulty, Mitrofan wound his way out of the huddle of horses and carriages. Reaching the narrow forest road, he gave the restive horses a free rein; they pulled hard, and a headlong race began. The phaeton bounced on the long roots stretching across the bumpy road, and careened to left land right, so that both driver and passenger had to balance themselves.

The red flame of the torch was tossing and roaring, and the long, grotesque shadows of trees were tossing round the phaeton with it. It seemed as if a crowd of tall, thin, blurred ghosts were rushing along beside the phaeton in a ludicrous dance. Sometimes the ghosts would overtake the horses, growing to colossal sizes as they did so, and then drop on the ground and, shrinking rapidly as the phaeton rushed on, vanish in the dark behind Bobrov; then they would dart into the thicket for a few seconds, only to jump back into view hard by the phaeton, or they would run together in serried ranks, swaying and starting, as if whispering among themselves. Several times the boughs of the dense brushwood fringing the road reached out like thin hands to lash Mitrofan and Bobrov across the face.

They drove out of the forest. The horses splashed across a puddle, in which the crimson flame of the torch jumped and broke into furrows, and suddenly they pulled the phaeton at a smart gallop to the top of a steep hillock. A black, dreary field spread out ahead.

"Hurry, Mitrofan, or we'll never make it!" cried Bobrov impatiently, although the phaeton was racing on at breakneck speed. Mitrofan grumbled in his booming voice and lashed Fairway who was galloping alongside. The driver wondered what had come over his master who was so fond of his horses and had always spared them.

On the horizon, the glow of a tremendous fire cast its wavering reflection on the clouds trailing across the sky. As Bobrov looked up at the flashing sky, a triumphant feeling of malicious joy stirred in his heart. Andreas' insolent, cruel toast had at once opened his eyes to the cause of Nina's cold reserve throughout the evening, her mother's indignation during the mazurka, and Svezhevsky's intimacy with Kvashnin; he recalled all the rumours and gossip he had heard at the mill about Kvashnin courting Nina. "Serves him right, the red-headed monster," he whispered, seething with hatred and so deeply humiliated that his mouth felt dry. "If only I could meet him face to face now I'd spoil his smugness for him, the filthy old buyer of young flesh, the dirty, fat bag crammed with gold. I'd leave a nice stamp on his copper forehead!"

All that he had drunk had failed to intoxicate him, but it had brought about an extraordinary surge of energy, an impatient and morbid lust for action. He was shivering violently, his teeth were chattering, his brain was working rapidly and chaotically as in a fever. He unwittingly talked aloud, groaned, or laughed jerkily while his fists clenched of themselves.

"You must be ill, master. Hadn't we better go home?" Mitrofan said timidly.

Bobrov flew into a rage.

"Shut up, you fool!" he cried hoarsely. "Drive on!"

Before long they saw from a hilltop the whole mill wrapped in a milky-pink smoke. The timber storage grounds beyond it were blazing like an enormous bonfire. A multitude of small black human figures were scurrying about against the bright background of the fire. You could hear from afar the dry timber crackling in the flames. The round towers of the hot-blast stoves and blast-furnaces would stand out vividly for a moment and then merge with the dark again. The red glow of the fire cast a terrible shine on the brown water of the big square pond. The high dam of the pond was completely covered by the black mass of a huge crowd that seemed to be seething as it moved slowly forward. And a strange roar, vague and sinister, as of a distant sea, came from the formidable human mass compressed in that narrow space.

"Where the hell are you driving, you fathead! Can't you see the people, you son of a bitch?" The shout came from the road ahead; the next moment a tall bearded man appeared on the road, as if he had darted up from under the horses' hooves; his hatless head was bandaged all over with white rags.

"Drive on, Mitrofan!" cried Bobrov.

"They've set fire to it, master," he heard Mitrofan's trembling voice.

The next instant came the whistling of a rock hurled from behind, and Bobrov felt a sharp pain a little above his right temple. He touched it, and as he took his hand away it was sticky with warm blood.

The phaeton sped on. The glow grew brighter. The horses' long shadows ran from one side of the road to the other. At times it seemed to Bobrov as if he were racing down a steep slope and about to hurtle into a precipice, phaeton and all. He had lost all ability to take his bearings and could not recognize the places they passed. Suddenly the horses stood still.

"Well, Mitrofan, why did you stop?" he cried irritably.

"How can I drive on with people ahead?" Mitrofan retorted with sullen anger.

Hard as he peered into the grey twilight of early dawn, Bobrov could see nothing but a black uneven wall, with the sky flaming above it.

"What people are you talking about, damn you?" Bobrov got down and walked round the horses, which were white with lather.

As soon as he had walked a few paces from the horses he realized that what he had taken for ;a black wall was a large, dense crowd of workmen that had flooded the road and was moving slowly on in silence. Bobrov walked mechanically some fifty paces behind the workmen and then turned back to find Mitrofan and get to the mill by some other way. But Mitrofan and the horses were gone. Bobrov could not make out whether Mitrofan had driven off to look for him or he himself had wandered away. He started to call the driver, but got no response. Then he decided to catch up with the workmen he had just left, and he ran back in what he thought was the same direction. But, strangely enough, the workmen seemed to have vanished into thin air, and instead of them Bobrov bumped into a low wooden fence.

There was no end to that fence either on the right or on the left. Bobrov clambered over it and began to walk up a long, steep hill overgrown with dense, tall weeds. Cold sweat was streaming down his face, and his tongue felt as dry and stiff as a piece of wood; each breath of air he drew caused a sharp pain in his chest; the blood was throbbing violently against the top of his head; his bruised temple hurt unbearably.

The ascent seemed endless, and he was gripped with dull despair. Still he climbed on, falling down again and again, bruising his knees and clutching at prickly shrubs. Sometimes he fancied he was in one of his feverish, morbid dreams. The panic, the long wandering on the road, the endless climb—they were all as painful and absurd, as unexpected and terrible, as those nightmares of his.

At last the acclivity ended, and Bobrov knew at once it was the railway embankment. From up there the photographer had taken pictures of the group of engineers and workmen during the religious service the day before. He sat down on a sleeper, completely exhausted, and the next instant something strange happened to him: his feet became painfully weak, he felt a sickening, painful irritation in his chest and abdomen, and his forehead and cheeks went cold. Then

everything turned before his eyes and rushed away somewhere, into unfathomable depths.

He came to in half an hour or so. There was an unusual, frightful stillness below, at the foot of the embankment, where the giant mill had been working day and night with an unceasing din. He scrambled to his feet and walked towards the blast-furnaces. His head felt so heavy that he could hardly hold it up; his injured temple caused him a frightful pain at every step. Touching the wound, he again felt the warm stickiness of blood on his fingers. There was blood also on his lips and in his mouth: he could taste its salty, metallic flavour. He had not yet recovered full consciousness, and the effort to recall and grasp the meaning of what had happened caused him a terrible headache. His soul was brimming over with a deep sadness and a desperate, pointless anger.

Morning was visibly near. Everything was grey, cold, and moist—the earth, the sky, the meagre yellow grass, the shapeless heaps of stone piled up on either side of the road. Bobrov was roaming aimlessly among the deserted buildings of the mill, talking aloud to himself as people sometimes do after a severe mental shock. He was trying to pull together his straggling thoughts and bring some order into them.

"Well, tell me, please, what I am to do. Tell me for God's sake," he whispered passionately to some outsider who seemed to be lurking in him. "Oh, how hard it is! How painful! How unbearably painful! I think I'll kill myself. I can't stand this torture."

But the outsider replied from the depths of his soul, speaking aloud too, and with rude mockery, "Oh, no, you won't kill yourself. Why pretend? You're much too fond of living to kill yourself. You're too feeble in spirit to do that. You're too much afraid of physical pain. You reflect too much."

"So what am I to do? What?" Bobrov whispered again, wringing his hands. "She's so delicate, so pure—my Nina! She was the only one I had on earth. And all of a sudden— oh, how revolting!—to sell her youth, her virgin body!"

"Stop posing. What's the good of those pompous words from old melodramas?" said the other ironically. "If you hate Kvashnin so much, go and kill him."

"I will!" Bobrov shrieked, stopping and thrusting up his fists in fury. "I will! Let him no longer infect honest people with his foul breath! I'll kill him!"

But the other remarked with venomous mockery, "No, you won't. You know very well you won't. You lack both the resolve and the strength to do it. By tomorrow you'll be reasonable and weak again."

There were lucid moments in this dreadful state of internal crisis, moments when Bobrov wondered what was wrong with him, and how he had come to be where he was, and what he was to do. And he had to do something— something big and important—but he forgot what, and grimaced with pain as he tried to remember. During one of those lucid moments he found himself standing on the edge of the stokers' pit. He at once recalled with extraordinary vividness his recent conversation with the doctor on that very spot.

There was not a single stoker below; they were all gone. The boilers had long been cold. Only in the two furnaces on the extreme right and left was the coal still smouldering with a faint glow. A crazy idea flashed across Bobrov's mind. He squatted, then lowered his feet into the pit, propping himself on his hands, and jumped down.

A shovel stuck out of a heap of coal. He grabbed it and started hurriedly to feed coal into both stokeholes. A minute or two later white flames were roaring in the furnaces, and the water was gurgling in the boiler. Bobrov went on feeding shovelful after shovelful of coal; as he did so he smiled slyly, nodding at someone invisible, and giving senseless exclamations. The morbid, terrible idea of vengeance, which had occurred to him on the road, was tightening its grip on his mind. As he looked at the huge humming body of the boiler lit by fiery flashes, it seemed to him more and more alive and hateful.

No one stood in his way. The water was dwindling fast in the gauge. The gurgle in the boiler and the roar in the furnaces were growing more and more powerful and menacing.

But the unwonted toil soon wore out Bobrov. The veins in his temples were pulsating at a feverish speed, and the blood trickled down his cheek. The access of wild energy was spent, and the outsider in him was saying in a loud, mocking voice:

"Well it needs only one more move to make! But you won't make it. No, you won't. Why, the whole thing is so ridiculous that tomorrow you won't dare to confess having wanted to blow up the steam boilers."

* * *

The sun—a large blur—had risen above the horizon when Bobrov walked into the mill hospital.

Dr. Goldberg had a moment ago stopped dressing the wounds of injured and maimed people and was washing his hands over a brass wash-stand. His assistant stood beside him, holding a towel ready. On seeing Bobrov the doctor started.

"What's the matter with you, Andrei Ilyich? You're a terrible sight," he said, frightened.

Bobrov did look ghastly. The gore showed in black spots on his pale face, smudged with coal dust. His wet clothes hung in shreds from his arms and knees; his tousled hair fell over his forehead.

"Speak up, man, for God's sake! What happened?" said Dr. Goldberg, wiping his hands hastily and walking up to Bobrov.

"Oh, it's nothing at all," groaned Bobrov. "For goodness' sake, give me some morphia, doctor. Some morphia, quick, or I'll go mad! I'm suffering terribly!"

Dr. Goldberg took Bobrov by the arm, hurriedly led him away into another room, and carefully shut the door behind him.

"Listen," he said, "I can guess what's tormenting you. Believe me, I'm very sorry for you, and I'm willing to help you. But, my dear man"—'his voice sounded tearful —"my dear Andrei Ilyich, couldn't you do without it somehow? Just remember what an effort it cost you to get over that nasty habit! It'll be awful if I give you an injection now: you'll never—do you understand?—you'll never be able to give it up again."

Bobrov slumped face downwards on the broad oilskin-draped sofa.

"I don't care," he muttered through clenched teeth, shivering from head to foot. "I don't give a damn, doctor. I can't bear it any more."

Dr. Goldberg sighed, shrugged his shoulders, and took a syringe out of a medicine chest. Five minutes later Bobrov was sound asleep on the sofa. A happy smile played on his pale face, grown emaciated overnight. Dr. Goldberg was carefully washing the wound on the sleeper's head.

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