Childhood

by Leo Tolstoy

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By Leo Tolstoy

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I — THE TUTOR, KARL IVANITCH

On the 12th of August, 18— (just three days after my tenth birthday, when I had been given such wonderful presents), I was awakened at seven o'clock in the morning by Karl Ivanitch slapping the wall close to my head with a fly-flap made of sugar paper and a stick. He did this so roughly that he hit the image of my patron saint suspended to the oaken back of my bed, and the dead fly fell down on my curls. I peeped out from under the coverlet, steadied the still shaking image with my hand, flicked the dead fly on to the floor, and gazed at Karl Ivanitch with sleepy, wrathful eyes. He, in a parti-coloured wadded dressing-gown fastened about the waist with a wide belt of the same material, a red knitted cap adorned with a tassel, and soft slippers of goat skin, went on walking round the walls and taking aim at, and slapping, flies.

"Suppose," I thought to myself, "that I am only a small boy, yet why should he disturb me? Why does he not go killing flies around Woloda's bed? No; Woloda is

older than I, and I am the youngest of the family, so he torments me. That is what he thinks of all day long—how to tease me. He knows very well that he has woken me up and frightened me, but he pretends not to notice it. Disgusting brute! And his dressing-gown and cap and tassel too—they are all of them disgusting."

While I was thus inwardly venting my wrath upon Karl Ivanitch, he had passed to his own bedstead, looked at his watch (which hung suspended in a little shoe sewn with bugles), and deposited the fly-flap on a nail, then, evidently in the most cheerful mood possible, he turned round to us.

"Get up, children! It is quite time, and your mother is already in the drawing-room," he exclaimed in his strong German accent. Then he crossed over to me, sat down at my feet, and took his snuff-box out of his pocket. I pretended to be asleep. Karl Ivanitch sneezed, wiped his nose, flicked his fingers, and began amusing himself by teasing me and tickling my toes as he said with a smile, "Well, well, little lazy one!"

For all my dread of being tickled, I determined not to get out of bed or to answer him, but hid my head deeper in the pillow, kicked out with all my strength, and strained every nerve to keep from laughing.

"How kind he is, and how fond of us!" I thought to myself. "Yet to think that I could be hating him so just now!"

I felt angry, both with myself and with Karl Ivanitch, I wanted to laugh and to cry at the same time, for my nerves were all on edge.

"Leave me alone, Karl!" I exclaimed at length, with tears in my eyes, as I raised my head from beneath the bed-clothes.

Karl Ivanitch was taken aback. He left off tickling my feet, and asked me kindly what the matter was. Had I had a disagreeable dream? His good German face and the sympathy with which he sought to know the cause of my tears made them flow the faster. I felt conscience-stricken, and could not understand how, only a minute ago, I had been hating Karl, and thinking his dressing-gown and cap and tassel

disgusting. On the contrary, they looked eminently lovable now. Even the tassel seemed another token of his goodness. I replied that I was crying because I had had a bad dream, and had seen Mamma dead and being buried. Of course it was a mere invention, since I did not remember having dreamt anything at all that night, but the truth was that Karl's sympathy as he tried to comfort and reassure me had gradually made me believe that I HAD dreamt such a horrible dream, and so weep the more—though from a different cause to the one he imagined.

When Karl Ivanitch had left me, I sat up in bed and proceeded to draw my stockings over my little feet. The tears had quite dried now, yet the mournful thought of the invented dream was still haunting me a little. Presently Uncle [This term is often applied by children to old servants in Russia] Nicola came in—a neat little man who was always grave, methodical, and respectful, as well as a great friend of Karl's. He brought with him our clothes and boots—at least, boots for Woloda, and for myself the old detestable, be-ribanded shoes. In his presence I felt ashamed to cry, and, moreover, the morning sun was shining so gaily through the window, and Woloda, standing at the washstand as he mimicked Maria Ivanovna (my sister's governess), was laughing so loud and so long, that even the serious Nicola—a towel over his shoulder, the soap in one hand, and the basin in the other—could not help smiling as he said, "Will you please let me wash you, Vladimir Petrovitch?" I had cheered up completely.

"Are you nearly ready?" came Karl's voice from the schoolroom. The tone of that voice sounded stern now, and had nothing in it of the kindness which had just touched me so much. In fact, in the schoolroom Karl was altogether a different man from what he was at other times. There he was the tutor. I washed and dressed myself hurriedly, and, a brush still in my hand as I smoothed my wet hair, answered to his call. Karl, with spectacles on nose and a book in his hand, was sitting, as usual, between the door and one of the windows. To the left of the door were two shelves—one of them the children's (that is to say, ours), and the other one Karl's

own. Upon ours were heaped all sorts of books—lesson books and play books—some standing up and some lying down. The only two standing decorously against the wall were two large volumes of a Histoire des Voyages, in red binding. On that shelf could be seen books thick and thin and books large and small, as well as covers without books and books without covers, since everything got crammed up together anyhow when play time arrived and we were told to put the “library” (as Karl called these shelves) in order. The collection of books on his own shelf was, if not so numerous as ours, at least more varied. Three of them in particular I remember, namely, a German pamphlet (minus a cover) on Manuring Cabbages in Kitchen-Gardens, a History of the Seven Years’ War (bound in parchment and burnt at one corner), and a Course of Hydrostatics. Though Karl passed so much of his time in reading that he had injured his sight by doing so, he never read anything beyond these books and The Northern Bee.

Another article on Karl’s shelf I remember well. This was a round piece of cardboard fastened by a screw to a wooden stand, with a sort of comic picture of a lady and a hairdresser glued to the cardboard. Karl was very clever at fixing pieces of cardboard together, and had devised this contrivance for shielding his weak eyes from any very strong light.

I can see him before me now—the tall figure in its wadded dressing-gown and red cap (a few grey hairs visible beneath the latter) sitting beside the table; the screen with the hairdresser shading his face; one hand holding a book, and the other one resting on the arm of the chair. Before him lie his watch, with a huntsman painted on the dial, a check cotton handkerchief, a round black snuff-box, and a green spectacle-case. The neatness and orderliness of all these articles show clearly that Karl Ivanitch has a clear conscience and a quiet mind.

Sometimes, when tired of running about the salon downstairs, I would steal on tiptoe to the schoolroom and find Karl sitting alone in his armchair as, with a grave and

quiet expression on his face, he perused one of his favourite books. Yet sometimes, also, there were moments when he was not reading, and when the spectacles had slipped down his large aquiline nose, and the blue, half-closed eyes and faintly smiling lips seemed to be gazing before them with a curious expression. All would be quiet in the room—not a sound being audible save his regular breathing and the ticking of the watch with the hunter painted on the dial. He would not see me, and I would stand at the door and think: “Poor, poor old man! There are many of us, and we can play together and be happy, but he sits there all alone, and has nobody to be fond of him. Surely he speaks truth when he says that he is an orphan. And the story of his life, too—how terrible it is! I remember him telling it to Nicola. How dreadful to be in his position!” Then I would feel so sorry for him that I would go to him, and take his hand, and say, “Dear Karl Ivanitch!” and he would be visibly delighted whenever I spoke to him like this, and would look much brighter.

On the second wall of the schoolroom hung some maps—mostly torn, but glued together again by Karl’s hand. On the third wall (in the middle of which stood the door) hung, on one side of the door, a couple of rulers (one of them ours—much bescratched, and the other one his—quite a new one), with, on the further side of the door, a blackboard on which our more serious faults were marked by circles and our lesser faults by crosses. To the left of the blackboard was the corner in which we had to kneel when naughty. How well I remember that corner—the shutter on the stove, the ventilator above it, and the noise which it made when turned! Sometimes I would be made to stay in that corner till my back and knees were aching all over, and I would think to myself. “Has Karl Ivanitch forgotten me? He goes on sitting quietly in his arm-chair and reading his Hydrostatics, while I—!” Then, to remind him of my presence, I would begin gently turning the ventilator round. Or scratching some plaster off the wall; but if by chance an extra large piece fell upon the floor, the fright of it was worse than any punishment. I would glance round at Karl, but he would still be sitting there quietly, book in hand, and pretending that he had noticed

nothing.

In the middle of the room stood a table, covered with a torn black oilcloth so much cut about with penknives that the edge of the table showed through. Round the table stood unpainted chairs which, through use, had attained a high degree of polish. The fourth and last wall contained three windows, from the first of which the view was as follows. Immediately beneath it there ran a high road on which every irregularity, every pebble, every rut was known and dear to me. Beside the road stretched a row of lime-trees, through which glimpses could be caught of a wattled fence, with a meadow with farm buildings on one side of it and a wood on the other—the whole bounded by the keeper's hut at the further end of the meadow. The next window to the right overlooked the part of the terrace where the "grownups" of the family used to sit before luncheon. Sometimes, when Karl was correcting our exercises, I would look out of that window and see Mamma's dark hair and the backs of some persons with her, and hear the murmur of their talking and laughter. Then I would feel vexed that I could not be there too, and think to myself, "When am I going to be grown up, and to have no more lessons, but sit with the people whom I love instead of with these horrid dialogues in my hand?" Then my anger would change to sadness, and I would fall into such a reverie that I never heard Karl when he scolded me for my mistakes.

At last, on the morning of which I am speaking, Karl Ivanitch took off his dressing-gown, put on his blue frockcoat with its creased and crumpled shoulders, adjusted his tie before the looking-glass, and took us down to greet Mamma.

II — MAMMA

Mamma was sitting in the drawing-room and making tea. In one hand she was holding the tea-pot, while with the other one she was drawing water from the urn and letting it drip into the tray. Yet though she appeared to be noticing what she

doing, in reality she noted neither this fact nor our entry.

However vivid be one's recollection of the past, any attempt to recall the features of a beloved being shows them to one's vision as through a mist of tears—dim and blurred. Those tears are the tears of the imagination. When I try to recall Mamma as she was then, I see, true, her brown eyes, expressive always of love and kindness, the small mole on her neck below where the small hairs grow, her white embroidered collar, and the delicate, fresh hand which so often caressed me, and which I so often kissed; but her general appearance escapes me altogether.

To the left of the sofa stood an English piano, at which my dark-haired sister Lubotshka was sitting and playing with manifest effort (for her hands were rosy from a recent washing in cold water) Clementi's "Etudes." Then eleven years old, she was dressed in a short cotton frock and white lace-frilled trousers, and could take her octaves only in arpeggio. Beside her was sitting Maria Ivanovna, in a cap adorned with pink ribbons and a blue shawl. Her face was red and cross, and it assumed an expression even more severe when Karl Ivanitch entered the room. Looking angrily at him without answering his bow, she went on beating time with her foot and counting, "One, two, three—one, two, three," more loudly and commandingly than ever.

Karl Ivanitch paid no attention to this rudeness, but went, as usual, with German politeness to kiss Mamma's hand. She drew herself up, shook her head as though by the movement to chase away sad thoughts from her, and gave Karl her hand, kissing him on his wrinkled temple as he bent his head in salutation.

"I thank you, dear Karl Ivanitch," she said in German, and then, still using the same language asked him how we (the children) had slept. Karl Ivanitch was deaf in one ear, and the added noise of the piano now prevented him from hearing anything at all. He moved nearer to the sofa, and, leaning one hand upon the table and lifting his cap above his head, said with, a smile which in those days always seemed to me the

perfection of politeness: “You, will excuse me, will you not, Natalia Nicolaevna?”

The reason for this was that, to avoid catching cold, Karl never took off his red cap, but invariably asked permission, on entering the drawing-room, to retain it on his head.

“Yes, pray replace it, Karl Ivanitch,” said Mamma, bending towards him and raising her voice, “But I asked you whether the children had slept well?”

Still he did not hear, but, covering his bald head again with the red cap, went on smiling more than ever.

“Stop a moment, Mimi,” said Mamma (now smiling also) to Maria Ivanovna. “It is impossible to hear anything.”

How beautiful Mamma’s face was when she smiled! It made her so infinitely more charming, and everything around her seemed to grow brighter! If in the more painful moments of my life I could have seen that smile before my eyes, I should never have known what grief is. In my opinion, it is in the smile of a face that the essence of what we call beauty lies. If the smile heightens the charm of the face, then the face is a beautiful one. If the smile does not alter the face, then the face is an ordinary one. But if the smile spoils the face, then the face is an ugly one indeed.

Mamma took my head between her hands, bent it gently backwards, looked at me gravely, and said: “You have been crying this morning?”

I did not answer. She kissed my eyes, and said again in German: “Why did you cry?”

When talking to us with particular intimacy she always used this language, which she knew to perfection.

“I cried about a dream, Mamma” I replied, remembering the invented vision, and trembling involuntarily at the recollection.

Karl Ivanitch confirmed my words, but said nothing as to the subject of the dream.

Then, after a little conversation on the weather, in which Mimi also took part, Mamma laid some lumps of sugar on the tray for one or two of the more privileged servants, and crossed over to her embroidery frame, which stood near one of the windows.

“Go to Papa now, children,” she said, “and ask him to come to me before he goes to the home farm.”

Then the music, the counting, and the wrathful looks from Mimi began again, and we went off to see Papa. Passing through the room which had been known ever since Grandpapa’s time as “the pantry,” we entered the study.

III — PAPA

He was standing near his writing-table, and pointing angrily to some envelopes, papers, and little piles of coin upon it as he addressed some observations to the bailiff, Jakoff Michaelovitch, who was standing in his usual place (that is to say, between the door and the barometer) and rapidly closing and unclosing the fingers of the hand which he held behind his back. The more angry Papa grew, the more rapidly did those fingers twirl, and when Papa ceased speaking they came to rest also. Yet, as soon as ever Jakoff himself began to talk, they flew here, there, and everywhere with lightning rapidity. These movements always appeared to me an index of Jakoff’s secret thoughts, though his face was invariably placid, and expressive alike of dignity and submissiveness, as who should say, “I am right, yet let it be as you wish.” On seeing us, Papa said, “Directly—wait a moment,” and looked towards the door as a hint for it to be shut.

“Gracious heavens! What can be the matter with you to-day, Jakoff?” he went on with a hitch of one shoulder (a habit of his). “This envelope here with the 800 roubles enclosed,”—Jacob took out a set of tablets, put down “800” and remained looking at the figures while he waited for what was to come next—“is for expenses

during my absence. Do you understand? From the mill you ought to receive 1000 roubles. Is not that so? And from the Treasury mortgage you ought to receive some 8000 roubles. From the hay—of which, according to your calculations, we shall be able to sell 7000 poods [The pood = 40 lbs.]at 45 copecks a piece there should come in 3000. Consequently the sum-total that you ought to have in hand soon is—how much?—12,000 roubles. Is that right?"

"Precisely," answered Jakoff. Yet by the extreme rapidity with which his fingers were twitching I could see that he had an objection to make. Papa went on:

"Well, of this money you will send 10,000 roubles to the Petrovskoe local council. As for the money already at the office, you will remit it to me, and enter it as spent on this present date." Jakoff turned over the tablet marked "12,000," and put down "21,000"—seeming, by his action, to imply that 12,000 roubles had been turned over in the same fashion as he had turned the tablet. "And this envelope with the enclosed money," concluded Papa, "you will deliver for me to the person to whom it is addressed."

I was standing close to the table, and could see the address. It was "To Karl Ivanitch Mayer." Perhaps Papa had an idea that I had read something which I ought not, for he touched my shoulder with his hand and made me aware, by a slight movement, that I must withdraw from the table. Not sure whether the movement was meant for a caress or a command, I kissed the large, sinewy hand which rested upon my shoulder.

"Very well," said Jakoff. "And what are your orders about the accounts for the money from Chabarovska?" (Chabarovska was Mamma's village.)

"Only that they are to remain in my office, and not to be taken thence without my express instructions."

For a minute or two Jakoff was silent. Then his fingers began to twitch with extraordinary rapidity, and, changing the expression of deferential vacancy with

which he had listened to his orders for one of shrewd intelligence, he turned his tablets back and spoke.

“Will you allow me to inform you, Peter Alexandritch,” he said, with frequent pauses between his words, “that, however much you wish it, it is out of the question to repay the local council now. You enumerated some items, I think, as to what ought to come in from the mortgage, the mill, and the hay (he jotted down each of these items on his tablets again as he spoke). Yet I fear that we must have made a mistake somewhere in the accounts.” Here he paused a while, and looked gravely at Papa.

“How so?”

“Well, will you be good enough to look for yourself? There is the account for the mill. The miller has been to me twice to ask for time, and I am afraid that he has no money whatever in hand. He is here now. Would you like to speak to him?”

“No. Tell me what he says,” replied Papa, showing by a movement of his head that he had no desire to have speech with the miller.

“Well, it is easy enough to guess what he says. He declares that there is no grinding to be got now, and that his last remaining money has gone to pay for the dam. What good would it do for us to turn him out? As to what you were pleased to say about the mortgage, you yourself are aware that your money there is locked up and cannot be recovered at a moment’s notice. I was sending a load of flour to Ivan Afanovitch to-day, and sent him a letter as well, to which he replies that he would have been glad to oblige you, Peter Alexandritch, were it not that the matter is out of his hands now, and that all the circumstances show that it would take you at least two months to withdraw the money. From the hay I understood you to estimate a return of 3000 roubles?” (Here Jakoff jotted down “3000” on his tablets, and then looked for a moment from the figures to Papa with a peculiar expression on his face.) “Well, surely you see for yourself how little that is? And even then we should lose if we

were to sell the stuff now, for you must know that—”

It was clear that he would have had many other arguments to adduce had not Papa interrupted him.

“I cannot make any change in my arrangements,” said Papa. “Yet if there should REALLY have to be any delay in the recovery of these sums, we could borrow what we wanted from the Chabarovska funds.”

“Very well, sir.” The expression of Jakoff’s face and the way in which he twitched his fingers showed that this order had given him great satisfaction. He was a serf, and a most zealous, devoted one, but, like all good bailiffs, exacting and parsimonious to a degree in the interests of his master. Moreover, he had some queer notions of his own. He was forever endeavouring to increase his master’s property at the expense of his mistress’s, and to prove that it would be impossible to avoid using the rents from her estates for the benefit of Petrovskoe (my father’s village, and the place where we lived). This point he had now gained and was delighted in consequence.

Papa then greeted ourselves, and said that if we stayed much longer in the country we should become lazy boys; that we were growing quite big now, and must set about doing lessons in earnest,

“I suppose you know that I am starting for Moscow to-night?” he went on, “and that I am going to take you with me? You will live with Grandmamma, but Mamma and the girls will remain here. You know, too, I am sure, that Mamma’s one consolation will be to hear that you are doing your lessons well and pleasing every one around you.”

The preparations which had been in progress for some days past had made us expect some unusual event, but this news left us thunderstruck, Woloda turned red, and, with a shaking voice, delivered Mamma’s message to Papa.

“So this was what my dream foreboded!” I thought to myself. “God send that there

come nothing worse!" I felt terribly sorry to have to leave Mamma, but at the same rejoiced to think that I should soon be grown up, "If we are going to-day, we shall probably have no lessons to do, and that will be splendid. However, I am sorry for Karl Ivanitch, for he will certainly be dismissed now. That was why that envelope had been prepared for him. I think I would almost rather stay and do lessons here than leave Mamma or hurt poor Karl. He is miserable enough already."

As these thoughts crossed my mind I stood looking sadly at the black ribbons on my shoes. After a few words to Karl Ivanitch about the depression of the barometer and an injunction to Jakoff not to feed the hounds, since a farewell meet was to be held after luncheon, Papa disappointed my hopes by sending us off to lessons—though he also consoled us by promising to take us out hunting later.

On my way upstairs I made a digression to the terrace. Near the door leading on to it Papa's favourite hound, Milka, was lying in the sun and blinking her eyes.

"Miloshka," I cried as I caressed her and kissed her nose, "we are going away today. Good-bye. Perhaps we shall never see each other again." I was crying and laughing at the same time.

IV — LESSONS

Karl Ivanitch was in a bad temper. This was clear from his contracted brows, and from the way in which he flung his frockcoat into a drawer, angrily donned his old dressing-gown again, and made deep dints with his nails to mark the place in the book of dialogues to which we were to learn by heart. Woloda began working diligently, but I was too distracted to do anything at all. For a long while I stared vacantly at the book; but tears at the thought of the impending separation kept rushing to my eyes and preventing me from reading a single word. When at length the time came to repeat the dialogues to Karl (who listened to us with blinking eyes—a very bad sign), I had no sooner reached the place where some one asks,

"Wo kommen Sie her?" ("Where do you come from?") and some one else answers him, "Ich komme vom Kaffeehaus" ("I come from the coffee-house"), than I burst into tears and, for sobbing, could not pronounce, "Haben Sie die Zeitung nicht gelesen?" ("Have you not read the newspaper?") at all. Next, when we came to our writing lesson, the tears kept falling from my eyes and, making a mess on the paper, as though some one had written on blotting-paper with water, Karl was very angry. He ordered me to go down upon my knees, declared that it was all obstinacy and "puppet-comedy playing" (a favourite expression of his) on my part, threatened me with the ruler, and commanded me to say that I was sorry. Yet for sobbing and crying I could not get a word out. At last—conscious, perhaps, that he was unjust—he departed to Nicola's pantry, and slammed the door behind him. Nevertheless their conversation there carried to the schoolroom.

"Have you heard that the children are going to Moscow, Nicola?" said Karl.

"Yes. How could I help hearing it?"

At this point Nicola seemed to get up for Karl said, "Sit down, Nicola," and then locked the door. However, I came out of my corner and crept to the door to listen.

"However much you may do for people, and however fond of them you may be, never expect any gratitude, Nicola," said Karl warmly. Nicola, who was shoe-cobbling by the window, nodded his head in assent.

"Twelve years have I lived in this house," went on Karl, lifting his eyes and his snuff-box towards the ceiling, "and before God I can say that I have loved them, and worked for them, even more than if they had been my own children. You recollect, Nicola, when Woloda had the fever? You recollect how, for nine days and nights, I never closed my eyes as I sat beside his bed? Yes, at that time I was 'the dear, good Karl Ivanitch'—I was wanted then; but now"—and he smiled ironically—"the children are growing up, and must go to study in earnest. Perhaps they never learnt anything with me, Nicola? Eh?"

“I am sure they did,” replied Nicola, laying his awl down and straightening a piece of thread with his hands.

“No, I am wanted no longer, and am to be turned out. What good are promises and gratitude? Natalia Nicolaevna”—here he laid his hand upon his heart—“I love and revere, but what can SHE I do here? Her will is powerless in this house.”

He flung a strip of leather on the floor with an angry gesture. “Yet I know who has been playing tricks here, and why I am no longer wanted. It is because I do not flatter and toady as certain people do. I am in the habit of speaking the truth in all places and to all persons,” he continued proudly, “God be with these children, for my leaving them will benefit them little, whereas I—well, by God’s help I may be able to earn a crust of bread somewhere. Nicola, eh?”

Nicola raised his head and looked at Karl as though to consider whether he would indeed be able to earn a crust of bread, but he said nothing. Karl said a great deal more of the same kind—in particular how much better his services had been appreciated at a certain general’s where he had formerly lived (I regretted to hear that). Likewise he spoke of Saxony, his parents, his friend the tailor, Schonheit (beauty), and so on.

I sympathised with his distress, and felt dreadfully sorry that he and Papa (both of whom I loved about equally) had had a difference. Then I returned to my corner, crouched down upon my heels, and fell to thinking how a reconciliation between them might be effected.

Returning to the study, Karl ordered me to get up and prepare to write from dictation. When I was ready he sat down with a dignified air in his arm-chair, and in a voice which seemed to come from a profound abyss began to dictate: “Von al-len Lei-den-shaf-ten die grau-samste ist. Have you written that?” He paused, took a pinch of snuff, and began again: “Die grausamste ist die Un-dank-bar-keit [The most cruel of all passions is ingratitude.] a capital U, mind.”

The last word written, I looked at him, for him to go on.

“Punctum” (stop), he concluded, with a faintly perceptible smile, as he signed to us to hand him our copy-books.

Several times, and in several different tones, and always with an expression of the greatest satisfaction, did he read out that sentence, which expressed his predominant thought at the moment. Then he set us to learn a lesson in history, and sat down near the window. His face did not look so depressed now, but, on the contrary, expressed eloquently the satisfaction of a man who had avenged himself for an injury dealt him.

By this time it was a quarter to one o’clock, but Karl Ivanitch never thought of releasing us. He merely set us a new lesson to learn. My fatigue and hunger were increasing in equal proportions, so that I eagerly followed every sign of the approach of luncheon. First came the housemaid with a cloth to wipe the plates. Next, the sound of crockery resounded in the dining-room, as the table was moved and chairs placed round it. After that, Mimi, Lubotshka, and Katenka. (Katenka was Mimi’s daughter, and twelve years old) came in from the garden, but Foka (the servant who always used to come and announce luncheon) was not yet to be seen. Only when he entered was it lawful to throw one’s books aside and run downstairs.

Hark! Steps resounded on the staircase, but they were not Foka’s. Foka’s I had learnt to study, and knew the creaking of his boots well. The door opened, and a figure unknown to me made its appearance.

V — THE IDIOT

The man who now entered the room was about fifty years old, with a pale, attenuated face pitted with smallpox, long grey hair, and a scanty beard of a reddish hue. Likewise he was so tall that, on coming through the doorway, he was forced not only to bend his head, but to incline his whole body forward. He was dressed in a

sort of smock that was much torn, and held in his hand a stout staff. As he entered he smote this staff upon the floor, and, contracting his brows and opening his mouth to its fullest extent, laughed in a dreadful, unnatural way. He had lost the sight of one eye, and its colourless pupil kept rolling about and imparting to his hideous face an even more repellent expression than it otherwise bore.

“Hullo, you are caught!” he exclaimed as he ran to Woloda with little short steps and, seizing him round the head, looked at it searchingly. Next he left him, went to the table, and, with a perfectly serious expression on his face, began to blow under the oil-cloth, and to make the sign of the cross over it, “O-oh, what a pity! O-oh, how it hurts! They are angry! They fly from me!” he exclaimed in a tearful choking voice as he glared at Woloda and wiped away the streaming tears with his sleeve. His voice was harsh and rough, all his movements hysterical and spasmodic, and his words devoid of sense or connection (for he used no conjunctions). Yet the tone of that voice was so heartrending, and his yellow, deformed face at times so sincere and pitiful in its expression, that, as one listened to him, it was impossible to repress a mingled sensation of pity, grief, and fear.

This was the idiot Grisha. Whence he had come, or who were his parents, or what had induced him to choose the strange life which he led, no one ever knew. All that I myself knew was that from his fifteenth year upwards he had been known as an imbecile who went barefooted both in winter and summer, visited convents, gave little images to any one who cared to take them, and spoke meaningless words which some people took for prophecies; that nobody remembered him as being different; that at, rare intervals he used to call at Grandmamma’s house; and that by some people he was said to be the outcast son of rich parents and a pure, saintly soul, while others averred that he was a mere peasant and an idler.

At last the punctual and wished-for Foka arrived, and we went downstairs. Grisha followed us sobbing and continuing to talk nonsense, and knocking his staff on each

step of the staircase. When we entered the drawing-room we found Papa and Mamma walking up and down there, with their hands clasped in each other's, and talking in low tones. Maria Ivanovna was sitting bolt upright in an arm-chair placed at tight angles to the sofa, and giving some sort of a lesson to the two girls sitting beside her. When Karl Ivanitch entered the room she looked at him for a moment, and then turned her eyes away with an expression which seemed to say, "You are beneath my notice, Karl Ivanitch." It was easy to see from the girls' eyes that they had important news to communicate to us as soon as an opportunity occurred (for to leave their seats and approach us first was contrary to Mimi's rules). It was for us to go to her and say, "Bon jour, Mimi," and then make her a low bow; after which we should possibly be permitted to enter into conversation with the girls.

What an intolerable creature that Mimi was! One could hardly say a word in her presence without being found fault with. Also whenever we wanted to speak in Russian, she would say, "Parlez, donc, francais," as though on purpose to annoy us, while, if there was any particularly nice dish at luncheon which we wished to enjoy in peace, she would keep on ejaculating, "Mangez, donc, avec du pain!" or, "Comment est-ce que vous tenez votre fourchette?" "What has SHE got to do with us?" I used to think to myself. "Let her teach the girls. WE have our Karl Ivanitch." I shared to the full his dislike of "certain people."

"Ask Mamma to let us go hunting too," Katenka whispered to me, as she caught me by the sleeve just when the elders of the family were making a move towards the dining-room.

"Very well. I will try."

Grisha likewise took a seat in the dining-room, but at a little table apart from the rest. He never lifted his eyes from his plate, but kept on sighing and making horrible grimaces, as he muttered to himself: "What a pity! It has flown away! The dove is flying to heaven! The stone lies on the tomb!" and so forth.

Ever since the morning Mamma had been absent-minded, and Grisha's presence, words, and actions seemed to make her more so.

"By the way, there is something I forgot to ask you," she said, as she handed Papa a plate of soup.

"What is it?"

"That you will have those dreadful dogs of yours tied up. They nearly worried poor Grisha to death when he entered the courtyard, and I am sure they will bite the children some day."

No sooner did Grisha hear himself mentioned that he turned towards our table and showed us his torn clothes. Then, as he went on with his meal, he said: "He would have let them tear me in pieces, but God would not allow it! What a sin to let the dogs loose—a great sin! But do not beat him, master; do not beat him! It is for God to forgive! It is past now!"

"What does he say?" said Papa, looking at him gravely and sternly. "I cannot understand him at all."

"I think he is saying," replied Mamma, "that one of the huntsmen set the dogs on him, but that God would not allow him to be torn in pieces. Therefore he begs you not to punish the man."

"Oh, is that it?" said Papa, "How does he know that I intended to punish the huntsman? You know, I am not very fond of fellows like this," he added in French, "and this one offends me particularly. Should it ever happen that—"

"Oh, don't say so," interrupted Mamma, as if frightened by some thought. "How can you know what he is?"

"I think I have plenty of opportunities for doing so, since no lack of them come to see you—all of them the same sort, and probably all with the same story."

I could see that Mamma's opinion differed from his, but that she did not mean to

quarrel about it.

“Please hand me the cakes,” she said to him, “Are they good to-day or not?”

“Yes, I AM angry,” he went on as he took the cakes and put them where Mamma could not reach them, “very angry at seeing supposedly reasonable and educated people let themselves be deceived,” and he struck the table with his fork.

“I asked you to hand me the cakes,” she repeated with outstretched hand.

“And it is a good thing,” Papa continued as he put the hand aside, “that the police run such vagabonds in. All they are good for is to play upon the nerves of certain people who are already not over-strong in that respect,” and he smiled, observing that Mamma did not like the conversation at all. However, he handed her the cakes.

“All that I have to say,” she replied, “is that one can hardly believe that a man who, though sixty years of age, goes barefooted winter and summer, and always wears chains of two pounds’ weight, and never accepts the offers made to him to live a quiet, comfortable life—it is difficult to believe that such a man should act thus out of laziness.” Pausing a moment, she added with a sigh: “As to predictions, je suis payee pour y croire, I told you, I think, that Grisha prophesied the very day and hour of poor Papa’s death?”

“Oh, what HAVE you gone and done?” said Papa, laughing and putting his hand to his cheek (whenever he did this I used to look for something particularly comical from him). “Why did you call my attention to his feet? I looked at them, and now can eat nothing more.”

Luncheon was over now, and Lubotshka and Katenka were winking at us, fidgeting about in their chairs, and showing great restlessness. The winking, of course, signified, “Why don’t you ask whether we too may go to the hunt?” I nudged Woloda, and Woloda nudged me back, until at last I took heart of grace, and began (at first shyly, but gradually with more assurance) to ask if it would matter much if the girls too were allowed to enjoy the sport. Thereupon a consultation was held

among the elder folks, and eventually leave was granted—Mamma, to make things still more delightful, saying that she would come too.

VI — PREPARATIONS FOR THE CHASE

During dessert Jakoff had been sent for, and orders given him to have ready the carriage, the hounds, and the saddle-horses—every detail being minutely specified, and every horse called by its own particular name. As Woloda's usual mount was lame, Papa ordered a "hunter" to be saddled for him; which term, "hunter" so horrified Mamma's ears, that she imagined it to be some kind of an animal which would at once run away and bring about Woloda's death. Consequently, in spite of all Papa's and Woloda's assurances (the latter glibly affirming that it was nothing, and that he liked his horse to go fast), poor Mamma continued to exclaim that her pleasure would be quite spoilt for her.

When luncheon was over, the grown-ups had coffee in the study, while we younger ones ran into the garden and went chattering along the undulating paths with their carpet of yellow leaves. We talked about Woloda's riding a hunter and said what a shame it was that Lubotshka, could not run as fast as Katenka, and what fun it would be if we could see Grisha's chains, and so forth; but of the impending separation we said not a word. Our chatter was interrupted by the sound of the carriage driving up, with a village urchin perched on each of its springs. Behind the carriage rode the huntsmen with the hounds, and they, again, were followed by the groom Ignat on the steed intended for Woloda, with my old horse trotting alongside. After running to the garden fence to get a sight of all these interesting objects, and indulging in a chorus of whistling and hallooing, we rushed upstairs to dress—our one aim being to make ourselves look as like the huntsmen as possible. The obvious way to do this was to tuck one's breeches inside one's boots. We lost no time over it all, for we were in a hurry to run to the entrance steps again there to feast our eyes upon the

horses and hounds, and to have a chat with the huntsmen. The day was exceedingly warm while, though clouds of fantastic shape had been gathering on the horizon since morning and driving before a light breeze across the sun, it was clear that, for all their menacing blackness, they did not really intend to form a thunderstorm and spoil our last day's pleasure. Moreover, towards afternoon some of them broke, grew pale and elongated, and sank to the horizon again, while others of them changed to the likeness of white transparent fish-scales. In the east, over Maslovska, a single lurid mass was louring, but Karl Ivanitch (who always seemed to know the ways of the heavens) said that the weather would still continue to be fair and dry.

In spite of his advanced years, it was in quite a sprightly manner that Foka came out to the entrance steps, to give the order "Drive up." In fact, as he planted his legs firmly apart and took up his station between the lowest step and the spot where the coachman was to halt, his mien was that of a man who knew his duties and had no need to be reminded of them by anybody. Presently the ladies, also came out, and after a little discussions as to seats and the safety of the girls (all of which seemed to me wholly superfluous), they settled themselves in the vehicle, opened their parasols, and started. As the carriage was, driving away, Mamma pointed to the hunter and asked nervously "Is that the horse intended for Vladimir Petrovitch?" On the groom answering in the affirmative, she raised her hands in horror and turned her head away. As for myself, I was burning with impatience. Clambering on to the back of my steed (I was just tall enough to see between its ears), I proceeded to perform evolutions in the courtyard.

"Mind you don't ride over the hounds, sir," said one of the huntsmen.

"Hold your tongue. It is not the first time I have been one of the party." I retorted with dignity.

Although Woloda had plenty of pluck, he was not altogether free from apprehensions as he sat on the hunter. Indeed, he more than once asked as he patted

it, “Is he quiet?” He looked very well on horseback—almost a grown-up young man, and held himself so upright in the saddle that I envied him since my shadow seemed to show that I could not compare with him in looks.

Presently Papa’s footsteps sounded on the flagstones, the whip collected the hounds, and the huntsmen mounted their steeds. Papa’s horse came up in charge of a groom, the hounds of his particular leash sprang up from their picturesque attitudes to fawn upon him, and Milka, in a collar studded with beads, came bounding joyfully from behind his heels to greet and sport with the other dogs. Finally, as soon as Papa had mounted we rode away.

VII — THE HUNT

AT the head of the cavalcade rode Turka, on a hog-backed roan. On his head he wore a shaggy cap, while, with a magnificent horn slung across his shoulders and a knife at his belt, he looked so cruel and inexorable that one would have thought he was going to engage in bloody strife with his fellow men rather than to hunt a small animal. Around the hind legs of his horse the hounds gambolled like a cluster of checkered, restless balls. If one of them wished to stop, it was only with the greatest difficulty that it could do so, since not only had its leash-fellow also to be induced to halt, but at once one of the huntsmen would wheel round, crack his whip, and shout to the delinquent,

“Back to the pack, there!”

Arrived at a gate, Papa told us and the huntsmen to continue our way along the road, and then rode off across a cornfield. The harvest was at its height. On the further side of a large, shining, yellow stretch of cornland lay a high purple belt of forest which always figured in my eyes as a distant, mysterious region behind which either the world ended or an uninhabited waste began. This expanse of corn-land was dotted with swathes and reapers, while along the lanes where the sickle had passed

could be seen the backs of women as they stooped among the tall, thick grain or lifted armfuls of corn and rested them against the shocks. In one corner a woman was bending over a cradle, and the whole stubble was studded with sheaves and cornflowers. In another direction shirt-sleeved men were standing on waggons, shaking the soil from the stalks of sheaves, and stacking them for carrying. As soon as the foreman (dressed in a blouse and high boots, and carrying a tally-stick) caught sight of Papa, he hastened to take off his lamb's-wool cap and, wiping his red head, told the women to get up. Papa's chestnut horse went trotting along with a prancing gait as it tossed its head and swished its tail to and fro to drive away the gadflies and countless other insects which tormented its flanks, while his two greyhounds—their tails curved like sickles—went springing gracefully over the stubble. Milka was always first, but every now and then she would halt with a shake of her head to await the whipper-in. The chatter of the peasants; the rumbling of horses and waggons; the joyous cries of quails; the hum of insects as they hung suspended in the motionless air; the smell of the soil and grain and steam from our horses; the thousand different lights and shadows which the burning sun cast upon the yellowish-white cornland; the purple forest in the distance; the white gossamer threads which were floating in the air or resting on the soil-all these things I observed and heard and felt to the core.

Arrived at the Kalinovo wood, we found the carriage awaiting us there, with, beside it, a one-horse waggonette driven by the butler—a waggonette in which were a tea-urn, some apparatus for making ices, and many other attractive boxes and bundles, all packed in straw! There was no mistaking these signs, for they meant that we were going to have tea, fruit, and ices in the open air. This afforded us intense delight, since to drink tea in a wood and on the grass and where none else had ever drunk tea before seemed to us a treat beyond expressing.

When Turka arrived at the little clearing where the carriage was halted he took Papa's detailed instructions as to how we were to divide ourselves and where each

of us was to go (though, as a matter of fact, he never acted according to such instructions, but always followed his own devices). Then he unleashed the hounds, fastened the leashes to his saddle, whistled to the pack, and disappeared among the young birch trees the liberated hounds jumping about him in high delight, wagging their tails, and sniffing and gambolling with one another as they dispersed themselves in different directions.

“Has anyone a pocket-handkerchief to spare?” asked Papa. I took mine from my pocket and offered it to him.

“Very well. Fasten it to this greyhound here.”

“Gizana?” I asked, with the air of a connoisseur.

“Yes. Then run him along the road with you. When you come to a little clearing in the wood stop and look about you, and don’t come back to me without a hare.”

Accordingly I tied my handkerchief round Gizana’s soft neck, and set off running at full speed towards the appointed spot, Papa laughing as he shouted after me, “Hurry up, hurry up or you’ll be late!”

Every now and then Gizana kept stopping, pricking up his ears, and listening to the hallooing of the beaters. Whenever he did this I was not strong enough to move him, and could do no more than shout, “Come on, come on!” Presently he set off so fast that I could not restrain him, and I encountered more than one fall before we reached our destination. Selecting there a level, shady spot near the roots of a great oak-tree, I lay down on the turf, made Gizana crouch beside me, and waited. As usual, my imagination far outstripped reality. I fancied that I was pursuing at least my third hare when, as a matter of fact, the first hound was only just giving tongue. Presently, however, Turka’s voice began to sound through the wood in louder and more excited tones, the baying of a hound came nearer and nearer, and then another, and then a third, and then a fourth, deep throat joined in the rising and falling cadences of a chorus, until the whole had united their voices in one continuous, tumultuous

burst of melody. As the Russian proverb expresses it, “The forest had found a tongue, and the hounds were burning as with fire.”

My excitement was so great that I nearly swooned where I stood. My lips parted themselves as though smiling, the perspiration poured from me in streams, and, in spite of the tickling sensation caused by the drops as they trickled over my chin, I never thought of wiping them away. I felt that a crisis was approaching. Yet the tension was too unnatural to last. Soon the hounds came tearing along the edge of the wood, and then—behold, they were racing away from me again, and of hares there was not a sign to be seen! I looked in every direction and Gizana did the same—pulling at his leash at first and whining. Then he lay down again by my side, rested his muzzle on my knees, and resigned himself to disappointment. Among the naked roots of the oak-tree under which I was sitting. I could see countless ants swarming over the parched grey earth and winding among the acorns, withered oak-leaves, dry twigs, russet moss, and slender, scanty blades of grass. In serried files they kept pressing forward on the level track they had made for themselves—some carrying burdens, some not. I took a piece of twig and barred their way. Instantly it was curious to see how they made light of the obstacle. Some got past it by creeping underneath, and some by climbing over it. A few, however, there were (especially those weighted with loads) who were nonplussed what to do. They either halted and searched for a way round, or returned whence they had come, or climbed the adjacent herbage, with the evident intention of reaching my hand and going up the sleeve of my jacket. From this interesting spectacle my attention was distracted by the yellow wings of a butterfly which was fluttering alluringly before me. Yet I had scarcely noticed it before it flew away to a little distance and, circling over some half-faded blossoms of white clover, settled on one of them. Whether it was the sun’s warmth that delighted it, or whether it was busy sucking nectar from the flower, at all events it seemed thoroughly comfortable. It scarcely moved its wings at all, and pressed itself down into the clover until I could hardly see its body.

I sat with my chin on my hands and watched it with intense interest.

Suddenly Gizana sprang up and gave me such a violent jerk that I nearly rolled over. I looked round. At the edge of the wood a hare had just come into view, with one ear bent down and the other one sharply pricked. The blood rushed to my head, and I forgot everything else as I shouted, slipped the dog, and rushed towards the spot. Yet all was in vain. The hare stopped, made a rush, and was lost to view.

How confused I felt when at that moment Turka stepped from the undergrowth (he had been following the hounds as they ran along the edges of the wood)! He had seen my mistake (which had consisted in my not biding my time), and now threw me a contemptuous look as he said, “Ah, master!” And you should have heard the tone in which he said it! It would have been a relief to me if he had then and there suspended me to his saddle instead of the hare. For a while I could only stand miserably where I was, without attempting to recall the dog, and ejaculate as I slapped my knees, “Good heavens! What a fool I was!” I could hear the hounds retreating into the distance, and baying along the further side of the wood as they pursued the hare, while Turka rallied them with blasts on his gorgeous horn: yet I did not stir.

VIII — WE PLAY GAMES

THE hunt was over, a cloth had been spread in the shade of some young birch-trees, and the whole party was disposed around it. The butler, Gabriel, had stamped down the surrounding grass, wiped the plates in readiness, and unpacked from a basket a quantity of plums and peaches wrapped in leaves.

Through the green branches of the young birch-trees the sun glittered and threw little glancing balls of light upon the pattern of my napkin, my legs, and the bald moist head of Gabriel. A soft breeze played in the leaves of the trees above us, and, breathing softly upon my hair and heated face, refreshed me beyond measure. When

we had finished the fruit and ices, nothing remained to be done around the empty cloth, so, despite the oblique, scorching rays of the sun, we rose and proceeded to play.

“Well, what shall it be?” said Lubotshka, blinking in the sunlight and skipping about the grass, “Suppose we play Robinson?”

“No, that’s a tiresome game,” objected Woloda, stretching himself lazily on the turf and gnawing some leaves, “Always Robinson! If you want to play at something, play at building a summerhouse.”

Woloda was giving himself tremendous airs. Probably he was proud of having ridden the hunter, and so pretended to be very tired. Perhaps, also, he had too much hard-headedness and too little imagination fully to enjoy the game of Robinson. It was a game which consisted of performing various scenes from The Swiss Family Robinson, a book which we had recently been reading.

“Well, but be a good boy. Why not try and please us this time?” the girls answered. “You may be Charles or Ernest or the father, whichever you like best,” added Katenka as she tried to raise him from the ground by pulling at his sleeve.

“No, I’m not going to; it’s a tiresome game,” said Woloda again, though smiling as if secretly pleased.

“It would be better to sit at home than not to play at ANYTHING,” murmured Lubotshka, with tears in her eyes. She was a great weeper.

“Well, go on, then. Only, DON’T cry; I can’t stand that sort of thing.”

Woloda’s condescension did not please us much. On the contrary, his lazy, tired expression took away all the fun of the game. When we sat on the ground and imagined that we were sitting in a boat and either fishing or rowing with all our might, Woloda persisted in sitting with folded hands or in anything but a fisherman’s posture. I made a remark about it, but he replied that, whether we moved our hands or not, we should neither gain nor lose ground—certainly not

advance at all, and I was forced to agree with him. Again, when I pretended to go out hunting, and, with a stick over my shoulder, set off into the wood, Woloda only lay down on his back with his hands under his head, and said that he supposed it was all the same whether he went or not. Such behaviour and speeches cooled our ardour for the game and were very disagreeable—the more so since it was impossible not to confess to oneself that Woloda was right, I myself knew that it was not only impossible to kill birds with a stick, but to shoot at all with such a weapon. Still, it was the game, and if we were once to begin reasoning thus, it would become equally impossible for us to go for drives on chairs. I think that even Woloda himself cannot at that moment have forgotten how, in the long winter evenings, we had been used to cover an arm-chair with a shawl and make a carriage of it—one of us being the coachman, another one the footman, the two girls the passengers, and three other chairs the trio of horses abreast. With what ceremony we used to set out, and with what adventures we used to meet on the way! How gaily and quickly those long winter evenings used to pass! If we were always to judge from reality, games would be nonsense; but if games were nonsense, what else would there be left to do?

IX — A FIRST ESSAY IN LOVE

PRETENDING to gather some “American fruit” from a tree, Lubotshka suddenly plucked a leaf upon which was a huge caterpillar, and throwing the insect with horror to the ground, lifted her hands and sprang away as though afraid it would spit at her. The game stopped, and we crowded our heads together as we stooped to look at the curiosity.

I peeped over Katenka’s shoulder as she was trying to lift the caterpillar by placing another leaf in its way. I had observed before that the girls had a way of shrugging their shoulders whenever they were trying to put a loose garment straight on their bare necks, as well as that Mimi always grew angry on witnessing this manoeuvre

and declared it to be a chambermaid's trick. As Katenka bent over the caterpillar she made that very movement, while at the same instant the breeze lifted the fichu on her white neck. Her shoulder was close to my lips, I looked at it and kissed it. She did not turn round, but Woloda remarked without raising his head, "What spooniness!" I felt the tears rising to my eyes, and could not take my gaze from Katenka. I had long been used to her fair, fresh face, and had always been fond of her, but now I looked at her more closely, and felt more fond of her, than I had ever done or felt before.

When we returned to the grown-ups, Papa informed us, to our great joy, that, at Mamma's entreaties, our departure was to be postponed until the following morning. We rode home beside the carriage—Woloda and I galloping near it, and vieing with one another in our exhibition of horsemanship and daring. My shadow looked longer now than it had done before, and from that I judged that I had grown into a fine rider. Yet my complacency was soon marred by an unfortunate occurrence. Desiring to outdo Woloda before the audience in the carriage, I dropped a little behind. Then with whip and spur I urged my steed forward, and at the same time assumed a natural, graceful attitude, with the intention of whooting past the carriage on the side on which Katenka was seated. My only doubt was whether to halloo or not as I did so. In the event, my infernal horse stopped so abruptly when just level with the carriage horses that I was pitched forward on to its neck and cut a very sorry figure!

X — THE SORT OF MAN MY FATHER WAS

Papa was a gentleman of the last century, with all the chivalrous character, self-reliance, and gallantry of the youth of that time. Upon the men of the present day he looked with a contempt arising partly from inborn pride and partly from a secret feeling of vexation that, in this age of ours, he could no longer enjoy the influence and success which had been his in his youth. His two principal failings

were gambling and gallantry, and he had won or lost, in the course of his career, several millions of roubles.

Tall and of imposing figure, he walked with a curiously quick, mincing gait, as well as had a habit of hitching one of his shoulders. His eyes were small and perpetually twinkling, his nose large and aquiline, his lips irregular and rather oddly (though pleasantly) compressed, his articulation slightly defective and lisping, and his head quite bald. Such was my father's exterior from the days of my earliest recollection. It was an exterior which not only brought him success and made him a man a bonnes fortunes but one which pleased people of all ranks and stations. Especially did it please those whom he desired to please.

At all junctures he knew how to take the lead, for, though not deriving from the highest circles of society, he had always mixed with them, and knew how to win their respect. He possessed in the highest degree that measure of pride and self-confidence which, without giving offence, maintains a man in the opinion of the world. He had much originality, as well as the ability to use it in such a way that it benefited him as much as actual worldly position or fortune could have done. Nothing in the universe could surprise him, and though not of eminent attainments in life, he seemed born to have acquired them. He understood so perfectly how to make both himself and others forget and keep at a distance the seamy side of life, with all its petty troubles and vicissitudes, that it was impossible not to envy him. He was a connoisseur in everything which could give ease and pleasure, as well as knew how to make use of such knowledge. Likewise he prided himself on the brilliant connections which he had formed through my mother's family or through friends of his youth, and was secretly jealous of any one of a higher rank than himself—any one, that is to say, of a rank higher than a retired lieutenant of the Guards. Moreover, like all ex-officers, he refused to dress himself in the prevailing fashion, though he attired himself both originally and artistically—his invariable wear being light, loose-fitting suits, very fine shirts, and large collars and cuffs.

Everything seemed to suit his upright figure and quiet, assured air. He was sensitive to the pitch of sentimentality, and, when reading a pathetic passage, his voice would begin to tremble and the tears to come into his eyes, until he had to lay the book aside. Likewise he was fond of music, and could accompany himself on the piano as he sang the love songs of his friend A— or gipsy songs or themes from operas; but he had no love for serious music, and would frankly flout received opinion by declaring that, whereas Beethoven's sonatas wearied him and sent him to sleep, his ideal of beauty was "Do not wake me, youth" as Semenoff sang it, or "Not one" as the gipsy Taninsha rendered that ditty. His nature was essentially one of those which follow public opinion concerning what is good, and consider only that good which the public declares to be so. [It may be noted that the author has said earlier in the chapter that his father possessed "much originality."] God only knows whether he had any moral convictions. His life was so full of amusement that probably he never had time to form any, and was too successful ever to feel the lack of them.

As he grew to old age he looked at things always from a fixed point of view, and cultivated fixed rules—but only so long as that point or those rules coincided with expediency. The mode of life which offered some passing degree of interest—that, in his opinion, was the right one and the only one that men ought to affect. He had great fluency of argument; and this, I think, increased the adaptability of his morals and enabled him to speak of one and the same act, now as good, and now, with abuse, as abominable.

XI — IN THE DRAWING-ROOM AND THE STUDY

Twilight had set in when we reached home. Mamma sat down to the piano, and we to a table, there to paint and draw in colours and pencil. Though I had only one cake of colour, and it was blue, I determined to draw a picture of the hunt. In exceedingly vivid fashion I painted a blue boy on a blue horse, and—but here I stopped, for I was

uncertain whether it was possible also to paint a blue HARE. I ran to the study to consult Papa, and as he was busy reading he never lifted his eyes from his book when I asked, “Can there be blue hares?” but at once replied, “There can, my boy, there can.” Returning to the table I painted in my blue hare, but subsequently thought it better to change it into a blue bush. Yet the blue bush did not wholly please me, so I changed it into a tree, and then into a rick, until, the whole paper having now become one blur of blue, I tore it angrily in pieces, and went off to meditate in the large arm-chair.

Mamma was playing Field’s second concerto. Field, it may be said, had been her master. As I dozed, the music brought up before my imagination a kind of luminosity, with transparent dream-shapes. Next she played the “Sonate Pathetique” of Beethoven, and I at once felt heavy, depressed, and apprehensive. Mamma often played those two pieces, and therefore I well recollect the feelings they awakened in me. Those feelings were a reminiscence—of what? Somehow I seemed to remember something which had never been.

Opposite to me lay the study door, and presently I saw Jakoff enter it, accompanied by several long-bearded men in kaftans. Then the door shut again.

“Now they are going to begin some business or other,” I thought. I believed the affairs transacted in that study to be the most important ones on earth. This opinion was confirmed by the fact that people only approached the door of that room on tiptoe and speaking in whispers. Presently Papa’s resonant voice sounded within, and I also scented cigar smoke—always a very attractive thing to me. Next, as I dozed, I suddenly heard a creaking of boots that I knew, and, sure enough, saw Karl Ivanitch go on tiptoe, and with a depressed, but resolute, expression on his face and a written document in his hand, to the study door and knock softly. It opened, and then shut again behind him.

“I hope nothing is going to happen,” I mused. “Karl Ivanitch is offended, and might

be capable of anything—" and again I dozed off.

Nevertheless something DID happen. An hour later I was disturbed by the same creaking of boots, and saw Karl come out, and disappear up the stairs, wiping away a few tears from his cheeks with his pocket handkerchief as he went and muttering something between his teeth. Papa came out behind him and turned aside into the drawing-room.

"Do you know what I have just decided to do?" he asked gaily as he laid a hand upon Mamma's shoulder.

"What, my love?"

"To take Karl Ivanitch with the children. There will be room enough for him in the carriage. They are used to him, and he seems greatly attached to them. Seven hundred roubles a year cannot make much difference to us, and the poor devil is not at all a bad sort of a fellow." I could not understand why Papa should speak of him so disrespectfully.

"I am delighted," said Mamma, "and as much for the children's sake as his own. He is a worthy old man."

"I wish you could have seen how moved he was when I told him that he might look upon the 500 roubles as a present! But the most amusing thing of all is this bill which he has just handed me. It is worth seeing," and with a smile Papa gave Mamma a paper inscribed in Karl's handwriting. "Is it not capital?" he concluded.

The contents of the paper were as follows: [The joke of this bill consists chiefly in its being written in very bad Russian, with continual mistakes as to plural and singular, prepositions and so forth.]

"Two book for the children—70 copeck. Coloured paper, gold frames, and a pop-guns, blockheads [This word has a double meaning in Russian.] for cutting out several box for presents—6 roubles, 55 copecks. Several book and a bows, presents for the childrens—8 roubles, 16 copecks. A gold watches promised to me by Peter

Alexandrovitch out of Moscow, in the years 18— for 140 roubles. Consequently Karl Mayer have to receive 139 rouble, 79 copecks, beside his wage."

If people were to judge only by this bill (in which Karl Ivanitch demanded repayment of all the money he had spent on presents, as well as the value of a present promised to himself), they would take him to have been a callous, avaricious egotist yet they would be wrong.

It appears that he had entered the study with the paper in his hand and a set speech in his head, for the purpose of declaiming eloquently to Papa on the subject of the wrongs which he believed himself to have suffered in our house, but that, as soon as ever he began to speak in the vibratory voice and with the expressive intonations which he used in dictating to us, his eloquence wrought upon himself more than upon Papa; with the result that, when he came to the point where he had to say, "however sad it will be for me to part with the children," he lost his self-command utterly, his articulation became choked, and he was obliged to draw his coloured pocket-handkerchief from his pocket.

"Yes, Peter Alexandrovitch," he said, weeping (this formed no part of the prepared speech), "I am grown so used to the children that I cannot think what I should do without them. I would rather serve you without salary than not at all," and with one hand he wiped his eyes, while with the other he presented the bill.

Although I am convinced that at that moment Karl Ivanitch was speaking with absolute sincerity (for I know how good his heart was), I confess that never to this day have I been able quite to reconcile his words with the bill.

"Well, if the idea of leaving us grieves you, you may be sure that the idea of dismissing you grieves me equally," said Papa, tapping him on the shoulder. Then, after a pause, he added, "But I have changed my mind, and you shall not leave us."

Just before supper Grisha entered the room. Ever since he had entered the house that day he had never ceased to sigh and weep—a portent, according to those who

believed in his prophetic powers, that misfortune was impending for the household. He had now come to take leave of us, for to-morrow (so he said) he must be moving on. I nudged Woloda, and we moved towards the door.

“What is the matter?” he said.

“This—that if we want to see Grisha’s chains we must go upstairs at once to the men-servants’ rooms. Grisha is to sleep in the second one, so we can sit in the store-room and see everything.”

“All right. Wait here, and I’ll tell the girls.”

The girls came at once, and we ascended the stairs, though the question as to which of us should first enter the store-room gave us some little trouble. Then we cowered down and waited.

XII — GRISHA

WE all felt a little uneasy in the thick darkness, so we pressed close to one another and said nothing. Before long Grisha arrived with his soft tread, carrying in one hand his staff and in the other a tallow candle set in a brass candlestick. We scarcely ventured to breathe.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ! Holy Mother of God! Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!” he kept repeating, with the different intonations and abbreviations which gradually become peculiar to persons who are accustomed to pronounce the words with great frequency.

Still praying, he placed his staff in a corner and looked at the bed; after which he began to undress. Unfastening his old black girdle, he slowly divested himself of his torn nankeen kaftan, and deposited it carefully on the back of a chair. His face had now lost its usual disquietude and idiocy. On the contrary, it had in it something restful, thoughtful, and even grand, while all his movements were deliberate and

intelligent.

Next, he lay down quietly in his shirt on the bed, made the sign of the cross towards every side of him, and adjusted his chains beneath his shirt—an operation which, as we could see from his face, occasioned him considerable pain. Then he sat up again, looked gravely at his ragged shirt, and rising and taking the candle, lifted the latter towards the shrine where the images of the saints stood. That done, he made the sign of the cross again, and turned the candle upside down, when it went out with a hissing noise.

Through the window (which overlooked the wood) the moon (nearly full) was shining in such a way that one side of the tall white figure of the idiot stood out in the pale, silvery moonlight, while the other side was lost in the dark shadow which covered the floor, walls, and ceiling. In the courtyard the watchman was tapping at intervals upon his brass alarm plate. For a while Grisha stood silently before the images and, with his large hands pressed to his breast and his head bent forward, gave occasional sighs. Then with difficulty he knelt down and began to pray.

At first he repeated some well-known prayers, and only accented a word here and there. Next, he repeated thee same prayers, but louder and with increased accentuation. Lastly he repeated them again and with even greater emphasis, as well as with an evident effort to pronounce them in the old Slavonic Church dialect. Though disconnected, his prayers were very touching. He prayed for all his benefactors (so he called every one who had received him hospitably), with, among them, Mamma and ourselves. Next he prayed for himself, and besought God to forgive him his sins, at the same time repeating, “God forgive also my enemies!” Then, moaning with the effort, he rose from his knees—only to fall to the floor again and repeat his phrases afresh. At last he regained his feet, despite the weight of the chains, which rattled loudly whenever they struck the floor.

Woloda pinched me rudely in the leg, but I took no notice of that (except that I

involuntarily touched the place with my hand), as I observed with a feeling of childish astonishment, pity, and respect the words and gestures of Grisha. Instead of the laughter and amusement which I had expected on entering the store-room, I felt my heart beating and overcome.

Grisha continued for some time in this state of religious ecstasy as he improvised prayers and repeated again and yet again, “Lord, have mercy upon me!” Each time that he said, “Pardon me, Lord, and teach me to do what Thou wouldst have done,” he pronounced the words with added earnestness and emphasis, as though he expected an immediate answer to his petition, and then fell to sobbing and moaning once more. Finally, he went down on his knees again, folded his arms upon his breast, and remained silent. I ventured to put my head round the door (holding my breath as I did so), but Grisha still made no movement except for the heavy sighs which heaved his breast. In the moonlight I could see a tear glistening on the white patch of his blind eye.

“Yes, Thy will be done!” he exclaimed suddenly, with an expression which I cannot describe, as, prostrating himself with his forehead on the floor, he fell to sobbing like a child.

Much sand has run out since then, many recollections of the past have faded from my memory or become blurred in indistinct visions, and poor Grisha himself has long since reached the end of his pilgrimage; but the impression which he produced upon me, and the feelings which he aroused in my breast, will never leave my mind. O truly Christian Grisha, your faith was so strong that you could feel the actual presence of God; your love so great that the words fell of themselves from your lips. You had no reason to prove them, for you did so with your earnest praises of His majesty as you fell to the ground speechless and in tears!

Nevertheless the sense of awe with which I had listened to Grisha could not last for ever. I had now satisfied my curiosity, and, being cramped with sitting in one

position so long, desired to join in the tittering and fun which I could hear going on in the dark store-room behind me. Some one took my hand and whispered, “Whose hand is this?” Despite the darkness, I knew by the touch and the low voice in my ear that it was Katenka. I took her by the arm, but she withdrew it, and, in doing so, pushed a cane chair which was standing near. Grisha lifted his head looked quietly about him, and, muttering a prayer, rose and made the sign of the cross towards each of the four corners of the room.

XIII — NATALIA SAVISHNA

In days gone by there used to run about the seignorial courtyard of the country-house at Chabarovska a girl called Natashka. She always wore a cotton dress, went barefooted, and was rosy, plump, and gay. It was at the request and entreaties of her father, the clarionet player Savi, that my grandfather had “taken her upstairs”—that is to say, made her one of his wife’s female servants. As chamber-maid, Natashka so distinguished herself by her zeal and amiable temper that when Mamma arrived as a baby and required a nurse Natashka was honoured with the charge of her. In this new office the girl earned still further praises and rewards for her activity, trustworthiness, and devotion to her young mistress. Soon, however, the powdered head and buckled shoes of the young and active footman Foka (who had frequent opportunities of courting her, since they were in the same service) captivated her unsophisticated, but loving, heart. At last she ventured to go and ask my grandfather if she might marry Foka, but her master took the request in bad part, flew into a passion, and punished poor Natashka by exiling her to a farm which he owned in a remote quarter of the Steppes. At length, when she had been gone six months and nobody could be found to replace her, she was recalled to her former duties. Returned, and with her dress in rags, she fell at Grandpapa’s feet, and besought him to restore her his favour and kindness, and to forget the folly of which

she had been guilty—folly which, she assured him, should never recur again. And she kept her word.

From that time forth she called herself, not Natashka, but Natalia Savishna, and took to wearing a cap. All the love in her heart was now bestowed upon her young charge. When Mamma had a governess appointed for her education, Natalia was awarded the keys as housekeeper, and henceforth had the linen and provisions under her care. These new duties she fulfilled with equal fidelity and zeal. She lived only for her master's advantage. Everything in which she could detect fraud, extravagance, or waste she endeavoured to remedy to the best of her power. When Mamma married and wished in some way to reward Natalia Savishna for her twenty years of care and labour, she sent for her and, voicing in the tenderest terms her attachment and love, presented her with a stamped charter of her (Natalia's) freedom, [It will be remembered that this was in the days of serfdom] telling her at the same time that, whether she continued to serve in the household or not, she should always receive an annual pension of 300 roubles. Natalia listened in silence to this. Then, taking the document in her hands and regarding it with a frown, she muttered something between her teeth, and darted from the room, slamming the door behind her. Not understanding the reason for such strange conduct, Mamma followed her presently to her room, and found her sitting with streaming eyes on her trunk, crushing her pocket-handkerchief between her fingers, and looking mournfully at the remains of the document, which was lying torn to pieces on the floor.

"What is the matter, dear Natalia Savishna?" said Mamma, taking her hand.

"Nothing, ma'am," she replied; "only—only I must have displeased you somehow, since you wish to dismiss me from the house. Well, I will go."

She withdrew her hand and, with difficulty restraining her tears, rose to leave the room, but Mamma stopped her, and they wept a while in one another's arms.

Ever since I can remember anything I can remember Natalia Savishna and her love and tenderness; yet only now have I learnt to appreciate them at their full value. In early days it never occurred to me to think what a rare and wonderful being this old domestic was. Not only did she never talk, but she seemed never even to think, of herself. Her whole life was compounded of love and self-sacrifice. Yet so used was I to her affection and singleness of heart that I could not picture things otherwise. I never thought of thanking her, or of asking myself, “Is she also happy? Is she also contented?” Often on some pretext or another I would leave my lessons and run to her room, where, sitting down, I would begin to muse aloud as though she were not there. She was forever mending something, or tidying the shelves which lined her room, or marking linen, so that she took no heed of the nonsense which I talked—how that I meant to become a general, to marry a beautiful woman, to buy a chestnut horse, to, build myself a house of glass, to invite Karl Ivanitch’s relatives to come and visit me from Saxony, and so forth; to all of which she would only reply, “Yes, my love, yes.” Then, on my rising, and preparing to go, she would open a blue trunk which had pasted on the inside of its lid a coloured picture of a hussar which had once adorned a pomade bottle and a sketch made by Woloda, and take from it a fumigation pastille, which she would light and shake for my benefit, saying:

“These, dear, are the pastilles which your grandfather (now in Heaven) brought back from Otchakov after fighting against the Turks.” Then she would add with a sigh: “But this is nearly the last one.”

The trunks which filled her room seemed to contain almost everything in the world. Whenever anything was wanted, people said, “Oh, go and ask Natalia Savishna for it,” and, sure enough, it was seldom that she did not produce the object required and say, “See what comes of taking care of everything!” Her trunks contained thousands of things which nobody in the house but herself would have thought of preserving.

Once I lost my temper with her. This was how it happened.

One day after luncheon I poured myself out a glass of kvass, and then dropped the decanter, and so stained the tablecloth.

“Go and call Natalia, that she may come and see what her darling has done,” said Mamma.

Natalia arrived, and shook her head at me when she saw the damage I had done; but Mamma whispered something in her car, threw a look at myself, and then left the room.

I was just skipping away, in the sprightliest mood possible, when Natalia darted out upon me from behind the door with the tablecloth in her hand, and, catching hold of me, rubbed my face hard with the stained part of it, repeating, “Don’t thou go and spoil tablecloths any more!”

I struggled hard, and roared with temper.

“What?” I said to myself as I fled to the drawing-room in a mist of tears, “To think that Natalia Savishna-just plain Natalia-should say ‘THOU’ to me and rub my face with a wet tablecloth as though I were a mere servant-boy! It is abominable!”

Seeing my fury, Natalia departed, while I continued to strut about and plan how to punish the bold woman for her offence. Yet not more than a few moments had passed when Natalia returned and, stealing to my side, began to comfort me,

“Hush, then, my love. Do not cry. Forgive me my rudeness. It was wrong of me. You WILL pardon me, my darling, will you not? There, there, that’s a dear,” and she took from her handkerchief a cornet of pink paper containing two little cakes and a grape, and offered it me with a trembling hand. I could not look the kind old woman in the face, but, turning aside, took the paper, while my tears flowed the faster—though from love and shame now, not from anger.

XIV — THE PARTING

ON the day after the events described, the carriage and the luggage-cart drew up to the door at noon. Nicola, dressed for the journey, with his breeches tucked into his boots and an old overcoat belted tightly about him with a girdle, got into the cart and arranged cloaks and cushions on the seats. When he thought that they were piled high enough he sat down on them, but finding them still unsatisfactory, jumped up and arranged them once more.

“Nicola Dimitvitch, would you be so good as to take master’s dressing-case with you?” said Papa’s valet, suddenly standing up in the carriage, “It won’t take up much room.”

“You should have told me before, Michael Ivanitch,” answered Nicola snappishly as he hurled a bundle with all his might to the floor of the cart. “Good gracious! Why, when my head is going round like a whirlpool, there you come along with your dressing-case!” and he lifted his cap to wipe away the drops of perspiration from his sunburnt brow.

The courtyard was full of bareheaded peasants in kaftans or simple shirts, women clad in the national dress and wearing striped handkerchiefs, and barefooted little ones—the latter holding their mothers’ hands or crowding round the entrance-steps. All were chattering among themselves as they stared at the carriage. One of the postillions, an old man dressed in a winter cap and cloak, took hold of the pole of the carriage and tried it carefully, while the other postillion (a young man in a white blouse with pink gussets on the sleeves and a black lamb’s-wool cap which he kept cocking first on one side and then on the other as he arranged his flaxen hair) laid his overcoat upon the box, slung the reins over it, and cracked his thonged whip as he looked now at his boots and now at the other drivers where they stood greasing the wheels of the cart—one driver lifting up each wheel in turn and the other driver applying the grease. Tired post-horses of various hues stood lashing away flies with their tails near the gate—some stamping their great hairy legs, blinking their eyes,

and dozing, some leaning wearily against their neighbours, and others cropping the leaves and stalks of dark-green fern which grew near the entrance-steps. Some of the dogs were lying panting in the sun, while others were slinking under the vehicles to lick the grease from the wheels. The air was filled with a sort of dusty mist, and the horizon was lilac-grey in colour, though no clouds were to be seen, A strong wind from the south was raising volumes of dust from the roads and fields, shaking the poplars and birch-trees in the garden, and whirling their yellow leaves away. I myself was sitting at a window and waiting impatiently for these various preparations to come to an end.

As we sat together by the drawing-room table, to pass the last few moments en famille, it never occurred to me that a sad moment was impending. On the contrary, the most trivial thoughts were filling my brain. Which driver was going to drive the carriage and which the cart? Which of us would sit with Papa, and which with Karl Ivanitch? Why must I be kept forever muffled up in a scarf and padded boots?

“Am I so delicate? Am I likely to be frozen?” I thought to myself. “I wish it would all come to an end, and we could take our seats and start.”

“To whom shall I give the list of the children’s linen?” asked Natalia Savishna of Mamma as she entered the room with a paper in her hand and her eyes red with weeping.

“Give it to Nicola, and then return to say good-bye to them,” replied Mamma. The old woman seemed about to say something more, but suddenly stopped short, covered her face with her handkerchief, and left the room. Something seemed to prick at my heart when I saw that gesture of hers, but impatience to be off soon drowned all other feeling, and I continued to listen indifferently to Papa and Mamma as they talked together. They were discussing subjects which evidently interested neither of them. What must be bought for the house? What would Princess Sophia or Madame Julie say? Would the roads be good?—and so forth.

Foka entered, and in the same tone and with the same air as though he were announcing luncheon said, “The carriages are ready.” I saw Mamma tremble and turn pale at the announcement, just as though it were something unexpected.

Next, Foka was ordered to shut all the doors of the room. This amused me highly. As though we needed to be concealed from some one! When every one else was seated, Foka took the last remaining chair. Scarcely, however, had he done so when the door creaked and every one looked that way. Natalia Savishna entered hastily, and, without raising her eyes, sat own on the same chair as Foka. I can see them before me now-Foka’s bald head and wrinkled, set face, and, beside him, a bent, kind figure in a cap from beneath which a few grey hairs were straggling. The pair settled themselves together on the chair, but neither of them looked comfortable.

I continued preoccupied and impatient. In fact, the ten minutes during which we sat there with closed doors seemed to me an hour. At last every one rose, made the sign of the cross, and began to say good-bye. Papa embraced Mamma, and kissed her again and again.

“But enough,” he said presently. “We are not parting for ever.”

“No, but it is-so-so sad!” replied Mamma, her voice trembling with emotion.

When I heard that faltering voice, and saw those quivering lips and tear-filled eyes, I forgot everything else in the world. I felt so ill and miserable that I would gladly have run away rather than bid her farewell. I felt, too, that when she was embracing Papa she was embracing us all. She clasped Woloda to her several times, and made the sign of the cross over him; after which I approached her, thinking that it was my turn. Nevertheless she took him again and again to her heart, and blessed him. Finally I caught hold of her, and, clinging to her, wept—wept, thinking of nothing in the world but my grief.

As we passed out to take our seats, other servants pressed round us in the hall to say good-bye. Yet their requests to shake hands with us, their resounding kisses on our

shoulders, [The fashion in which inferiors salute their superiors in Russia.] and the odour of their greasy heads only excited in me a feeling akin to impatience with these tiresome people. The same feeling made me bestow nothing more than a very cross kiss upon Natalia's cap when she approached to take leave of me. It is strange that I should still retain a perfect recollection of these servants' faces, and be able to draw them with the most minute accuracy in my mind, while Mamma's face and attitude escape me entirely. It may be that it is because at that moment I had not the heart to look at her closely. I felt that if I did so our mutual grief would burst forth too unrestrainedly.

I was the first to jump into the carriage and to take one of the hinder seats. The high back of the carriage prevented me from actually seeing her, yet I knew by instinct that Mamma was still there.

"Shall I look at her again or not?" I said to myself. "Well, just for the last time," and I peeped out towards the entrance-steps. Exactly at that moment Mamma moved by the same impulse, came to the opposite side of the carriage, and called me by name. Hearing her voice behind me. I turned round, but so hastily that our heads knocked together. She gave a sad smile, and kissed me convulsively for the last time.

When we had driven away a few paces I determined to look at her once more. The wind was lifting the blue handkerchief from her head as, bent forward and her face buried in her hands, she moved slowly up the steps. Foka was supporting her. Papa said nothing as he sat beside me. I felt breathless with tears—felt a sensation in my throat as though I were going to choke, just as we came out on to the open road I saw a white handkerchief waving from the terrace. I waved mine in return, and the action of so doing calmed me a little. I still went on crying, but the thought that my tears were a proof of my affection helped to soothe and comfort me.

After a little while I began to recover, and to look with interest at objects which we passed and at the hind-quarters of the led horse which was trotting on my side. I

watched how it would swish its tail, how it would lift one hoof after the other, how the driver's thong would fall upon its back, and how all its legs would then seem to jump together and the back-band, with the rings on it, to jump too—the whole covered with the horse's foam. Then I would look at the rolling stretches of ripe corn, at the dark ploughed fields where ploughs and peasants and horses with foals were working, at their footprints, and at the box of the carriage to see who was driving us; until, though my face was still wet with tears, my thoughts had strayed far from her with whom I had just parted—parted, perhaps, for ever. Yet ever and again something would recall her to my memory. I remembered too how, the evening before, I had found a mushroom under the birch-trees, how Lubotshka had quarrelled with Katenka as to whose it should be, and how they had both of them wept when taking leave of us. I felt sorry to be parted from them, and from Natalia Savishna, and from the birch-tree avenue, and from Foka. Yes, even the horrid Mimi I longed for. I longed for everything at home. And poor Mamma!—The tears rushed to my eyes again. Yet even this mood passed away before long.

XV — CHILDHOOD

HAPPY, happy, never-returning time of childhood! How can we help loving and dwelling upon its recollections? They cheer and elevate the soul, and become to one a source of higher joys.

Sometimes, when dreaming of bygone days, I fancy that, tired out with running about, I have sat down, as of old, in my high arm-chair by the tea-table. It is late, and I have long since drunk my cup of milk. My eyes are heavy with sleep as I sit there and listen. How could I not listen, seeing that Mamma is speaking to somebody, and that the sound of her voice is so melodious and kind? How much its echoes recall to my heart! With my eyes veiled with drowsiness I gaze at her wistfully. Suddenly she seems to grow smaller and smaller, and her face vanishes to

a point; yet I can still see it—can still see her as she looks at me and smiles. Somehow it pleases me to see her grown so small. I blink and blink, yet she looks no larger than a boy reflected in the pupil of an eye. Then I rouse myself, and the picture fades. Once more I half-close my eyes, and cast about to try and recall the dream, but it has gone.

I rise to my feet, only to fall back comfortably into the armchair.

“There! You are failing asleep again, little Nicolas,” says Mamma. “You had better go to by-by.”

“No, I won’t go to sleep, Mamma,” I reply, though almost inaudibly, for pleasant dreams are filling all my soul. The sound sleep of childhood is weighing my eyelids down, and for a few moments I sink into slumber and oblivion until awakened by some one. I feel in my sleep as though a soft hand were caressing me. I know it by the touch, and, though still dreaming, I seize hold of it and press it to my lips. Every one else has gone to bed, and only one candle remains burning in the drawing-room. Mamma has said that she herself will wake me. She sits down on the arm of the chair in which I am asleep, with her soft hand stroking my hair, and I hear her beloved, well-known voice say in my ear:

“Get up, my darling. It is time to go by-by.”

No envious gaze sees her now. She is not afraid to shed upon me the whole of her tenderness and love. I do not wake up, yet I kiss and kiss her hand.

“Get up, then, my angel.”

She passes her other arm round my neck, and her fingers tickle me as they move across it. The room is quiet and in half-darkness, but the tickling has touched my nerves and I begin to awake. Mamma is sitting near me—that I can tell—and touching me; I can hear her voice and feel her presence. This at last rouses me to spring up, to throw my arms around her neck, to hide my head in her bosom, and to say with a sigh:

"Ah, dear, darling Mamma, how much I love you!"

She smiles her sad, enchanting smile, takes my head between her two hands, kisses me on the forehead, and lifts me on to her lap.

"Do you love me so much, then?" she says. Then, after a few moments' silence, she continues: "And you must love me always, and never forget me. If your Mamma should no longer be here, will you promise never to forget her—never, Nicolinka? and she kisses me more fondly than ever.

"Oh, but you must not speak so, darling Mamma, my own darling Mamma!" I exclaim as I clasp her knees, and tears of joy and love fall from my eyes.

How, after scenes like this, I would go upstairs, and stand before the ikons, and say with a rapturous feeling, "God bless Papa and Mamma!" and repeat a prayer for my beloved mother which my childish lips had learnt to lisp-the love of God and of her blending strangely in a single emotion!

After saying my prayers I would wrap myself up in the bedclothes. My heart would feel light, peaceful, and happy, and one dream would follow another. Dreams of what? They were all of them vague, but all of them full of pure love and of a sort of expectation of happiness. I remember, too, that I used to think about Karl Ivanitch and his sad lot. He was the only unhappy being whom I knew, and so sorry would I feel for him, and so much did I love him, that tears would fall from my eyes as I thought, "May God give him happiness, and enable me to help him and to lessen his sorrow. I could make any sacrifice for him!" Usually, also, there would be some favourite toy—a china dog or hare—stuck into the bed-corner behind the pillow, and it would please me to think how warm and comfortable and well cared-for it was there. Also, I would pray God to make every one happy, so that every one might be contented, and also to send fine weather to-morrow for our walk. Then I would turn myself over on to the other side, and thoughts and dreams would become jumbled and entangled together until at last I slept soundly and peacefully, though with a face

wet with tears.

Do in after life the freshness and light-heartedness, the craving for love and for strength of faith, ever return which we experience in our childhood's years? What better time is there in our lives than when the two best of virtues—innocent gaiety and a boundless yearning for affection—are our sole objects of pursuit?

Where now are our ardent prayers? Where now are our best gifts—the pure tears of emotion which a guardian angel dries with a smile as he sheds upon us lovely dreams of ineffable childish joy? Can it be that life has left such heavy traces upon one's heart that those tears and ecstasies are for ever vanished? Can it be that there remains to us only the recollection of them?

XVI — VERSE-MAKING

RATHER less than a month after our arrival in Moscow I was sitting upstairs in my Grandmamma's house and doing some writing at a large table. Opposite to me sat the drawing master, who was giving a few finishing touches to the head of a turbaned Turk, executed in black pencil. Woloda, with out-stretched neck, was standing behind the drawing master and looking over his shoulder. The head was Woloda's first production in pencil and to-day—Grandmamma's name-day—the masterpiece was to be presented to her.

"Aren't you going to put a little more shadow there?" said Woloda to the master as he raised himself on tiptoe and pointed to the Turk's neck.

"No, it is not necessary," the master replied as he put pencil and drawing-pen into a japanned folding box. "It is just right now, and you need not do anything more to it. As for you, Nicolinka," he added, rising and glancing askew at the Turk, "won't you tell us your great secret at last? What are you going to give your Grandmamma? I think another head would be your best gift. But good-bye, gentlemen," and taking his hat and cardboard he departed.

I too had thought that another head than the one at which I had been working would be a better gift; so, when we were told that Grandmamma's name-day was soon to come round and that we must each of us have a present ready for her, I had taken it into my head to write some verses in honour of the occasion, and had forthwith composed two rhymed couplets, hoping that the rest would soon materialise. I really do not know how the idea—one so peculiar for a child—came to occur to me, but I know that I liked it vastly, and answered all questions on the subject of my gift by declaring that I should soon have something ready for Grandmamma, but was not going to say what it was.

Contrary to my expectation, I found that, after the first two couplets executed in the initial heat of enthusiasm, even my most strenuous efforts refused to produce another one. I began to read different poems in our books, but neither Dimitrieff nor Derzhavin could help me. On the contrary, they only confirmed my sense of incompetence. Knowing, however, that Karl Ivanitch was fond of writing verses, I stole softly upstairs to burrow among his papers, and found, among a number of German verses, some in the Russian language which seemed to have come from his own pen.

To L Remember near Remember far, Remember me. To-day be faithful, and for ever— Aye, still beyond the grave—remember That I have well loved thee. "KARL MAYER."

These verses (which were written in a fine, round hand on thin letter-paper) pleased me with the touching sentiment with which they seemed to be inspired. I learnt them by heart, and decided to take them as a model. The thing was much easier now. By the time the name-day had arrived I had completed a twelve-couplet congratulatory ode, and sat down to the table in our school-room to copy them out on vellum.

Two sheets were soon spoiled—not because I found it necessary to alter anything (the verses seemed to me perfect), but because, after the third line, the tail-end of

each successive one would go curving upward and making it plain to all the world that the whole thing had been written with a want of adherence to the horizontal—a thing which I could not bear to see.

The third sheet also came out crooked, but I determined to make it do. In my verses I congratulated Grandmamma, wished her many happy returns, and concluded thus: "Endeavouring you to please and cheer, We love you like our Mother dear."

This seemed to me not bad, yet it offended my ear somehow.

"Lo-ve you li-ike our Mo-ther dear," I repeated to myself. "What other rhyme could I use instead of 'dear'? Fear? Steer? Well, it must go at that. At least the verses are better than Karl Ivanitch's."

Accordingly I added the last verse to the rest. Then I went into our bedroom and recited the whole poem aloud with much feeling and gesticulation. The verses were altogether guiltless of metre, but I did not stop to consider that. Yet the last one displeased me more than ever. As I sat on my bed I thought:

"Why on earth did I write 'like our Mother dear'? She is not here, and therefore she need never have been mentioned. True, I love and respect Grandmamma, but she is not quite the same as—Why DID I write that? What did I go and tell a lie for? They may be verses only, yet I needn't quite have done that."

At that moment the tailor arrived with some new clothes for us.

"Well, so be it!" I said in much vexation as I crammed the verses hastily under my pillow and ran down to adorn myself in the new Moscow garments.

They fitted marvellously-both the brown jacket with yellow buttons (a garment made skin-tight and not "to allow room for growth," as in the country) and the black trousers (also close-fitting so that they displayed the figure and lay smoothly over the boots).

"At last I have real trousers on!" I thought as I looked at my legs with the utmost

satisfaction. I concealed from every one the fact that the new clothes were horribly tight and uncomfortable, but, on the contrary, said that, if there were a fault, it was that they were not tight enough. For a long while I stood before the looking-glass as I combed my elaborately pomaded head, but, try as I would, I could not reduce the topmost hairs on the crown to order. As soon as ever I left off combing them, they sprang up again and radiated in different directions, thus giving my face a ridiculous expression.

Karl Ivanitch was dressing in another room, and I heard some one bring him his blue frockcoat and under-linen. Then at the door leading downstairs I heard a maid-servant's voice, and went to see what she wanted. In her hand she held a well-starched shirt which she said she had been sitting up all night to get ready. I took it, and asked if Grandmamma was up yet.

"Oh yes, she has had her coffee, and the priest has come. My word, but you look a fine little fellow!" added the girl with a smile at my new clothes.

This observation made me blush, so I whirled round on one leg, snapped my fingers, and went skipping away, in the hope that by these manoeuvres I should make her sensible that even yet she had not realised quite what a fine fellow I was.

However, when I took the shirt to Karl I found that he did not need it, having taken another one. Standing before a small looking-glass, he tied his cravat with both hands—trying, by various motions of his head, to see whether it fitted him comfortably or not—and then took us down to see Grandmamma. To this day I cannot help laughing when I remember what a smell of pomade the three of us left behind us on the staircase as we descended.

Karl was carrying a box which he had made himself, Woloda, his drawing, and I my verses, while each of us also had a form of words ready with which to present his gift. Just as Karl opened the door, the priest put on his vestment and began to say prayers.

During the ceremony Grandmamma stood leaning over the back of a chair, with her head bent down. Near her stood Papa. He turned and smiled at us as we hurriedly thrust our presents behind our backs and tried to remain unobserved by the door. The whole effect of a surprise, upon which we had been counting, was entirely lost. When at last every one had made the sign of the cross I became intolerably oppressed with a sudden, invincible, and deadly attack of shyness, so that the courage to, offer my present completely failed me. I hid myself behind Karl Ivanitch, who solemnly congratulated Grandmamma and, transferring his box from his right hand to his left, presented it to her. Then he withdrew a few steps to make way for Woloda. Grandmamma seemed highly pleased with the box (which was adorned with a gold border), and smiled in the most friendly manner in order to express her gratitude. Yet it was evident that, she did not know where to set the box down, and this probably accounts for the fact that she handed it to Papa, at the same time bidding him observe how beautifully it was made.

His curiosity satisfied, Papa handed the box to the priest, who also seemed particularly delighted with it, and looked with astonishment, first at the article itself, and then at the artist who could make such wonderful things. Then Woloda presented his Turk, and received a similarly flattering ovation on all sides.

It was my turn now, and Grandmamma turned to me with her kindest smile. Those who have experienced what embarrassment is know that it is a feeling which grows in direct proportion to delay, while decision decreases in similar measure. In other words the longer the condition lasts, the more invincible does it become, and the smaller does the power of decision come to be.

My last remnants of nerve and energy had forsaken me while Karl and Woloda had been offering their presents, and my shyness now reached its culminating point, I felt the blood rushing from my heart to my head, one blush succeeding another across my face, and drops of perspiration beginning to stand out on my brow and

nose. My ears were burning, I trembled from head to foot, and, though I kept changing from one foot to the other, I remained rooted where I stood.

“Well, Nicolinka, tell us what you have brought?” said Papa. “Is it a box or a drawing?”

There was nothing else to be done. With a trembling hand held out the folded, fatal paper, but my voiced failed me completely and I stood before Grandmamma in silence. I could not get rid of the dreadful idea that, instead of a display of the expected drawing, some bad verses of mine were about to be read aloud before every one, and that the words “our Mother dear” would clearly prove that I had never loved, but had only forgotten, her. How shall I express my sufferings when Grandmamma began to read my poetry aloud?—when, unable to decipher it, she stopped half-way and looked at Papa with a smile (which I took to be one of ridicule)?—when she did not pronounce it as I had meant it to be pronounced?—and when her weak sight not allowing her to finish it, she handed the paper to Papa and requested him to read it all over again from the beginning? I fancied that she must have done this last because she did not like to read such a lot of stupid, crookedly written stuff herself, yet wanted to point out to Papa my utter lack of feeling. I expected him to slap me in the face with the verses and say, “You bad boy! So you have forgotten your Mamma! Take that for it!” Yet nothing of the sort happened. On the contrary, when the whole had been read, Grandmamma said, “Charming!” and kissed me on the forehead. Then our presents, together with two cambric pocket-handkerchiefs and a snuff-box engraved with Mamma’s portrait, were laid on the table attached to the great Voltairian arm-chair in which Grandmamma always sat.

“The Princess Barbara Ilinitsha!” announced one of the two footmen who used to stand behind Grandmamma’s carriage, but Grandmamma was looking thoughtfully at the portrait on the snuff-box, and returned no answer.

“Shall I show her in, madam?” repeated the footman.

XVII — THE PRINCESS KORNAKOFF

“Yes, show her in,” said Grandmamma, settling herself as far back in her arm-chair as possible. The Princess was a woman of about forty-five, small and delicate, with a shrivelled skin and disagreeable, greyish-green eyes, the expression of which contradicted the unnaturally suave look of the rest of her face. Underneath her velvet bonnet, adorned with an ostrich feather, was visible some reddish hair, while against the unhealthy colour of her skin her eyebrows and eyelashes looked even lighter and redder that they would other wise have done. Yet, for all that, her animated movements, small hands, and peculiarly dry features communicated something aristocratic and energetic to her general appearance. She talked a great deal, and, to judge from her eloquence, belonged to that class of persons who always speak as though some one were contradicting them, even though no one else may be saying a word. First she would raise her voice, then lower it and then take on a fresh access of vivacity as she looked at the persons present, but not participating in the conversation, with an air of endeavouring to draw them into it.

Although the Princess kissed Grandmamma’s hand and repeatedly called her “my good Aunt,” I could see that Grandmamma did not care much about her, for she kept raising her eyebrows in a peculiar way while listening to the Princess’s excuses why Prince Michael had been prevented from calling, and congratulating Grandmamma “as he would like so-much to have done.” At length, however, she answered the Princess’s French with Russian, and with a sharp accentuation of certain words.

“I am much obliged to you for your kindness,” she said. “As for Prince Michael’s absence, pray do not mention it. He has so much else to do. Besides, what pleasure could he find in coming to see an old woman like me?” Then, without allowing the Princess time to reply, she went on: “How are your children my dear?”

"Well, thank God, Aunt, they grow and do their lessons and play—particularly my eldest one, Etienne, who is so wild that it is almost impossible to keep him in order. Still, he is a clever and promising boy. Would you believe it, cousin," (this last to Papa, since Grandmamma altogether uninterested in the Princess's children, had turned to us, taken my verses out from beneath the presentation box, and unfolded them again), "would you believe it, but one day not long ago—" and leaning over towards Papa, the Princess related something or other with great vivacity. Then, her tale concluded, she laughed, and, with a questioning look at Papa, went on:

"What a boy, cousin! He ought to have been whipped, but the trick was so spirited and amusing that I let him off." Then the Princess looked at Grandmamma and laughed again.

"Ah! So you WHIP your children, do you" said Grandmamma, with a significant lift of her eyebrows, and laying a peculiar stress on the word "WHIP."

"Alas, my good Aunt," replied the Princess in a sort of tolerant tone and with another glance at Papa, "I know your views on the subject, but must beg to be allowed to differ with them. However much I have thought over and read and talked about the matter, I have always been forced to come to the conclusion that children must be ruled through FEAR. To make something of a child, you must make it FEAR something. Is it not so, cousin? And what, pray, do children fear so much as a rod?"

As she spoke she seemed, to look inquiringly at Woloda and myself, and I confess that I did not feel altogether comfortable.

"Whatever you may say," she went on, "a boy of twelve, or even of fourteen, is still a child and should be whipped as such; but with girls, perhaps, it is another matter."

"How lucky it is that I am not her son!" I thought to myself.

"Oh, very well," said Grandmamma, folding up my verses and replacing them beneath the box (as though, after that exposition of views, the Princess was

unworthy of the honour of listening to such a production). “Very well, my dear,” she repeated “But please tell me how, in return, you can look for any delicate sensibility from your children?”

Evidently Grandmamma thought this argument unanswerable, for she cut the subject short by adding:

“However, it is a point on which people must follow their own opinions.”

The Princess did not choose to reply, but smiled condescendingly, and as though out of indulgence to the strange prejudices of a person whom she only PRETENDED to revere.

“Oh, by the way, pray introduce me to your young people,” she went on presently as she threw us another gracious smile.

Thereupon we rose and stood looking at the Princess, without in the least knowing what we ought to do to show that we were being introduced.

“Kiss the Princess’s hand,” said Papa.

“Well, I hope you will love your old aunt,” she said to Woloda, kissing his hair, “even though we are not near relatives. But I value friendship far more than I do degrees of relationship,” she added to Grandmamma, who nevertheless, remained hostile, and replied:

“Eh, my dear? Is that what they think of relationships nowadays?”

“Here is my man of the world,” put in Papa, indicating Woloda; “and here is my poet,” he added as I kissed the small, dry hand of the Princess, with a vivid picture in my mind of that same hand holding a rod and applying it vigorously.

“WHICH one is the poet?” asked the Princess.

“This little one,” replied Papa, smiling; “the one with the tuft of hair on his top-knot.”

“Why need he bother about my tuft?” I thought to myself as I retired into a corner.

"Is there nothing else for him to talk about?"

I had strange ideas on manly beauty. I considered Karl Ivanitch one of the handsomest men in the world, and myself so ugly that I had no need to deceive myself on that point. Therefore any remark on the subject of my exterior offended me extremely. I well remember how, one day after luncheon (I was then six years of age), the talk fell upon my personal appearance, and how Mamma tried to find good features in my face, and said that I had clever eyes and a charming smile; how, nevertheless, when Papa had examined me, and proved the contrary, she was obliged to confess that I was ugly; and how, when the meal was over and I went to pay her my respects, she said as she patted my cheek; "You know, Nicolinka, nobody will ever love you for your face alone, so you must try all the more to be a good and clever boy."

Although these words of hers confirmed in me my conviction that I was not handsome, they also confirmed in me an ambition to be just such a boy as she had indicated. Yet I had my moments of despair at my ugliness, for I thought that no human being with such a large nose, such thick lips, and such small grey eyes as mine could ever hope to attain happiness on this earth. I used to ask God to perform a miracle by changing me into a beauty, and would have given all that I possessed, or ever hoped to possess, to have a handsome face.

XVIII — PRINCE IVAN IVANOVITCH

When the Princess had heard my verses and overwhelmed the writer of them with praise, Grandmamma softened to her a little. She began to address her in French and to cease calling her "my dear." Likewise she invited her to return that evening with her children. This invitation having been accepted, the Princess took her leave. After that, so many other callers came to congratulate Grandmamma that the courtyard was crowded all day long with carriages.

“Good morning, my dear cousin,” was the greeting of one guest in particular as he entered the room and kissed Grandmamma’s hand. He was a man of seventy, with a stately figure clad in a military uniform and adorned with large epaulettes, an embroidered collar, and a white cross round the neck. His face, with its quiet and open expression, as well as the simplicity and ease of his manners, greatly pleased me, for, in spite of the thin half-circle of hair which was all that was now left to him, and the want of teeth disclosed by the set of his upper lip, his face was a remarkably handsome one.

Thanks to his fine character, handsome exterior, remarkable valour, influential relatives, and, above all, good fortune, Prince, Ivan Ivanovitch had early made himself a career. As that career progressed, his ambition had met with a success which left nothing more to be sought for in that direction. From his earliest youth upward he had prepared himself to fill the exalted station in the world to which fate actually called him later; wherefore, although in his prosperous life (as in the lives of all) there had been failures, misfortunes, and cares, he had never lost his quietness of character, his elevated tone of thought, or his peculiarly moral, religious bent of mind. Consequently, though he had won the universal esteem of his fellows, he had done so less through his important position than through his perseverance and integrity. While not of specially distinguished intellect, the eminence of his station (whence he could afford to look down upon all petty questions) had caused him to adopt high points of view. Though in reality he was kind and sympathetic, in manner he appeared cold and haughty—probably for the reason that he had forever to be on his guard against the endless claims and petitions of people who wished to profit through his influence. Yet even then his coldness was mitigated by the polite condescension of a man well accustomed to move in the highest circles of society. Well-educated, his culture was that of a youth of the end of the last century. He had read everything, whether philosophy or belles lettres, which that age had produced in France, and loved to quote from Racine, Corneille, Boileau, Moliere, Montaigne,

and Fenelon. Likewise he had gleaned much history from Segur, and much of the old classics from French translations of them; but for mathematics, natural philosophy, or contemporary literature he cared nothing whatever. However, he knew how to be silent in conversation, as well as when to make general remarks on authors whom he had never read—such as Goethe, Schiller, and Byron. Moreover, despite his exclusively French education, he was simple in speech and hated originality (which he called the mark of an untutored nature). Wherever he lived, society was a necessity to him, and, both in Moscow and the country he had his reception days, on which practically "all the town" called upon him. An introduction from him was a passport to every drawing-room; few young and pretty ladies in society objected to offering him their rosy cheeks for a paternal salute; and people even in the highest positions felt flattered by invitations to his parties.

The Prince had few friends left now like Grandmamma—that is to say, few friends who were of the same standing as himself, who had had the same sort of education, and who saw things from the same point of view: wherefore he greatly valued his intimate, long-standing friendship with her, and always showed her the highest respect.

I hardly dared to look at the Prince, since the honour paid him on all sides, the huge epaulettes, the peculiar pleasure with which Grandmamma received him, and the fact that he alone, seemed in no way afraid of her, but addressed her with perfect freedom (even being so daring as to call her "cousin"), awakened in me a feeling of reverence for his person almost equal to that which I felt for Grandmamma herself.

On being shown my verses, he called me to his side, and said:

"Who knows, my cousin, but that he may prove to be a second Derzhavin?" Nevertheless he pinched my cheek so hard that I was only prevented from crying by the thought that it must be meant for a caress.

Gradually the other guests dispersed, and with them Papa and Woloda. Thus only

Grandmamma, the Prince, and myself were left in the drawing-room.

“Why has our dear Natalia Nicolaevna not come to-day” asked the Prince after a silence.

“Ah, my friend,” replied Grandmamma, lowering her voice and laying a hand upon the sleeve of his uniform, “she would certainly have come if she had been at liberty to do what she likes. She wrote to me that Peter had proposed bringing her with him to town, but that she had refused, since their income had not been good this year, and she could see no real reason why the whole family need come to Moscow, seeing that Lubotshka was as yet very young and that the boys were living with me—a fact, she said, which made her feel as safe about them as though she had been living with them herself.”

“True, it is good for the boys to be here,” went on Grandmamma, yet in a tone which showed clearly that she did not think it was so very good, “since it was more than time that they should be sent to Moscow to study, as well as to learn how to comport themselves in society. What sort of an education could they have got in the country? The eldest boy will soon be thirteen, and the second one eleven. As yet, my cousin, they are quite untaught, and do not know even how to enter a room.”

“Nevertheless” said the Prince, “I cannot understand these complaints of ruined fortunes. He has a very handsome income, and Natalia has Chabarovska, where we used to act plays, and which I know as well as I do my own hand. It is a splendid property, and ought to bring in an excellent return.”

“Well,” said Grandmamma with a sad expression on her face, “I do not mind telling you, as my most intimate friend, that all this seems to me a mere pretext on his part for living alone, for strolling about from club to club, for attending dinner-parties, and for resorting to—well, who knows what? She suspects nothing; you know her angelic sweetness and her implicit trust of him in everything. He had only to tell her that the children must go to Moscow and that she must be left behind in the country

with a stupid governess for company, for her to believe him! I almost think that if he were to say that the children must be whipped just as the Princess Barbara whips hers, she would believe even that!" and Grandmamma leant back in her arm-chair with an expression of contempt. Then, after a moment of silence, during which she took her handkerchief out of her pocket to wipe away a few tears which had stolen down her cheeks, she went, on:

"Yes, my friend, I often think that he cannot value and understand her properly, and that, for all her goodness and love of him and her endeavours to conceal her grief (which, however as I know only too well, exists). She cannot really be happy with him. Mark my words if he does not—" Here Grandmamma buried her face in the handkerchief.

"Ah, my dear old friend," said the Prince reproachfully. "I think you are unreasonable. Why grieve and weep over imagined evils? That is not right. I have known him a long time, and feel sure that he is an attentive, kind, and excellent husband, as well as (which is the chief thing of all) a perfectly honourable man."

At this point, having been an involuntary auditor of a conversation not meant for my ears, I stole on tiptoe out of the room, in a state of great distress.

XIX — THE IWINS

"Woloda, Woloda! The Iwins are just coming." I shouted on seeing from the window three boys in blue overcoats, and followed by a young tutor, advancing along the pavement opposite our house.

The Iwins were related to us, and of about the same age as ourselves. We had made their acquaintance soon after our arrival in Moscow. The second brother, Seriosha, had dark curly hair, a turned-up, strongly pronounced nose, very bright red lips (which, never being quite shut, showed a row of white teeth), beautiful dark-blue eyes, and an uncommonly bold expression of face. He never smiled but was either

wholly serious or laughing a clear, merry, agreeable laugh. His striking good looks had captivated me from the first, and I felt an irresistible attraction towards him. Only to see him filled me with pleasure, and at one time my whole mental faculties used to be concentrated in the wish that I might do so. If three or four days passed without my seeing him I felt listless and ready to cry. Awake or asleep, I was forever dreaming of him. On going to bed I used to see him in my dreams, and when I had shut my eyes and called up a picture of him I hugged the vision as my choicest delight. So much store did I set upon this feeling for my friend that I never mentioned it to any one. Nevertheless, it must have annoyed him to see my admiring eyes constantly fixed upon him, or else he must have felt no reciprocal attraction, for he always preferred to play and talk with Woloda. Still, even with that I felt satisfied, and wished and asked for nothing better than to be ready at any time to make any sacrifice for him. Likewise, over and above the strange fascination which he exercised upon me, I always felt another sensation, namely, a dread of making him angry, of offending him, of displeasing him. Was this because his face bore such a haughty expression, or because I, despising my own exterior, over-rated the beautiful in others, or, lastly (and most probably), because it is a common sign of affection? At all events, I felt as much fear, of him as I did love. The first time that he spoke to me I was so overwhelmed with sudden happiness that I turned pale, then red, and could not utter a word. He had an ugly habit of blinking when considering anything seriously, as well as of twitching his nose and eyebrows. Consequently every one thought that this habit marred his face. Yet I thought it such a nice one that I involuntarily adopted it for myself, until, a few days after I had made his acquaintance, Grandmamma suddenly asked me whether my eyes were hurting me, since I was winking like an owl! Never a word of affection passed between us, yet he felt his power over me, and unconsciously but tyrannically, exercised it in all our childish intercourse. I used to long to tell him all that was in my heart, yet was too much afraid of him to be frank in any way, and, while submitting myself to his will,

tried to appear merely careless and indifferent. Although at times his influence seemed irksome and intolerable, to throw it off was beyond my strength.

I often think with regret of that fresh, beautiful feeling of boundless, disinterested love which came to an end without having ever found self-expression or return. It is strange how, when a child, I always longed to be like grown-up people, and yet how I have often longed, since childhood's days, for those days to come back to me! Many times, in my relations with Seriosha, this wish to resemble grown-up people put a rude check upon the love that was waiting to expand, and made me repress it. Not only was I afraid of kissing him, or of taking his hand and saying how glad I was to see him, but I even dreaded calling him "Seriosha" and always said "Sergius" as every one else did in our house. Any expression of affection would have seemed like evidence of childishness, and any one who indulged in it, a baby. Not having yet passed through those bitter experiences which enforce upon older years circumspection and coldness, I deprived myself of the pure delight of a fresh, childish instinct for the absurd purpose of trying to resemble grown-up people.

I met the Iwins in the ante-room, welcomed them, and then ran to tell Grandmamma of their arrival with an expression as happy as though she were certain to be equally delighted. Then, never taking my eyes off Seriosha, I conducted the visitors to the drawing-room, and eagerly followed every movement of my favourite. When Grandmamma spoke to and fixed her penetrating glance upon him, I experienced that mingled sensation of pride and solicitude which an artist might feel when waiting for revered lips to pronounce a judgment upon his work.

With Grandmamma's permission, the Iwins' young tutor, Herr Frost, accompanied us into the little back garden, where he seated himself upon a bench, arranged his legs in a tasteful attitude, rested his brass-knobbed cane between them, lighted a cigar, and assumed the air of a man well-pleased with himself. He was a German, but of a very different sort to our good Karl Ivanitch. In the first place, he spoke

both Russian and French correctly, though with a hard accent Indeed, he enjoyed—especially among the ladies—the reputation of being a very accomplished fellow. In the second place, he wore a reddish moustache, a large gold pin set with a ruby, a black satin tie, and a very fashionable suit. Lastly, he was young, with a handsome, self-satisfied face and fine muscular legs. It was clear that he set the greatest store upon the latter, and thought them beyond compare, especially as regards the favour of the ladies. Consequently, whether sitting or standing, he always tried to exhibit them in the most favourable light. In short, he was a type of the young German-Russian whose main desire is to be thought perfectly gallant and gentlemanly.

In the little garden merriment reigned. In fact, the game of “robbers” never went better. Yet an incident occurred which came near to spoiling it. Seriosha was the robber, and in pouncing upon some travellers he fell down and knocked his leg so badly against a tree that I thought the leg must be broken. Consequently, though I was the gendarme and therefore bound to apprehend him, I only asked him anxiously, when I reached him, if he had hurt himself very much. Nevertheless this threw him into a passion, and made him exclaim with fists clenched and in a voice which showed by its faltering what pain he was enduring, “Why, whatever is the matter? Is this playing the game properly? You ought to arrest me. Why on earth don’t you do so?” This he repeated several times, and then, seeing Woloda and the elder Iwin (who were taking the part of the travellers) jumping and running about the path, he suddenly threw himself upon them with a shout and loud laughter to effect their capture. I cannot express my wonder and delight at this valiant behaviour of my hero. In spite of the severe pain, he had not only refrained from crying, but had repressed the least symptom of suffering and kept his eye fixed upon the game! Shortly after this occurrence another boy, Ilinka Grap, joined our party. We went upstairs, and Seriosha gave me an opportunity of still further appreciating and taking delight in his manly bravery and fortitude. This was how it was.

Ilinka was the son of a poor foreigner who had been under certain obligations to my Grandpapa, and now thought it incumbent upon him to send his son to us as frequently as possible. Yet if he thought that the acquaintance would procure his son any advancement or pleasure, he was entirely mistaken, for not only were we anything but friendly to Ilinka, but it was seldom that we noticed him at all except to laugh at him. He was a boy of thirteen, tall and thin, with a pale, birdlike face, and a quiet, good-tempered expression. Though poorly dressed, he always had his head so thickly pomaded that we used to declare that on warm days it melted and ran down his neck. When I think of him now, it seems to me that he was a very quiet, obliging, and good-tempered boy, but at the time I thought him a creature so contemptible that he was not worth either attention or pity.

Upstairs we set ourselves to astonish each other with gymnastic tours de force. Ilinka watched us with a faint smile of admiration, but refused an invitation to attempt a similar feat, saying that he had no strength.

Seriosha was extremely captivating. His face and eyes glowed with laughter as he surprised us with tricks which we had never seen before. He jumped over three chairs put together, turned somersaults right across the room, and finally stood on his head on a pyramid of Tatistchev's dictionaries, moving his legs about with such comical rapidity that it was impossible not to help bursting with merriment.

After this last trick he pondered for a moment (blinking his eyes as usual), and then went up to Ilinka with a very serious face.

"Try and do that," he said. "It is not really difficult."

Ilinka, observing that the general attention was fixed upon him, blushed, and said in an almost inaudible voice that he could not do the feat.

"Well, what does he mean by doing nothing at all? What a girl the fellow is! He has just GOT to stand on his head," and Seriosha, took him by the hand.

"Yes, on your head at once! This instant, this instant!" every one shouted as we ran

upon Ilinka and dragged him to the dictionaries, despite his being visibly pale and frightened.

“Leave me alone! You are tearing my jacket!” cried the unhappy victim, but his exclamations of despair only encouraged us the more. We were dying with laughter, while the green jacket was bursting at every seam.

Woloda and the eldest Iwin took his head and placed it on the dictionaries, while Seriosha, and I seized his poor, thin legs (his struggles had stripped them upwards to the knees), and with boisterous, laughter held them uptight—the youngest Iwin superintending his general equilibrium.

Suddenly a moment of silence occurred amid our boisterous laughter—a moment during which nothing was to be heard in the room but the panting of the miserable Ilinka. It occurred to me at that moment that, after all, there was nothing so very comical and pleasant in all this.

“Now, THAT’S a boy!” cried Seriosha, giving Ilinka a smack with his hand. Ilinka said nothing, but made such desperate movements with his legs to free himself that his foot suddenly kicked Seriosha in the eye: with the result that, letting go of Ilinka’s leg and covering the wounded member with one hand, Seriosha hit out at him with all his might with the other one. Of course Ilinka’s legs slipped down as, sinking exhausted to the floor and half-suffocated with tears, he stammered out:

“Why should you bully me so?”

The poor fellow’s miserable figure, with its streaming tears, ruffled hair, and crumpled trousers revealing dirty boots, touched us a little, and we stood silent and trying to smile.

Seriosha was the first to recover himself.

“What a girl! What a gaby!” he said, giving Ilinka a slight kick. “He can’t take things in fun a bit. Well, get up, then.”

“You are an utter beast! That’s what YOU are!” said Ilinka, turning miserably away and sobbing.

“Oh, oh! Would it still kick and show temper, then?” cried Seriosha, seizing a dictionary and throwing it at the unfortunate boy’s head. Apparently it never occurred to Ilinka to take refuge from the missile; he merely guarded his head with his hands.

“Well, that’s enough now,” added Seriosha, with a forced laugh. “You DESERVE to be hurt if you can’t take things in fun. Now let’s go downstairs.”

I could not help looking with some compassion at the miserable creature on the floor as, his face buried in the dictionary, he lay there sobbing almost as though he were in a fit.

“Oh, Sergius!” I said. “Why have you done this?”

“Well, you did it too! Besides, I did not cry this afternoon when I knocked my leg and nearly broke it.”

“True enough,” I thought. “Ilinka is a poor whining sort of a chap, while Seriosha is a boy—a REAL boy.”

It never occurred to my mind that possibly poor Ilinka was suffering far less from bodily pain than from the thought that five companions for whom he may have felt a genuine liking had, for no reason at all, combined to hurt and humiliate him.

I cannot explain my cruelty on this occasion. Why did I not step forward to comfort and protect him? Where was the pitifulness which often made me burst into tears at the sight of a young bird fallen from its nest, or of a puppy being thrown over a wall, or of a chicken being killed by the cook for soup?

Can it be that the better instinct in me was overshadowed by my affection for Seriosha and the desire to shine before so brave a boy? If so, how contemptible were both the affection and the desire! They alone form dark spots on the pages of my

youthful recollections.

XX — PREPARATIONS FOR THE PARTY

To judge from the extraordinary activity in the pantry, the shining cleanliness which imparted such a new and festal guise to certain articles in the salon and drawing-room which I had long known as anything but resplendent, and the arrival of some musicians whom Prince Ivan would certainly not have sent for nothing, no small amount of company was to be expected that evening.

At the sound of every vehicle which chanced to pass the house I ran to the window, leaned my head upon my arms, and peered with impatient curiosity into the street.

At last a carriage stopped at our door, and, in the full belief that this must be the Iwins, who had promised to come early, I at once ran downstairs to meet them in the hall.

But, instead of the Iwins, I beheld from behind the figure of the footman who opened the door two female figures-one tall and wrapped in a blue cloak trimmed with marten, and the other one short and wrapped in a green shawl from beneath which a pair of little feet, stuck into fur boots, peeped forth.

Without paying any attention to my presence in the hall (although I thought it my duty, on the appearance of these persons to salute them), the shorter one moved towards the taller, and stood silently in front of her. Thereupon the tall lady untied the shawl which enveloped the head of the little one, and unbuttoned the cloak which hid her form; until, by the time that the footmen had taken charge of these articles and removed the fur boots, there stood forth from the amorphous chrysalis a charming girl of twelve, dressed in a short muslin frock, white pantaloons, and smart black satin shoes. Around her, white neck she wore a narrow black velvet ribbon, while her head was covered with flaxen curls which so perfectly suited her beautiful face in front and her bare neck and shoulders behind that I, would have believed

nobody, not even Karl Ivanitch, if he, or she had told me that they only hung so nicely because, ever since the morning, they had been screwed up in fragments of a Moscow newspaper and then warmed with a hot iron. To me it seemed as though she must have been born with those curls.

The most prominent feature in her face was a pair of unusually large half-veiled eyes, which formed a strange, but pleasing, contrast to the small mouth. Her lips were closed, while her eyes looked so grave that the general expression of her face gave one the impression that a smile was never to be looked for from her: wherefore, when a smile did come, it was all the more pleasing.

Trying to escape notice, I slipped through the door of the salon, and then thought it necessary to be seen pacing to and fro, seemingly engaged in thought, as though unconscious of the arrival of guests.

BY the time, however, that the ladies had advanced to the middle of the salon I seemed suddenly to awake from my reverie and told them that Grandmamma was in the drawing room, Madame Valakhin, whose face pleased me extremely (especially since it bore a great resemblance to her daughter's), stroked my head kindly.

Grandmamma seemed delighted to see Sonetchka. She invited her to come to her, put back a curl which had fallen over her brow, and looking earnestly at her said, "What a charming child!"

Sonetchka blushed, smiled, and, indeed, looked so charming that I myself blushed as I looked at her.

"I hope you are going to enjoy yourself here, my love," said Grandmamma. "Pray be as merry and dance as much as ever you can. See, we have two beaux for her already," she added, turning to Madame Valakhin, and stretching out her hand to me.

This coupling of Sonetchka and myself pleased me so much that I blushed again.

Feeling, presently, that, my embarrassment was increasing, and hearing the sound of

carriages approaching, I thought it wise to retire. In the hall I encountered the Princess Kornakoff, her son, and an incredible number of daughters. They had all of them the same face as their mother, and were very ugly. None of them arrested my attention. They talked in shrill tones as they took off their cloaks and boas, and laughed as they bustled about—probably at the fact that there were so many of them!

Etienne was a boy of fifteen, tall and plump, with a sharp face, deep-set bluish eyes, and very large hands and feet for his age. Likewise he was awkward, and had a nervous, unpleasing voice. Nevertheless he seemed very pleased with himself, and was, in my opinion, a boy who could well bear being beaten with rods.

For a long time we confronted one another without speaking as we took stock of each other. When the flood of dresses had swept past I made shift to begin a conversation by asking him whether it had not been very close in the carriage.

“I don’t know,” he answered indifferently. “I never ride inside it, for it makes me feel sick directly, and Mamma knows that. Whenever we are driving anywhere at night-time I always sit on the box. I like that, for then one sees everything. Philip gives me the reins, and sometimes the whip too, and then the people inside get a regular—well, you know,” he added with a significant gesture “It’s splendid then.”

“Master Etienne,” said a footman, entering the hall, “Philip wishes me to ask you where you put the whip.”

“Where I put it? Why, I gave it back to him.”

“But he says that you did not.”

“Well, I laid it across the carriage-lamps!”

“No, sir, he says that you did not do that either. You had better confess that you took it and lashed it to shreds. I suppose poor Philip will have to make good your mischief out of his own pocket.” The footman (who looked a grave and honest man) seemed much put out by the affair, and determined to sift it to the bottom on Philip’s

behalf.

Out of delicacy I pretended to notice nothing and turned aside, but the other footmen present gathered round and looked approvingly at the old servant.

“Hm—well, I DID tear it in pieces,” at length confessed Etienne, shrinking from further explanations. “However, I will pay for it. Did you ever hear anything so absurd?” he added to me as he drew me towards the drawing-room.

“But excuse me, sir; HOW are you going to pay for it? I know your ways of paying. You have owed Maria Valericana twenty copecks these eight months now, and you have owed me something for two years, and Peter for—”

“Hold your tongue, will you!” shouted the young fellow, pale with rage, “I shall report you for this.”

“Oh, you may do so,” said the footman. “Yet it is not fair, your highness,” he added, with a peculiar stress on the title, as he departed with the ladies’ wraps to the cloak-room. We ourselves entered the salon.

“Quite right, footman,” remarked someone approvingly from the ball behind us.

Grandmamma had a peculiar way of employing, now the second person singular, now the second person plural, in order to indicate her opinion of people. When the young Prince Etienne went up to her she addressed him as “YOU,” and altogether looked at him with such an expression of contempt that, had I been in his place, I should have been utterly crestfallen. Etienne, however, was evidently not a boy of that sort, for he not only took no notice of her reception of him, but none of her person either. In fact, he bowed to the company at large in a way which, though not graceful, was at least free from embarrassment.

Sonetchka now claimed my whole attention. I remember that, as I stood in the salon with Etienne and Woloda, at a spot whence we could both see and be seen by Sonetchka, I took great pleasure in talking very loud (and all my utterances seemed to me both bold and comical) and glancing towards the door of the drawing-room,

but that, as soon as ever we happened to move to another spot whence we could neither see nor be seen by her, I became dumb, and thought the conversation had ceased to be enjoyable. The rooms were now full of people—among them (as at all children's parties) a number of elder children who wished to dance and enjoy themselves very much, but who pretended to do everything merely in order to give pleasure to the mistress of the house.

When the Iwins arrived I found that, instead of being as delighted as usual to meet Seriosha, I felt a kind of vexation that he should see and be seen by Sonetchka.

XXI — BEFORE THE MAZURKA

"HULLO, Woloda! So we are going to dance to-night," said Seriosha, issuing from the drawing-room and taking out of his pocket a brand new pair of gloves. "I suppose it IS necessary to put on gloves?"

"Goodness! What shall I do? We have no gloves," I thought to myself. "I must go upstairs and search about." Yet though I rummaged in every drawer, I only found, in one of them, my green travelling mittens, and, in another, a single lilac-coloured glove, a thing which could be of no use to me, firstly, because it was very old and dirty, secondly, because it was much too large for me, and thirdly (and principally), because the middle finger was wanting—Karl having long ago cut it off to wear over a sore nail.

However, I put it on—not without some diffident contemplation of the blank left by the middle finger and of the ink-stained edges round the vacant space.

"If only Natalia Savishna had been here," I reflected, "we should certainly have found some gloves. I can't go downstairs in this condition. Yet, if they ask me why I am not dancing, what am I to say? However, I can't remain here either, or they will be sending upstairs to fetch me. What on earth am I to do?" and I wrung my hands.

"What are you up to here?" asked Woloda as he burst into the room. "Go and

engage a partner. The dancing will be beginning directly."

"Woloda," I said despairingly, as I showed him my hand with two fingers thrust into a single finger of the dirty glove, "Woloda, you, never thought of this."

"Of what?" he said impatiently. "Oh, of gloves," he added with a careless glance at my hand. "That's nothing. We can ask Grandmamma what she thinks about it," and without further ado he departed downstairs. I felt a trifle relieved by the coolness with which he had met a situation which seemed to me so grave, and hastened back to the drawing-room, completely forgetful of the unfortunate glove which still adorned my left hand.

Cautiously approaching Grandmamma's arm-chair, I asked her in a whisper:

"Grandmamma, what are we to do? We have no gloves."

"What, my love?"

"We have no gloves," I repeated, at the same time bending over towards her and laying both hands on the arm of her chair.

"But what is that?" she cried as she caught hold of my left hand. "Look, my dear!" she continued, turning to Madame Valakhin. "See how smart this young man has made himself to dance with your daughter!"

As Grandmamma persisted in retaining hold of my hand and gazing with a mock air of gravity and interrogation at all around her, curiosity was soon aroused, and a general roar of laughter ensued.

I should have been infuriated at the thought that Seriosha was present to see this, as I scowled with embarrassment and struggled hard to free my hand, had it not been that somehow Sonetchka's laughter (and she was laughing to such a degree that the tears were standing in her eyes and the curls dancing about her lovely face) took away my feeling of humiliation. I felt that her laughter was not satirical, but only natural and free; so that, as we laughed together and looked at one another, there

seemed to begin a kind of sympathy between us. Instead of turning out badly, therefore, the episode of the glove served only to set me at my ease among the dreaded circle of guests, and to make me cease to feel oppressed with shyness. The sufferings of shy people proceed only from the doubts which they feel concerning the opinions of their fellows. No sooner are those opinions expressed (whether flattering or the reverse) than the agony disappears.

How lovely Sonetchka looked when she was dancing a quadrille as my vis-a-vis, with, as her partner, the loutish Prince Etienne! How charmingly she smiled when, en chaine, she accorded me her hand! How gracefully the curls, around her head nodded to the rhythm, and how naively she executed the jete assemble with her little feet!

In the fifth figure, when my partner had to leave me for the other side and I, counting the beats, was getting ready to dance my solo, she pursed her lips gravely and looked in another direction; but her fears for me were groundless. Boldly I performed the chasse en avant and chasse en arriere glissade, until, when it came to my turn to move towards her and I, with a comic gesture, showed her the poor glove with its crumpled fingers, she laughed heartily, and seemed to move her tiny feet more enchantingly than ever over the parquetted floor.

How well I remember how we formed the circle, and how, without withdrawing her hand from mine, she scratched her little nose with her glove! All this I can see before me still. Still can I hear the quadrille from “The Maids of the Danube” to which we danced that night.

The second quadrille, I danced with Sonetchka herself; yet when we went to sit down together during the interval, I felt overcome with shyness and as though I had nothing to say. At last, when my silence had lasted so long that I began to be afraid that she would think me a stupid boy, I decided at all hazards to counteract such a notion.

“Vous etes une habitante de Moscou?” I began, and, on receiving an affirmative answer, continued. “Et moi, je n’ai encore jamais frequente la capitale” (with a particular emphasis on the word “frequente”). Yet I felt that, brilliant though this introduction might be as evidence of my profound knowledge of the French language, I could not long keep up the conversation in that manner. Our turn for dancing had not yet arrived, and silence again ensued between us. I kept looking anxiously at her in the hope both of discerning what impression I had produced and of her coming to my aid.

“Where did you get that ridiculous glove of yours?” she asked me all of a sudden, and the question afforded me immense satisfaction and relief. I replied that the glove belonged to Karl Ivanitch, and then went on to speak ironically of his appearance, and to describe how comical he looked in his red cap, and how he and his green coat had once fallen plump off a horse into a pond.

The quadrille was soon over. Yet why had I spoken ironically of poor Karl Ivanitch? Should I, forsooth, have sunk in Sonetchka’s esteem if, on the contrary, I had spoken of him with the love and respect which I undoubtedly bore him?

The quadrille ended, Sonetchka said, “Thank you,” with as lovely an expression on her face as though I had really conferred, upon her a favour. I was delighted. In fact I hardly knew myself for joy and could not think whence I derived such case and confidence and even daring.

“Nothing in the world can abash me now,” I thought as I wandered carelessly about the salon. “I am ready for anything.”

Just then Seriosha came and requested me to be his vis-a-vis.

“Very well,” I said. “I have no partner as yet, but I can soon find one.”

Glancing round the salon with a confident eye, I saw that every lady was engaged save one—a tall girl standing near the drawing-room door. Yet a grown-up young man was approaching her-probably for the same purpose as myself! He was but two

steps from her, while I was at the further end of the salon. Doing a glissade over the polished floor, I covered the intervening space, and in a brave, firm voice asked the favour of her hand in the quadrille. Smiling with a protecting air, the young lady accorded me her hand, and the tall young man was left without a partner. I felt so conscious of my strength that I paid no attention to his irritation, though I learnt later that he had asked somebody who the awkward, untidy boy was who, had taken away his lady from him.

XXII — THE MAZURKA

AFTERWARDS the same young man formed one of the first couple in a mazurka. He sprang to his feet, took his partner's hand, and then, instead of executing the pas de Basques which Mimi had taught us, glided forward till he arrived at a corner of the room, stopped, divided his feet, turned on his heels, and, with a spring, glided back again. I, who had found no partner for this particular dance and was sitting on the arm of Grandmamma's chair, thought to myself:

"What on earth is he doing? That is not what Mimi taught us. And there are the Iwins and Etienne all dancing in the same way-without the pas de Basques! Ah! and there is Woloda too! He too is adopting the new style, and not so badly either. And there is Sonetchka, the lovely one! Yes, there she comes!" I felt immensely happy at that moment.

The mazurka came to an end, and already some of the guests were saying good-bye to Grandmamma. She was evidently tired, yet she assured them that she felt vexed at their early departure. Servants were gliding about with plates and trays among the dancers, and the musicians were carelessly playing the same tune for about the thirteenth time in succession, when the young lady whom I had danced with before, and who was just about to join in another mazurka, caught sight of me, and, with a kindly smile, led me to Sonetchka. And one of the innumerable Kornakoff

princesses, at the same time asking me, “Rose or Hortie?”

“Ah, so it’s YOU!” said Grandmamma as she turned round in her armchair. “Go and dance, then, my boy.”

Although I would fain have taken refuge behind the armchair rather than leave its shelter, I could not refuse; so I got up, said, “Rose,” and looked at Sonetchka. Before I had time to realise it, however, a hand in a white glove laid itself on mine, and the Kornakoff girl stepped forth with a pleased smile and evidently no suspicion that I was ignorant of the steps of the dance. I only knew that the pas de Basques (the only figure of it which I had been taught) would be out of place. However, the strains of the mazurka falling upon my ears, and imparting their usual impulse to my acoustic nerves (which, in their turn, imparted their usual impulse to my feet), I involuntarily, and to the amazement of the spectators, began executing on tiptoe the sole (and fatal) pas which I had been taught.

So long as we went straight ahead I kept fairly right, but when it came to turning I saw that I must make preparations to arrest my course. Accordingly, to avoid any appearance of awkwardness, I stopped short, with the intention of imitating the “wheel about” which I had seen the young man perform so neatly.

Unfortunately, just as I divided my feet and prepared to make a spring, the Princess Kornakoff looked sharply round at my legs with such an expression of stupefied amazement and curiosity that the glance undid me. Instead of continuing to dance, I remained moving my legs up and down on the same spot, in a sort of extraordinary fashion which bore no relation whatever either to form or rhythm. At last I stopped altogether. Every-one was looking at me—some with curiosity, some with astonishment, some with disdain, and some with compassion, Grandmamma alone seemed unmoved.

“You should not dance if you don’t know the step,” said Papa’s angry voice in my ear as, pushing me gently aside, he took my partner’s hand, completed the figures

with her to the admiration of every one, and finally led her back to, her place. The mazurka was at an end.

Ah me! What had I done to be punished so heavily?

"Every one despises me, and will always despise me," I thought to myself. "The way is closed for me to friendship, love, and fame! All, all is lost!"

Why had Woloda made signs to me which every one saw, yet which could in no way help me? Why had that disgusting princess looked at my legs? Why had Sonetchka—she was a darling, of course!—yet why, oh why, had she smiled at that moment?

Why had Papa turned red and taken my hand? Can it be that he was ashamed of me?

Oh, it was dreadful! Alas, if only Mamma had been there she would never have blushed for her Nicolinka!

How on the instant that dear image led my imagination captive! I seemed to see once more the meadow before our house, the tall lime-trees in the garden, the clear pond where the ducks swain, the blue sky dappled with white clouds, the sweet-smelling ricks of hay. How those memories—aye, and many another quiet, beloved recollection—floated through my mind at that time!

XXIII — AFTER THE MAZURKA

At supper the young man whom I have mentioned seated himself beside me at the children's table, and treated me with an amount of attention which would have flattered my self-esteem had I been able, after the occurrence just related, to give a thought to anything beyond my failure in the mazurka. However, the young man seemed determined to cheer me up. He jested, called me "old boy," and finally (since none of the elder folks were looking at us) began to help me to wine, first from one bottle and then from another and to force me to drink it off quickly.

By the time (towards the end of supper) that a servant had poured me out a quarter of a glass of champagne, and the young man had straightway bid him fill it up and urged me to drink the beverage off at a draught, I had begun to feel a grateful warmth diffusing itself through my body. I also felt well-disposed towards my kind patron, and began to laugh heartily at everything. Suddenly the music of the Grosvater dance struck up, and every one rushed from the table. My friendship with the young man had now outlived its day; so, whereas he joined a group of the older folks, I approached Madame Valakhin to hear what she and her daughter had to say to one another.

“Just HALF-an-hour more?” Sonetchka was imploring her.

“Impossible, my dearest.”

“Yet, only to please me—just this ONCE?” Sonetchka went on persuasively.

“Well, what if I should be ill to-morrow through all this dissipation?” rejoined her mother, and was incautious enough to smile.

“There! You DO consent, and we CAN stay after all!” exclaimed Sonetchka, jumping for joy.

“What is to be done with such a girl?” said Madame. “Well, run away and dance. See,” she added on perceiving myself, “here is a cavalier ready waiting for you.”

Sonetchka gave me her hand, and we darted off to the salon. The wine, added to Sonetchka’s presence and gaiety, had at once made me forget all about the unfortunate end of the mazurka. I kept executing the most splendid feats with my legs—now imitating a horse as he throws out his hoofs in the trot, now stamping like a sheep infuriated at a dog, and all the while laughing regardless of appearances.

Sonetchka also laughed unceasingly, whether we were whirling round in a circle or whether we stood still to watch an old lady whose painful movements with her feet showed the difficulty she had in walking. Finally Sonetchka nearly died of merriment when I jumped half-way to the ceiling in proof of my skill.

As I passed a mirror in Grandmamma's boudoir and glanced at myself I could see that my face was all in a perspiration and my hair dishevelled—the top-knot, in particular, being more erect than ever. Yet my general appearance looked so happy, healthy, and good-tempered that I felt wholly pleased with myself.

"If I were always as I am now," I thought, "I might yet be able to please people with my looks." Yet as soon as I glanced at my partner's face again, and saw there not only the expression of happiness, health, and good temper which had just pleased me in my own, but also a fresh and enchanting beauty besides, I felt dissatisfied with myself again. I understood how silly of me it was to hope to attract the attention of such a wonderful being as Sonetchka. I could not hope for reciprocity—could not even think of it, yet my heart was overflowing with happiness. I could not imagine that the feeling of love which was filling my soul so pleasantly could require any happiness still greater, or wish for more than that that happiness should never cease. I felt perfectly contented. My heart beat like that of a dove, with the blood constantly flowing back to it, and I almost wept for joy.

As we passed through the hall and peered into a little dark store-room beneath the staircase I thought: "What bliss it would be if I could pass the rest of my life with her in that dark corner, and never let anybody know that we were there!"

"It HAS been a delightful evening, hasn't it?" I asked her in a low, tremulous voice. Then I quickened my steps—as much out of fear of what I had said as out of fear of what I had meant to imply.

"Yes, VERY!" she answered, and turned her face to look at me with an expression so kind that I ceased to be afraid. I went on:

"Particularly since supper. Yet if you could only know how I regret" (I had nearly said) "how miserable I am at your going, and to think that we shall see each other no more!"

"But why SHOULDN'T we?" she asked, looking gravely at the corner of her

pocket-handkerchief, and gliding her fingers over a latticed screen which we were passing. “Every Tuesday and Friday I go with Mamma to the Iverskoi Prospect. I suppose you go for walks too sometimes?”

“Well, certainly I shall ask to go for one next Tuesday, and, if they won’t take me I shall go by myself—even without my hat, if necessary. I know the way all right.”

“Do you know what I have just thought of?” she went on. “You know, I call some of the boys who come to see us THOU. Shall you and I call each other THOU too? Wilt THOU?” she added, bending her head towards me and looking me straight in the eyes.

At this moment a more lively section of the Grosvater dance began.

“Give me your hand,” I said, under the impression that the music and din would drown my exact words, but she smilingly replied, “THY hand, not YOUR hand.” Yet the dance was over before I had succeeded in saying THOU, even though I kept conning over phrases in which the pronoun could be employed—and employed more than once. All that I wanted was the courage to say it.

“Wilt THOU?” and “THY hand” sounded continually in my ears, and caused in me a kind of intoxication I could hear and see nothing but Sonetchka. I watched her mother take her curls, lay them flat behind her ears (thus disclosing portions of her forehead and temples which I had not yet seen), and wrap her up so completely in the green shawl that nothing was left visible but the tip of her nose. Indeed, I could see that, if her little rosy fingers had not made a small, opening near her mouth, she would have been unable to breathe. Finally I saw her leave her mother’s arm for an instant on the staircase, and turn and nod to us quickly before she disappeared through the doorway.

Woloda, the Iwins, the young Prince Etienne, and myself were all of us in love with Sonetchka and all of us standing on the staircase to follow her with our eyes. To whom in particular she had nodded I do not know, but at the moment I firmly

believed it to be myself. In taking leave of the Iwins, I spoke quite unconcernedly, and even coldly, to Seriosha before I finally shook hands with him. Though he tried to appear absolutely indifferent, I think that he understood that from that day forth he had lost both my affection and his power over me, as well as that he regretted it.

XXIV — IN BED

"How could I have managed to be so long and so passionately devoted to Seriosha?" I asked myself as I lay in bed that night. "He never either understood, appreciated, or deserved my love. But Sonetchka! What a darling SHE is! 'Wilt THOU?'—'THY hand'!"

I crept closer to the pillows, imagined to myself her lovely face, covered my head over with the bedclothes, tucked the counterpane in on all sides, and, thus snugly covered, lay quiet and enjoying the warmth until I became wholly absorbed in pleasant fancies and reminiscences.

If I stared fixedly at the inside of the sheet above me I found that I could see her as clearly as I had done an hour ago could talk to her in my thoughts, and, though it was a conversation of irrational tenor, I derived the greatest delight from it, seeing that "THOU" and "THINE" and "for THEE" and "to THEE" occurred in it incessantly. These fancies were so vivid that I could not sleep for the sweetness of my emotion, and felt as though I must communicate my superabundant happiness to some one.

"The darling!" I said, half-aloud, as I turned over; then, "Woloda, are you asleep?"

"No," he replied in a sleepy voice. "What's the matter?"

"I am in love, Woloda—terribly in love with Sonetchka"

"Well? Anything else?" he replied, stretching himself.

"Oh, but you cannot imagine what I feel just now, as I lay covered over with the

counterpane, I could see her and talk to her so clearly that it was marvellous! And, do you know, while I was lying thinking about her—I don't know why it was, but all at once I felt so sad that I could have cried."

Woloda made a movement of some sort.

"One thing only I wish for," I continued; "and that is that I could always be with her and always be seeing her. Just that. You are in love too, I believe. Confess that you are."

It was strange, but somehow I wanted every one to be in love with Sonetchka, and every one to tell me that they were so.

"So that's how it is with you? " said Woloda, turning round to me. "Well, I can understand it."

"I can see that you cannot sleep," I remarked, observing by his bright eyes that he was anything but drowsy. "Well, cover yourself over SO" (and I pulled the bedclothes over him), "and then let us talk about her. Isn't she splendid? If she were to say to me, 'Nicolinka, jump out of the window,' or 'jump into the fire,' I should say, 'Yes, I will do it at once and rejoice in doing it.' Oh, how glorious she is!"

I went on picturing her again and again to my imagination, and, to enjoy the vision the better, turned over on my side and buried my head in the pillows, murmuring, "Oh, I want to cry, Woloda."

"What a fool you are!" he said with a slight laugh. Then, after a moment's silence he added: "I am not like you. I think I would rather sit and talk with her."

"Ah! Then you ARE in love with her!" I interrupted.

"And then," went on Woloda, smiling tenderly, "kiss her fingers and eyes and lips and nose and feet—kiss all of her."

"How absurd!" I exclaimed from beneath the pillows.

"Ah, you don't understand things," said Woloda with contempt.

"I DO understand. It's you who don't understand things, and you talk rubbish, too," I replied, half-crying.

"Well, there is nothing to cry about," he concluded. "She is only a girl."

XXV — THE LETTER

ON the 16th of April, nearly six months after the day just described, Papa entered our schoolroom and told us that that night we must start with him for our country house. I felt a pang at my heart when I heard the news, and my thoughts at once turned to Mamma. The cause of our unexpected departure was the following letter:

"PETROVSKOE, 12th April.

"Only this moment (i.e. at ten o'clock in the evening) have I received your dear letter of the 3rd of April, but as usual, I answer it at once. Fedor brought it yesterday from town, but, as it was late, he did not give it to Mimi till this morning, and Mimi (since I was unwell) kept it from me all day. I have been a little feverish. In fact, to tell the truth, this is the fourth day that I have been in bed.

"Yet do not be uneasy. I feel almost myself again now, and if Ivan Vassilitch should allow me, I think of getting up to-morrow.

"On Friday last I took the girls for a drive, and, close to the little bridge by the turning on to the high road (the place which always makes me nervous), the horses and carriage stuck fast in the mud. Well, the day being fine, I thought that we would walk a little up the road until the carriage should be extricated, but no sooner had we reached the chapel than I felt obliged to sit down, I was so tired, and in this way half-an-hour passed while help was being sent for to get the carriage dug out. I felt cold, for I had only thin boots on, and they had been wet through. After luncheon too, I had alternate cold and hot fits, yet still continued to follow our ordinary routine.

“When tea was over I sat down to the piano to play a duct with Lubotshka, (you would be astonished to hear what progress she has made!), but imagine my surprise when I found that I could not count the beats! Several times I began to do so, yet always felt confused in my head, and kept hearing strange noises in my ears. I would begin ‘One-two-three—’ and then suddenly go on ‘-eight-fifteen,’ and so on, as though I were talking nonsense and could not help it. At last Mimi came to my assistance and forced me to retire to bed. That was how my illness began, and it was all through my own fault. The next day I had a good deal of fever, and our good Ivan Vassilitch came. He has not left us since, but promises soon to restore me to the world.

“What a wonderful old man he is! While I was feverish and delirious he sat the whole night by my bedside without once closing his eyes; and at this moment (since he knows I am busy writing) he is with the girls in the divannaia, and I can hear him telling them German stories, and them laughing as they listen to him.

“‘La Belle Flamande,’ as you call her, is now spending her second week here as my guest (her mother having gone to pay a visit somewhere), and she is most attentive and attached to me. She even tells me her secret affairs. Under different circumstances her beautiful face, good temper, and youth might have made a most excellent girl of her, but in the society in which according to her own account, she moves she will be wasted. The idea has more than once occurred to me that, had I not had so many children of my own, it would have been a deed of mercy to have adopted her.

“Lubotshka had meant to write to you herself, but she has torn up three sheets of paper, saying: ‘I know what a quizzer Papa always is. If he were to find a single fault in my letter he would show it to everybody.’ Katenka is as charming as usual, and Mimi, too, is good, but tiresome.

“Now let me speak of more serious matters. You write to me that your affairs are not

going well this winter, and that you wish to break into the revenues of Chabarovska. It seems to me strange that you should think it necessary to ask my consent. Surely what belongs to me belongs no less to you? You are so kind-hearted, dear, that, for fear of worrying me, you conceal the real state of things, but I can guess that you have lost a great deal at cards, as also that you are afraid of my being angry at that. Yet, so long as you can tide over this crisis, I shall not think much of it, and you need not be uneasy, I have grown accustomed to no longer relying, so far as the children are concerned, upon your gains at play, nor yet—excuse me for saying so—upon your income. Therefore your losses cause me as little anxiety as your gains give me pleasure. What I really grieve over is your unhappy passion itself for gambling—a passion which bereaves me of part of your tender affection and obliges me to tell you such bitter truths as (God knows with what pain) I am now telling you. I never cease to beseech Him that He may preserve us, not from poverty (for what is poverty?), but from the terrible juncture which would arise should the interests of the children, which I am called upon to protect, ever come into collision with our own. Hitherto God has listened to my prayers. You have never yet overstepped the limit beyond which we should be obliged either to sacrifice property which would no longer belong to us, but to the children, or—It is terrible to think of, but the dreadful misfortune at which I hint is forever hanging over our heads. Yes, it is the heavy cross which God has given us both to carry.

"Also, you write about the children, and come back to our old point of difference by asking my consent to your placing them at a boarding-school. You know my objection to that kind of education. I do not know, dear, whether you will accede to my request, but I nevertheless beseech you, by your love for me, to give me your promise that never so long as I am alive, nor yet after my death (if God should see fit to separate us), shall such a thing be done.

"Also you write that our affairs render it indispensable for you to visit St. Petersburg. The Lord go with you! Go and return as, soon as possible. Without you

we shall all of us be lonely.

“Spring is coming in beautifully. We keep the door on to the terrace always open now, while the path to the orangery is dry and the peach-trees are in full blossom. Only here and there is there a little snow remaining. The swallows are arriving, and to-day Lubotshka brought me the first flowers. The doctor says that in about three days’ time I shall be well again and able to take the open air and to enjoy the April sun. Now, au revoir, my dearest one. Do not be alarmed, I beg of you, either on account of my illness or on account of your losses at play. End the crisis as soon as possible, and then return here with the children for the summer. I am making wonderful plans for our passing of it, and I only need your presence to realise them.”

The rest of the letter was written in French, as well as in a strange, uncertain hand, on another piece of paper. I transcribe it word for word:

“Do not believe what I have just written to you about my illness. It is more serious than any one knows. I alone know that I shall never leave my bed again. Do not, therefore, delay a minute in coming here with the children. Perhaps it may yet be permitted me to embrace and bless them. It is my last wish that it should be so. I know what a terrible blow this will be to you, but you would have had to hear it sooner or later—if not from me, at least from others. Let us try to, bear the Calamity with fortitude, and place our trust in the mercy of God. Let us submit ourselves to His will. Do not think that what I am writing is some delusion of my sick imagination. On the contrary, I am perfectly clear at this moment, and absolutely calm. Nor must you comfort yourself with the false hope that these are the unreal, confused feelings of a despondent spirit, for I feel indeed, I know, since God has deigned to reveal it to me—that I have now but a very short time to live. Will my love for you and the children cease with my life? I know that that can never be. At this moment I am too full of that love to be capable of believing that such a feeling (which constitutes a part of my very existence) can ever, perish. My soul can never

lack its love for you; and I know that that love will exist for ever, since such a feeling could never have been awakened if it were not to be eternal. I shall no longer be with you, yet I firmly believe that my love will cleave to you always, and from that thought I glean such comfort that I await the approach of death calmly and without fear. Yes, I am calm, and God knows that I have ever looked, and do look now, upon death as no more than the passage to a better life. Yet why do tears blind my eyes? Why should the children lose a mother's love? Why must you, my husband, experience such a heavy and unlooked-for blow? Why must I die when your love was making life so inexpressibly happy for me?

"But His holy will be done!

"The tears prevent my writing more. It may be that I shall never see you again. I thank you, my darling beyond all price, for all the felicity with which you have surrounded me in this life. Soon I shall appear before God Himself to pray that He may reward you. Farewell, my dearest! Remember that, if I am no longer here, my love will none the less NEVER AND NOWHERE fail you. Farewell, Woloda—farewell, my pet! Farewell, my Benjamin, my little Nicolinka! Surely they will never forget me?"

With this letter had come also a French note from Mimi, in which the latter said:

"The sad circumstances of which she has written to you are but too surely confirmed by the words of the doctor. Yesterday evening she ordered the letter to be posted at once, but, thinking at she did so in delirium, I waited until this morning, with the intention of sealing and sending it then. Hardly had I done so when Natalia Nicolaevna asked me what I had done with the letter and told me to burn it if not yet despatched. She is forever speaking of it, and saying that it will kill you. Do not delay your departure for an instant if you wish to see the angel before she leaves us. Pray excuse this scribble, but I have not slept now for three nights. You know how much I love her."

Later I heard from Natalia Savishna (who passed the whole of the night of the 11th April at Mamma's bedside) that, after writing the first part of the letter, Mamma laid it down upon the table beside her and went to sleep for a while.

"I confess," said Natalia Savishna, "that I too fell asleep in the arm-chair, and let my knitting slip from my hands. Suddenly, towards one o'clock in the morning, I heard her saying something; whereupon I opened my eyes and looked at her. My darling was sitting up in bed, with her hands clasped together and streams of tears gushing from her eyes.

"'It is all over now,' she said, and hid her face in her hands.

"I sprang to my feet, and asked what the matter was.

"'Ah, Natalia Savishna, if you could only know what I have just seen!' she said; yet, for all my asking, she would say no more, beyond commanding me to hand her the letter. To that letter she added something, and then said that it must be sent off directly. From that moment she grew, rapidly worse."

XXVI — WHAT AWAITED US AT THE COUNTRY-HOUSE

On the 18th of April we descended from the carriage at the front door of the house at Petrovskoe. All the way from Moscow Papa had been preoccupied, and when Woloda had asked him "whether Mamma was ill" he had looked at him sadly and nodded an affirmative. Nevertheless he had grown more composed during the journey, and it was only when we were actually approaching the house that his face again began to grow anxious, until, as he leaped from the carriage and asked Foka (who had run breathlessly to meet us), "How is Natalia Nicolaevna now?" his voice, was trembling, and his eyes had filled with tears. The good, old Foka looked at us, and then lowered his gaze again. Finally he said as he opened the hall-door and

turned his head aside: “It is the sixth day since she has not left her bed.”

Milka (who, as we afterwards learned, had never ceased to whine from the day when Mamma was taken ill) came leaping, joyfully to meet Papa, and barking a welcome as she licked his hands, but Papa put her aside, and went first to the drawing-room, and then into the divannaia, from which a door led into the bedroom. The nearer he approached the latter, the more, did his movements express the agitation that he felt. Entering the divannaia he crossed it on tiptoe, seeming to hold his breath. Even then he had to stop and make the sign of the cross before he could summon up courage to turn the handle. At the same moment Mimi, with dishevelled hair and eyes red with weeping came hastily out of the corridor.

“Ah, Peter Alexandritch!” she said in a whisper and with a marked expression of despair. Then, observing that Papa was trying to open the door, she whispered again:

“Not here. This door is locked. Go round to the door on the other side.”

Oh, how terribly all this wrought upon my imagination, racked as it was by grief and terrible forebodings!

So we went round to the other side. In the corridor we met the gardener, Akim, who had been wont to amuse us with his grimaces, but at this moment I could see nothing comical in him. Indeed, the sight of his thoughtless, indifferent face struck me more painfully than anything else. In the maidservants’ hall, through which we had to pass, two maids were sitting at their work, but rose to salute us with an expression so mournful that I felt completely overwhelmed.

Passing also through Mimi’s room, Papa opened the door of the bedroom, and we entered. The two windows on the right were curtained over, and close to them was seated, Natalia Savishna, spectacles on nose and engaged in darning stockings. She did not approach us to kiss me as she had been used to do, but just rose and looked at us, her tears beginning to flow afresh. Somehow it frightened me to see every one, on beholding us, begin to cry, although they had been calm enough before.

On the left stood the bed behind a screen, while in the great arm-chair the doctor lay asleep. Beside the bed a young, fair-haired and remarkably beautiful girl in a white morning wrapper was applying ice to Mamma's head, but Mamma herself I could not see. This girl was "La Belle Flamande" of whom Mamma had written, and who afterwards played so important a part in our family life. As we entered she disengaged one of her hands, straightened the pleats of her dress on her bosom, and whispered, "She is insensible." Though I was in an agony of grief, I observed at that moment every little detail.

It was almost dark in the room, and very hot, while the air was heavy with the mingled, scent of mint, eau-de-cologne, camomile, and Hoffman's pastilles. The latter ingredient caught my attention so strongly that even now I can never hear of it, or even think of it, without my memory carrying me back to that dark, close room, and all the details of that dreadful time.

Mamma's eyes were wide open, but they could not see us. Never shall I forget the terrible expression in them—the expression of agonies of suffering!

Then we were taken away.

When, later, I was able to ask Natalia Savishna about Mamma's last moments she told me the following:

"After you were taken out of the room, my beloved one struggled for a long time, as though some one were trying to strangle her. Then at last she laid her head back upon the pillow, and slept softly, peacefully, like an angel from Heaven. I went away for a moment to see about her medicine, and just as I entered the room again my darling was throwing the bedclothes from off her and calling for your Papa. He stooped over her, but strength failed her to say what she wanted to. All she could do was to open her lips and gasp, 'My God, my God! The children, the children!' I would have run to fetch you, but Ivan Vassilitch stopped me, saying that it would only excite her—it were best not to do so. Then suddenly she stretched her arms out

and dropped them again. What she meant by that gesture the good God alone knows, but I think that in it she was blessing you—you the children whom she could not see. God did not grant her to see her little ones before her death. Then she raised herself up—did my love, my darling—yes, just so with her hands, and exclaimed in a voice which I cannot bear to remember, 'Mother of God, never forsake them!'"

"Then the pain mounted to her heart, and from her eyes it as, plain that she suffered terribly, my poor one! She sank back upon the pillows, tore the bedclothes with her teeth, and wept—wept—"

"Yes and what then?" I asked but Natalia Savishna could say no more. She turned away and cried bitterly.

Mamma had expired in terrible agonies.

XXVII — GRIEF

LATE the following evening I thought I would like to look at her once more; so, conquering an involuntary sense of fear, I gently opened the door of the salon and entered on tiptoe.

In the middle of the room, on a table, lay the coffin, with wax candles burning all round it on tall silver candelabra. In the further corner sat the chanter, reading the Psalms in a low, monotonous voice. I stopped at the door and tried to look, but my eyes were so weak with crying, and my nerves so terribly on edge, that I could distinguish nothing. Every object seemed to mingle together in a strange blur—the candles, the brocade, the velvet, the great candelabra, the pink satin cushion trimmed with lace, the chaplet of flowers, the ribboned cap, and something of a transparent, wax-like colour. I mounted a chair to see her face, yet where it should have been I could see only that wax-like, transparent something. I could not believe it to be her face. Yet, as I stood grazing at it, I at last recognised the well-known, beloved features. I shuddered with horror to realise that it WAS she. Why were those eyes so

sunken? What had laid that dreadful paleness upon her cheeks, and stamped the black spot beneath the transparent skin on one of them? Why was the expression of the whole face so cold and severe? Why were the lips so white, and their outline so beautiful, so majestic, so expressive of an unnatural calm that, as I looked at them, a chill shudder ran through my hair and down my back?

Somehow, as I gazed, an irrepressible, incomprehensible power seemed to compel me to keep my eyes fixed upon that lifeless face. I could not turn away, and my imagination began to picture before me scenes of her active life and happiness. I forgot that the corpse lying before me now—the THING at which I was gazing unconsciously as at an object which had nothing in common with my dreams—was SHE. I fancied I could see her—now here, now there, alive, happy, and smiling. Then some well-known feature in the face at which I was gazing would suddenly arrest my attention, and in a flash I would recall the terrible reality and shudder-though still unable to turn my eyes away.

Then again the dreams would replace reality—then again the reality put to flight the dreams. At last the consciousness of both left me, and for a while I became insensible.

How long I remained in that condition I do not know, nor yet how it occurred. I only know that for a time I lost all sense of existence, and experienced a kind of vague blissfulness which though grand and sweet, was also sad. It may be that, as it ascended to a better world, her beautiful soul had looked down with longing at the world in which she had left us—that it had seen my sorrow, and, pitying me, had returned to earth on the wings of love to console and bless me with a heavenly smile of compassion.

The door creaked as the chanter entered who was to relieve his predecessor. The noise awakened me, and my first thought was that, seeing me standing on the chair in a posture which had nothing touching in its aspect, he might take me for an

unfeeling boy who had climbed on to the chair out of mere curiosity: wherefore I hastened to make the sign of the cross, to bend down my head, and to burst out crying. As I recall now my impressions of that episode I find that it was only during my moments of self-forgetfulness that my grief was wholehearted. True, both before and after the funeral I never ceased to cry and to look miserable, yet I feel conscience-stricken when I recall that grief of mine, seeing that always present in it there was an element of conceit—of a desire to show that I was more grieved than any one else, of an interest which I took in observing the effect, produced upon others by my tears, and of an idle curiosity leading me to remark Mimi's bonnet and the faces of all present. The mere circumstance that I despised myself for not feeling grief to the exclusion of everything else, and that I endeavoured to conceal the fact, shows that my sadness was insincere and unnatural. I took a delight in feeling that I was unhappy, and in trying to feel more so. Consequently this egotistic consciousness completely annulled any element of sincerity in my woe.

That night I slept calmly and soundly (as is usual after any great emotion), and awoke with my tears dried and my nerves restored. At ten o'clock we were summoned to attend the pre-funeral requiem.

The room was full of weeping servants and peasants who had come to bid farewell to their late mistress. During the service I myself wept a great deal, made frequent signs of the cross, and performed many genuflections, but I did not pray with, my soul, and felt, if anything, almost indifferent. My thoughts were chiefly centred upon the new coat which I was wearing (a garment which was tight and uncomfortable) and upon how to avoid soiling my trousers at the knees. Also I took the most minute notice of all present.

Papa stood at the head of the coffin. He was as white as snow, and only with difficulty restrained his tears. His tall figure in its black frockcoat, his pale, expressive face, the graceful, assured manner in which, as usual, he made the sign of

the cross or bowed until he touched the floor with his hand [A custom of the Greek funeral rite.] or took the candle from the priest or went to the coffin—all were exceedingly effective; yet for some reason or another I felt a grudge against him for that very ability to appear effective at such a moment. Mimi stood leaning against the wall as though scarcely able to support herself. Her dress was all awry and covered with feathers, and her cap cocked to one side, while her eyes were red with weeping, her legs trembling under her, and she sobbed incessantly in a heartrending manner as ever and again she buried her face in her handkerchief or her hands. I imagine that she did this to check her continual sobbing without being seen by the spectators. I remember, too, her telling Papa, the evening before, that Mamma's death had come upon her as a blow from which she could never hope to recover; that with Mamma she had lost everything; but that "the angel," as she called my mother, had not forgotten her when at the point of death, since she had declared her wish to render her (Mimi's) and Katenka's fortunes secure for ever. Mimi had shed bitter tears while relating this, and very likely her sorrow, if not wholly pure and disinterested, was in the main sincere. Lubotshka, in black garments and suffused with tears, stood with her head bowed upon her breast. She rarely looked at the coffin, yet whenever she did so her face expressed a sort of childish fear. Katenka stood near her mother, and, despite her lengthened face, looked as lovely as ever. Woloda's frank nature was frank also in grief. He stood looking grave and as though he were staring at some object with fixed eyes. Then suddenly his lips would begin to quiver, and he would hastily make the sign of the cross, and bend his head again.

Such of those present as were strangers I found intolerable. In fact, the phrases of condolence with which they addressed Papa (such, for instance, as that "she is better off now" "she was too good for this world," and so on) awakened in me something like fury. What right had they to weep over or to talk about her? Some of them, in referring to ourselves, called us "orphans"—just as though it were not a matter of common knowledge that children who have lost their mother are known as orphans!

Probably (I thought) they liked to be the first to give us that name, just as some people find pleasure in being the first to address a newly-married girl as “Madame.”

In a far corner of the room, and almost hidden by the open door, of the dining-room, stood a grey old woman with bent knees. With hands clasped together and eyes lifted to heaven, she prayed only—not wept. Her soul was in the presence of God, and she was asking Him soon to reunite her to her whom she had loved beyond all beings on this earth, and whom she steadfastly believed that she would very soon meet again.

“There stands one who SINCERELY loved her,” I thought to myself, and felt ashamed.

The requiem was over. They uncovered the face of the deceased, and all present except ourselves went to the coffin to give her the kiss of farewell.

One of the last to take leave of her departed mistress was a peasant woman who was holding by the hand a pretty little girl of five whom she had brought with her, God knows for what reason. Just at a moment when I chanced to drop my wet handkerchief and was stooping to pick it up again, a loud, piercing scream startled me, and filled me with such terror that, were I to live a hundred years more, I should never forget it. Even now the recollection always sends a cold shudder through my frame. I raised my head. Standing on the chair near the coffin was the peasant woman, while struggling and fighting in her arms was the little girl, and it was this same poor child who had screamed with such dreadful, desperate frenzy as, straining her terrified face away, she still, continued to gaze with dilated eyes at the face of the corpse. I too screamed in a voice perhaps more dreadful still, and ran headlong from the room.

Only now did I understand the source of the strong, oppressive smell which, mingling with the scent of the incense, filled the chamber, while the thought that the face which, but a few days ago, had been full of freshness and beauty—the face

which I loved more than anything else in all the world—was now capable of inspiring horror at length revealed to me, as though for the first time, the terrible truth, and filled my soul with despair.

XXVIII — SAD RECOLLECTIONS

Mamma was no longer with us, but our life went on as usual. We went to bed and got up at the same times and in the same rooms; breakfast, luncheon, and supper continued to be at their usual hours; everything remained standing in its accustomed place; nothing in the house or in our mode of life was altered: only, she was not there.

Yet it seemed to me as though such a misfortune ought to have changed everything. Our old mode of life appeared like an insult to her memory. It recalled too vividly her presence.

The day before the funeral I felt as though I should like to rest a little after luncheon, and accordingly went to Natalia Savishna's room with the intention of installing myself comfortably under the warm, soft down of the quilt on her bed. When I entered I found Natalia herself lying on the bed and apparently asleep, but, on hearing my footsteps, she raised herself up, removed the handkerchief which had been protecting her face from the flies, and, adjusting her cap, sat forward on the edge of the bed. Since it frequently happened that I came to lie down in her room, she guessed my errand at once, and said:

"So you have come to rest here a little, have you? Lie down, then, my dearest."

"Oh, but what is the matter with you, Natalia Savishna?" I exclaimed as I forced her back again. "I did not come for that. No, you are tired yourself, so you LIE down."

"I am quite rested now, darling," she said (though I knew that it was many a night since she had closed her eyes). "Yes, I am indeed, and have no wish to sleep again," she added with a deep sigh.

I felt as though I wanted to speak to her of our misfortune, since I knew her sincerity and love, and thought that it would be a consolation to me to weep with her.

“Natalia Savishna,” I said after a pause, as I seated myself upon the bed, “who would ever have thought of this?”

The old woman looked at me with astonishment, for she did not quite understand my question.

“Yes, who would ever have thought of it?” I repeated.

“Ah, my darling,” she said with a glance of tender compassion, “it is not only ‘Who would ever have thought of it?’ but ‘Who, even now, would ever believe it?’ I am old, and my bones should long ago have gone to rest rather than that I should have lived to see the old master, your Grandpapa, of blessed memory, and Prince Nicola Michaelovitch, and his two brothers, and your sister Amenka all buried before me, though all younger than myself—and now my darling, to my never-ending sorrow, gone home before me! Yet it has been God’s will. He took her away because she was worthy to be taken, and because He has need of the good ones.”

This simple thought seemed to me a consolation, and I pressed closer to Natalia. She laid her hands upon my head as she looked upward with eyes expressive of a deep, but resigned, sorrow. In her soul was a sure and certain hope that God would not long separate her from the one upon whom the whole strength of her love had for many years been concentrated.

“Yes, my dear,” she went on, “it is a long time now since I used to nurse and fondle her, and she used to call me Natasha. She used to come jumping upon me, and caressing and kissing me, and say, ‘MY Nashik, MY darling, MY ducky,’ and I used to answer jokingly, ‘Well, my love, I don’t believe that you DO love me. You will be a grown-up young lady soon, and going away to be married, and will leave your Nashik forgotten.’ Then she would grow thoughtful and say, ‘I think I had better not marry if my Nashik cannot go with me, for I mean never to leave her.’ Yet, alas! She

has left me now! Who was there in the world she did not love? Yes, my dearest, it must never be POSSIBLE for you to forget your Mamma. She was not a being of earth—she was an angel from Heaven. When her soul has entered the heavenly kingdom she will continue to love you and to be proud of you even there."

"But why do you say 'when her soul has entered the heavenly kingdom'?" I asked. "I believe it is there now."

"No, my dearest," replied Natalia as she lowered her voice and pressed herself yet closer to me, "her soul is still here," and she pointed upwards. She spoke in a whisper, but with such an intensity of conviction that I too involuntarily raised my eyes and looked at the ceiling, as though expecting to see something there. "Before the souls of the just enter Paradise they have to undergo forty trials for forty days, and during that time they hover around their earthly home." [A Russian popular legend.]

She went on speaking for some time in this strain—speaking with the same simplicity and conviction as though she were relating common things which she herself had witnessed, and to doubt which could never enter into any one's head. I listened almost breathlessly, and though I did not understand all she said, I never for a moment doubted her word.

"Yes, my darling, she is here now, and perhaps looking at us and listening to what we are saying," concluded Natalia. Raising her head, she remained silent for a while. At length she wiped away the tears which were streaming from her eyes, looked me straight in the face, and said in a voice trembling with emotion:

"Ah, it is through many trials that God is leading me to Him. Why, indeed, am I still here? Whom have I to live for? Whom have I to love?"

"Do you not love US, then?" I asked sadly, and half-choking with my tears.

"Yes, God knows that I love you, my darling; but to love any one as I loved HER—that I cannot do."

She could say no more, but turned her head aside and wept bitterly. As for me, I no longer thought of going to sleep, but sat silently with her and mingled my tears with hers.

Presently Foka entered the room, but, on seeing our emotion and not wishing to disturb us, stopped short at the door.

“Do you want anything, my good Foka?” asked Natalia as she wiped away her tears.

“If you please, half-a-pound of currants, four pounds of sugar, and three pounds of rice for the kutia.” [Cakes partaken of by the mourners at a Russian funeral.]

“Yes, in one moment,” said Natalia as she took a pinch of snuff and hastened to her drawers. All traces of the grief, aroused by our conversation disappeared on, the instant that she had duties to fulfil, for she looked upon those duties as of paramount importance.

“But why FOUR pounds?” she objected as she weighed the sugar on a steelyard. “Three and a half would be sufficient,” and she withdrew a few lumps. “How is it, too, that, though I weighed out eight pounds of rice yesterday, more is wanted now? No offence to you, Foka, but I am not going to waste rice like that. I suppose Vanka is glad that there is confusion in the house just now, for he thinks that nothing will be looked after, but I am not going to have any careless extravagance with my master’s goods. Did one ever hear of such a thing? Eight pounds!”

“Well, I have nothing to do with it. He says it is all gone, that’s all.”

“Hm, hm! Well, there it is. Let him take it.”

I was struck by the sudden transition from the touching sensibility with which she had just been speaking to me to this petty reckoning and captiousness. Yet, thinking it over afterwards, I recognised that it was merely because, in spite of what was lying on her heart, she retained the habit of duty, and that it was the strength of that habit which enabled her to pursue her functions as of old. Her grief was too strong and too true to require any pretence of being unable to fulfil trivial tasks, nor would

she have understood that any one could so pretend. Vanity is a sentiment so entirely at variance with genuine grief, yet a sentiment so inherent in human nature, that even the most poignant sorrow does not always drive it wholly forth. Vanity mingled with grief shows itself in a desire to be recognised as unhappy or resigned; and this ignoble desire—an aspiration which, for all that we may not acknowledge it is rarely absent, even in cases of the utmost affliction—takes off greatly from the force, the dignity, and the sincerity of grief. Natalia Savishna had been so sorely smitten by her misfortune that not a single wish of her own remained in her soul—she went on living purely by habit.

Having handed over the provisions to Foka, and reminded him of the refreshments which must be ready for the priests, she took up her knitting and seated herself by my side again. The conversation reverted to the old topic, and we once more mourned and shed tears together. These talks with Natalia I repeated every day, for her quiet tears and words of devotion brought me relief and comfort. Soon, however, a parting came. Three days after the funeral we returned to Moscow, and I never saw her again.

Grandmamma received the sad tidings only on our return to her house, and her grief was extraordinary. At first we were not allowed to see her, since for a whole week she was out of her mind, and the doctors were afraid for her life. Not only did she decline all medicine whatsoever, but she refused to speak to anybody or to take nourishment, and never closed her eyes in sleep. Sometimes, as she sat alone in the arm-chair in her room, she would begin laughing and crying at the same time, with a sort of tearless grief, or else relapse into convulsions, and scream out dreadful, incoherent words in a horrible voice. It was the first dire sorrow which she had known in her life, and it reduced her almost to distraction. She would begin accusing first one person, and then another, of bringing this misfortune upon her, and rail at and blame them with the most extraordinary virulence. Finally she would rise from her arm-chair, pace the room for a while, and end by falling senseless to the floor.

Once, when I went to her room, she appeared to be sitting quietly in her chair, yet with an air which struck me as curious. Though her eyes were wide open, their glance was vacant and meaningless, and she seemed to gaze in my direction without seeing me. Suddenly her lips parted slowly in a smile, and she said in a touchingly, tender voice: “Come here, then, my dearest one; come here, my angel.” Thinking that it was myself she was addressing, I moved towards her, but it was not I whom she was beholding at that moment. “Oh, my love,” she went on, “if only you could know how distracted I have been, and how delighted I am to see you once more!” I understood then that she believed herself to be looking upon Mamma, and halted where I was. “They told me you were gone,” she concluded with a frown; “but what nonsense! As if you could die before ME!” and she laughed a terrible, hysterical laugh.

Only those who can love strongly can experience an overwhelming grief. Yet their very need of loving sometimes serves to throw off their grief from them and to save them. The moral nature of man is more tenacious of life than the physical, and grief never kills.

After a time Grandmamma’s power of weeping came back to her, and she began to recover. Her first thought when her reason returned was for us children, and her love for us was greater than ever. We never left her arm-chair, and she would talk of Mamma, and weep softly, and caress us.

Nobody who saw her grief could say that it was consciously exaggerated, for its expression was too strong and touching; yet for some reason or another my sympathy went out more to Natalia Savishna, and to this day I am convinced that nobody loved and regretted Mamma so purely and sincerely as did that simple-hearted, affectionate being.

With Mamma’s death the happy time of my childhood came to an end, and a new epoch—the epoch of my boyhood—began; but since my memories of Natalia

Savishna (who exercised such a strong and beneficial influence upon the bent of my mind and the development of my sensibility) belong rather to the first period, I will add a few words about her and her death before closing this portion of my life.

I heard later from people in the village that, after our return to Moscow, she found time hang very heavy on her hands. Although the drawers and shelves were still under her charge, and she never ceased to arrange and rearrange them—to take things out and to dispose of them afresh—she sadly missed the din and bustle of the seignorial mansion to which she had been accustomed from her childhood up. Consequently grief, the alteration in her mode of life, and her lack of activity soon combined to develop in her a malady to which she had always been more or less subject.

Scarcely more than a year after Mamma's death dropsy showed itself, and she took to her bed. I can imagine how sad it must have been for her to go on living—still more, to die—alone in that great empty house at Petrovskoe, with no relations or any one near her. Every one there esteemed and loved her, but she had formed no intimate friendships in the place, and was rather proud of the fact. That was because, enjoying her master's confidence as she did, and having so much property under her care, she considered that intimacies would lead to culpable indulgence and condescension. Consequently (and perhaps, also, because she had nothing really in common with the other servants) she kept them all at a distance, and used to say that she "recognised neither kinsman nor godfather in the house, and would permit of no exceptions with regard to her master's property."

Instead, she sought and found consolation in fervent prayers to God. Yet sometimes, in those moments of weakness to which all of us are subject, and when man's best solace is the tears and compassion of his fellow-creatures, she would take her old dog Moska on to her bed, and talk to it, and weep softly over it as it answered her caresses by licking her hands, with its yellow eyes fixed upon her. When Moska

began to whine she would say as she quieted it: “Enough, enough! I know without thy telling me that my time is near.” A month before her death she took out of her chest of drawers some fine white calico, white cambric, and pink ribbon, and, with the help of the maidservants, fashioned the garments in which she wished to be buried. Next she put everything on her shelves in order and handed the bailiff an inventory which she had made out with scrupulous accuracy. All that she kept back was a couple of silk gowns, an old shawl, and Grandpapa’s military uniform—things which had been presented to her absolutely, and which, thanks to her care and orderliness, were in an excellent state of preservation—particularly the handsome gold embroidery on the uniform.

Just before her death, again, she expressed a wish that one of the gowns (a pink one) should be made into a robe de chambre for Woloda; that the other one (a many-coloured gown) should be made into a similar garment for myself; and that the shawl should go to Lubotshka. As for the uniform, it was to devolve either to Woloda or to myself, according as the one or the other of us should first become an officer. All the rest of her property (save only forty roubles, which she set aside for her commemorative rites and to defray the costs of her burial) was to pass to her brother, a person with whom, since he lived a dissipated life in a distant province, she had had no intercourse during her lifetime. When, eventually, he arrived to claim the inheritance, and found that its sum-total only amounted to twenty-five roubles in notes, he refused to believe it, and declared that it was impossible that his sister-a woman who for sixty years had had sole charge in a wealthy house, as well as all her life had been penurious and averse to giving away even the smallest thing should have left no more: yet it was a fact.

Though Natalia’s last illness lasted for two months, she bore her sufferings with truly Christian fortitude. Never did she fret or complain, but, as usual, appealed continually to God. An hour before the end came she made her final confession, received the Sacrament with quiet joy, and was accorded extreme unction. Then she

begged forgiveness of every one in the house for any wrong she might have done them, and requested the priest to send us word of the number of times she had blessed us for our love of her, as well as of how in her last moments she had implored our forgiveness if, in her ignorance, she had ever at any time given us offence. “Yet a thief have I never been. Never have I used so much as a piece of thread that was not my own.” Such was the one quality which she valued in herself.

Dressed in the cap and gown prepared so long beforehand, and with her head resting, upon the cushion made for the purpose, she conversed with the priest up to the very last moment, until, suddenly, recollecting that she had left him nothing for the poor, she took out ten roubles, and asked him to distribute them in the parish. Lastly she made the sign of the cross, lay down, and expired—pronouncing with a smile of joy the name of the Almighty.

She quitted life without a pang, and, so far from fearing death, welcomed it as a blessing. How often do we hear that said, and how seldom is it a reality! Natalia Savishna had no reason to fear death for the simple reason that she died in a sure and certain faith and in strict obedience to the commands of the Gospel. Her whole life had been one of pure, disinterested love, of utter self-negation. Had her convictions been of a more enlightened order, her life directed to a higher aim, would that pure soul have been the more worthy of love and reverence? She accomplished the highest and best achievement in this world: she died without fear and without repining.

They buried her where she had wished to lie—near the little mausoleum which still covers Mamma’s tomb. The little mound beneath which she sleeps is overgrown with nettles and burdock, and surrounded by a black railing, but I never forget, when leaving the mausoleum, to approach that railing, and to salute the plot of earth within by bowing reverently to the ground.

Sometimes, too, I stand thoughtfully between the railing and the mausoleum, and

sad memories pass through my mind. Once the idea came to me as I stood there: “Did Providence unite me to those two beings solely in order to make me regret them my life long?”

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