The Red Laugh

by Leonid Andreyev

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THE RED LAUGH

FRAGMENTS OF A DISCOVERED MANUSCRIPT

BY LEONIDAS ANDREIEF

Translated from the Russian by Alexandra Linden

LONDON T. FISHER UNWIN PATERNOSTER SQUARE 1905

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PREFACE

Leonidas Andreief, the author of The Red Laugh and of some volumes of short stories, was born at Orel in 1871. He studied first at the college of his own town, then at St Petersburg University. As a student at St Petersburg, he made a miserable

livelihood by giving infrequent lessons at wretched rates, and his first literary efforts belong to this period. His first short story, the subject of which was, in fact, autobiographical—the sorry life of the poor student, always half starving—was derisively rejected. But he gained entry into an important St Petersburg review with another and characteristic short story, Silence, and with it won the attention of the Russian literary world. Now his popularity in Russia almost transcends that of Gorky. Russian critics have said of Andreief, as Victor Hugo said of the author of the Fleurs du Mal, that he has "invented a new thrill," and Andreief seems, indeed, to be most at home in a region of horror, though it is very much psychologised horror, a horror full of fine shades. The Red Laugh is a literary outcome of the late war in Manchuria; it sets forth the anachronism of war as that anachronism is felt by a writer of genius.

O.

THE RED LAUGH

PART I

Fragment I

..... Horror and madness.

I felt it for the first time as we were marching along the road—marching incessantly for ten hours without stopping, never diminishing our step, never waiting to pick up those that had fallen, but leaving them to the enemy, that was moving behind us in a compact mass only three or four hours later effacing the marks of our feet by their own.

It was very sultry. I do not know how many degrees there were—120°, 140°, or more—I only know that the heat was incessant, hopelessly even and profound. The sun was so enormous, so fiery and terrible, that it seemed as if the earth had drawn

nearer to it and would soon be burnt up altogether in its merciless rays. Our eyes had ceased to look. The small shrunk pupil, as small as a poppyseed, sought in vain for darkness under the closed eyelid; the sun pierced the thin covering and penetrated into the tortured brain in a blood-red glow. But, nevertheless, it was better so: with closed eyelids, and for a long time, perhaps for several hours, I walked along with my eyes shut, hearing the multitude moving around me: the heavy, uneven tread of many feet, men's and horses, the grinding of iron wheels, crushing the small stones, somebody's deep strained breathing and the dry smacking of parched lips. But I heard no word. All were silent, as if an army of dumb people was moving, and when anyone fell down, he fell in silence; others stumbled against his body, fell down and rose mutely, and, without turning their heads, marched on, as though these dumb men were also blind and deaf. I stumbled and fell several times and then involuntarily opened my eyes, and all that I saw seemed a wild fiction, the terrible raving of a mad world. The air vibrated at a white-hot temperature, the stones seemed to be trembling silently, ready to flow, and in the distance, at a curve of the road, the files of men, guns and horses seemed detached from the earth, and trembled like a mass of jelly in their onward progress, and it seemed to me that they were not living people that I saw before me, but an army of incorporate shadows.

The enormous, near, terrible sun lit up thousands of tiny blinding suns on every gun-barrel and metal plate, and these suns, as fiery-white and sharp as the white-hot points of the bayonets, crept into your eyes from every side. And the consuming, burning heat penetrated into your body—into your very bones and brain—and at times it seemed to me that it was not a head that swayed upon my shoulders, but a strange and extraordinary globe, heavy and light, belonging to somebody else, and horrible.

And then—then I suddenly remembered my home: a corner of my room, a scrap of light-blue wall-paper, and a dusty untouched water-bottle on my table—on my table, which has one leg shorter than the others, and had a small piece of paper folded

under it. While in the next room—and I cannot see them—are my wife and little son. If I had had the power to cry out, I would have done so—so wonderful was this simple and peaceful picture—the scrap of light-blue wall-paper and dusty untouched water-bottle. I know that I stood still and lifted up my arms, but somebody gave me a push from behind, and I quickly moved on, thrusting the crowd aside, and hastening whither I knew not, but feeling now neither heat nor fatigue. And I marched on thus for a long time through the endless mute files, past red sunburnt necks, almost touching the helplessly lowered hot bayonets, when suddenly the thought of what I was doing, whither I was hastening, stopped me. I turned aside in the same hasty way, forced my way to the open, clambered across a gulley and sat down on a stone in a preoccupied manner, as if that rough hot stone was the aim of all my strivings.

And then I felt it for the first time. I clearly perceived that all these people, marching silently on in the glaring sun, torpid from fatigue and heat, swaying and falling—that they were all mad. They did not know whither they were going, they did not know what that sun was for, they did not know anything. It was not heads that they had on their shoulders, but strange and terrible globes. There—I saw a man in the same plight as I, pushing his way hurriedly through the rows and falling down; there—another, and a third. Suddenly a horse's head appeared above the throng with bloodshot and senseless eyes and a wide-open grinning mouth, that only hinted at a terrible unearthly cry; this head appeared, fell down, and for an instant the crowd stopped, growing denser in that spot; I could hear hoarse, hollow voices, then a shot, and again the silent endless march continued.

An hour passed as I sat on that stone, but the multitude still moved on past me, and the air and earth and the distant phantom-like ranks trembled as before. And again the burning heat pierced my body and I forgot what for an instant I had pictured to myself; and the multitudes moved on past me, but I did not know who they were. An hour ago I was alone on the stone, but now I was surrounded by a group of grey

people: some lying motionless, perhaps dead; others were sitting up and staring vacantly at those passing by. Some had guns and resembled soldiers; others were stripped almost naked, and the skin on their bodies was so livid, that one did not care to look at it. Not far from me someone was lying with his bared back upturned.

One could see by the unconcerned manner in which he had buried his face in the sharp burning sand, by the whiteness of the palm of his upturned hand, that he was dead, but his back was as red as if he were alive, and only a slight yellowish tinge, like one sees on smoked meat, spoke of death. I wanted to move away from him, but I had not the strength, and, tottering from weakness, I continued looking at the endless phantom-like swaying files of men. By the condition of my head I knew that I should soon have a sunstroke too, but I awaited it calmly, as in a dream, where death seems only a stage on the path of wonderful and confused visions.

And I saw a soldier part from the crowd and direct his steps in a decided manner towards us. For an instant I lost sight of him in a ditch, but when he reappeared and moved on towards us, his gait was unsteady, and in his endeavours to control his restlessly tossing body, one felt he was using his last strength. He was coming so straight upon me that I grew frightened and, breaking through the heavy torpor that enveloped my brain, I asked: "What do you want?"

He stopped short, as if it was only a word that he was waiting for, and stood before me, enormous, bearded, in a torn shirt. He had no gun, his trousers hung only by one button, and through a slit in them one could see his white body. He flung his arms and legs about and he was visibly trying to control them, but could not: the instant he brought his arms together, they fell apart again.

"What is the matter? You had better sit down," I said.

But he continued standing, vainly trying to gather himself together, and stared at me in silence. Involuntarily I got up from the stone and, tottering, looked into his eyes—and saw an abyss of horror and insanity in them. Everybody's pupils were

shrunk—but his had dilated and covered his whole eye: what a sea of fire he must have seen through those enormous black windows! Maybe I had only imagined it, maybe in his look there was only death,—but no, I was not mistaken: in those black, bottomless pupils, surrounded by a narrow orange-coloured rim, like a bird's eye, there was more than death, more than the horror of death. "Go away!" I cried, falling back. "Go away!" And as if he was only waiting for a word, enormous, disorderly and mute as before, he suddenly fell down upon me, knocking me over. With a shudder I freed my legs from under him, jumped up and longed to run—somewhere away from men into the sunlit, unpeopled and quivering distance, when suddenly, on the left-hand side, a cannon boomed forth from a hill-top, and directly after it two others, like an echo. And somewhere above our heads a shell flew past with a gladsome, many-voiced scr-e-e-ch and howl.

We were outflanked.

The murderous heat, fear and fatigue disappeared instantly. My thoughts cleared, my mind grew clear and sharp, and, when I ran up, out of breath, to the files of men drawing up, I saw serene, almost joyous faces, heard hoarse, but loud voices, orders, jokes. The sun seemed to have drawn itself up higher so as not to be in the way, and had grown dim and still—and again a shell, like a witch, cut the air with a gladsome scr-e-e-ch.

I came up....

Fragment II

... Nearly all the horses and men. The same in the eighth battery. In our twelfth battery, towards the end of the third day, there remained only three guns—all the others being disabled—six men and one officer, myself. We had neither slept nor eaten for twenty hours; for three days and nights a Satanic roar and howl enveloped us in a cloud of insanity, isolated us from the earth, the sky and ourselves—and we, the living, wandered about like lunatics. The dead—they lay still, while we moved

about doing our duty, talking and laughing, and we were—like lunatics. All our movements were quick and certain, our orders clear, the execution of them precise, but if you had suddenly asked any one of us who we were, undoubtedly we should not have been able to find an answer in our troubled brain. As in a dream all faces seemed familiar, and all that was going on seemed quite familiar and natural—as if it had happened before; but when I looked closely at any face or gun, or began listening to the din, I was struck by the novelty and endless mystery of everything. Night approached imperceptibly, and before we had time to notice it and wonder where it had come from, the sun was again burning above our heads. And only from those who came to our battery we learnt that it was the third day of the battle that was dawning, and instantly forgot it again: to us it appeared as one endless day without any beginning, sometimes dark, sometimes bright, but always incomprehensible and blind. And nobody was afraid of death, for nobody understood what death was.

On the third or fourth night—I do not remember which—I lay down for a minute behind the breastwork, and, as soon as I shut my eyes, the same familiar and extraordinary picture stood before them: the scrap of light-blue wall-paper and the dusty untouched water-bottle on my table. While in the next room—and I could not see them—were my wife and little son. But this time a lamp with a green shade was burning on the table, so it must have been evening or night. The picture stood motionless, and I contemplated it very calmly and attentively for a long time, letting my eyes rest on the light reflected in the crystal of the water-bottle, and on the wall-paper, and wondered why my son was not asleep: for it was night and time for him to go to bed. Then I again began examining the wall-paper: every spiral, silvery flower, square and line—and never imagined that I knew my room so well. Now and then I opened my eyes and saw the black sky with beautiful fiery stripes upon it, then shut them again and saw once more the wall-paper, the bright water-bottle, and wondered why my son was not asleep, for it was night and time for him to go to bed.

Once a shell burst not far from me, making my legs give a jerk, and somebody cried out loudly, louder than the bursting of the shell, and I said to myself: "Somebody is killed," but I did not get up and did not tear my eyes away from the light-blue wall-paper and the water-bottle.

Afterwards I got up, moved about, gave orders, looked at the men's faces, trained the guns, and kept on wondering why my son was not asleep. Once I asked the sergeant, and he explained it to me at length with great detail, and we kept nodding our heads. And he laughed, and his left eyebrow kept twitching, while his eye winked cunningly at somebody behind us. Behind us were somebody's feet—and nothing more.

By this time it was quite light, when suddenly there fell a drop of rain. Rain—just the same as at home, the most ordinary little drops of rain. But it was so sudden and out of place, and we were so afraid of getting wet, that we left our guns, stopped firing, and tried to find shelter anywhere we could.

The sergeant with whom I had only just been speaking got under the gun-carriage and dozed off, although he might have been crushed any minute; the stout artilleryman, for some reason or other, began undressing a corpse, while I began running about the battery in search of something—a cloak or an umbrella. And the same instant over the whole enormous area, where the rain-cloud had burst, a wonderful stillness fell. A belated shrapnel-shot shrieked and burst, and everything grew still—so still that one could hear the stout artilleryman panting and the drops of rain splashing upon the stones and guns. And this soft and continuous sound, that reminded one of autumn—the smell of the moist earth and the stillness—seemed to tear the bloody, savage nightmare asunder for an instant; and when I glanced at the wet, glistening gun it unexpectedly reminded me of something dear and peaceful—my childhood, or perhaps my first love. But in the distance a gun boomed forth particularly loud, and the spell of the momentary lull disappeared; the men

began coming out of their hiding-places as suddenly as they had hid themselves; a gun roared, then another, and once again the weary brain was enveloped by bloody, indissoluble gloom. And nobody noticed when the rain stopped. I only remember seeing the water rolling off the fat, sunken yellow face of the killed artilleryman; so I supposed it rained for rather a long time....

... Before me stood a young volunteer, holding his hand to his cap and reporting to me that the general wanted us to retain our position for only two hours more, when we should be relieved. I was wondering why my son was not in bed, and answered that I could hold on as much as he wished. But suddenly I became interested in the young man's face, probably because of its unusual and striking pallor. I never saw anything whiter than that face: even the dead have more colour than that young, beardless face had. I suppose he became terrified on his way to us, and could not recover himself; and in holding his hand to his cap he was only making an effort to drive away his mad fear by a simple and habitual gesture.

"Are you afraid?" I asked, touching his elbow. But his elbow seemed as if made of wood, and he only smiled and remained silent. Better to say, his lips alone were twitching into a smile, while his eyes were full of youth and terror only—nothing more.

"Are you afraid?" I repeated kindly. His lips twitched, trying to frame a word, and the same instant there happened something incomprehensible, monstrous and supernatural. I felt a draught of warm air upon my right cheek that made me sway—that is all—while before my eyes, in place of the white face, there was something short, blunt and red, and out of it the blood was gushing as out of an uncorked bottle, such as is drawn on badly executed signboards. And that short, red and flowing "something" still seemed to be smiling a sort of smile, a toothless laugh—a red laugh.

I recognised it—that red laugh. I had been searching for it, and I had found it—that

red laugh. Now I understood what there was in all those mutilated, torn, strange bodies. It was a red laugh. It was in the sky, it was in the sun, and soon it was going to overspread the whole earth—that red laugh!

While they, with precision and calmness, like lunatics....

Fragment III

They say there are a great number of madmen in our army as well as in the enemy's. Four lunatic wards have been opened. When I was on the staff our adjutant showed me....

Fragment IV

... Coiled round like snakes. He saw the wire, chopped through at one end, cut the air and coil itself round three soldiers. The barbs tore their uniforms and stuck into their bodies, and, shrieking, the soldiers spun round in frenzy, two of them dragging the third, who was already dead, after them. Then only one remained alive, and he tried to push the two that were dead away from him; but they trailed after him, whirling and rolling over each other and over him; and suddenly all three became motionless.

He told me that no less than two thousand men were lost at that one wire entanglement. While they were hacking at the wire and getting entangled in its serpentine coils, they were pelted by an incessant rain of balls and grape-shot. He assured me it was very terrifying, and if only they had known in which direction to run, that attack would have ended in a panic flight. But ten or twelve continuous lines of wire, and the struggle with it, a whole labyrinth of pitfalls with stakes driven in at the bottom, had muddled them so, that they were quite incapable of defining the direction of escape.

Some, like men blind, fell into the funnel-shaped pits, and hung upon the sharp stakes, pierced through the stomach, twitching convulsively and dancing like toy clowns; they were crushed down by fresh bodies, and soon the whole pit filled to the

edges, and presented a writhing mass of bleeding bodies, dead and living. Hands thrust themselves out of it in all directions, the fingers working convulsively, catching at everything; and those who once got caught in that trap could not get back again: hundreds of fingers, strong and blind, like the claws of a lobster, gripped them firmly by the legs, caught at their clothes, threw them down upon themselves, gouged out their eyes and throttled them. Many seemed as if they were intoxicated, and ran straight at the wire, got caught in it, and remained shrieking, until a bullet finished them.

Generally speaking, they all seemed like people intoxicated: some swore dreadfully, others laughed when the wire caught them by the arm or leg and died there and then. He himself, although he had had nothing to eat or drink since the morning, felt very queer. His head swam, and there were moments when the feeling of terror in him changed to wild rapture, and from rapture again to terror. When somebody struck up a song at his side, he caught up the tune, and soon a whole unanimous chorus broke forth. He did not remember what they sang, only that it was lively in a dancing strain. Yes, they sang, while all around them was red with blood. The very sky seemed to be red, and one could have thought that a catastrophe had overwhelmed the universe—a strange disappearance of colours: the light-blue and green and other habitual peaceful colours had disappeared, while the sun blazed forth in a red flare-light.

"The red laugh," said I.

But he did not understand.

"Yes, and they laughed, as I told you before, like people intoxicated. Perhaps they even danced. There was something of the sort. At least the movements of those three resembled dancing."

He remembers distinctly, when he was shot through the chest and fell, his legs twitched for some time until he lost consciousness, as if he were dancing to music.

And at the present moment, when he thinks of that attack, a strange feeling comes over him: partly fear and partly the desire to experience it all over again.

"And get another ball in your chest?" asked I.

"There now, why should I get a ball each time. But it would not be half bad, old boy to get a medal for bravery."

He was lying on his back with a waxen face, sharp nose, prominent cheek-bones and sunken eyes. He was lying looking like a corpse and dreaming of a medal! Mortification had already set in; he had a high temperature, and in three days' time he was to be thrown into the grave to join the dead; nevertheless he lay smiling dreamily and talking about a medal.

"Have you telegraphed to your mother?" I asked.

He glanced at me with terror, animosity and anger, and did not answer. I was silent, and then the groans and ravings of the wounded became audible. But when I rose to go, he caught my hand in his hot, but still strong one, and fixed his sunken burning eyes upon me in a lost and distressed way.

"What does it all mean, ay? What does it all mean?" asked he in a frightened and persistent manner, pulling at my hand.

"What?"

"Everything ... in general. Now, she is waiting for me. But I cannot. My country—is it possible to make her understand, what my country means."

"The red laugh," answered I.

"Ah! you are always joking, but I am serious. It is indispensable to explain it; but is it possible to make her understand? If you only knew what she says in her letters!—what she writes! And you know her words—are grey-haired. And you—" he looked curiously at my head, pointed his finger and suddenly breaking into a laugh said: "Why, you have grown bald. Have you noticed it?"

"There are no looking-glasses here."

"Many have grown bald and grey. Look here, give me a looking-glass. Give me one! I feel white hair growing out of my head. Give me a looking-glass!" He became delirious, crying and shouting out, and I left the hospital.

That same evening we got up an entertainment—a sad and strange entertainment, at which, amongst the guests, the shadows of the dead assisted. We decided to gather in the evening and have tea, as if we were at home, at a picnic. We got a samovar, we even got a lemon and glasses, and established ourselves under a tree, as if we were at home, at a picnic. Our companions arrived noisily in twos and threes, talking, joking and full of gleeful expectation—but soon grew silent, avoiding to look at each other, for there was something fearful in this meeting of spared men. In tatters, dirty, itching as if we were covered by a dreadful ringworm, with hair neglected, thin and worn, having lost all familiar and habitual aspect, we seemed to see each other for the first time as we gathered round the samovar, and seeing each other, we grew terrified. In vain I looked for a familiar face in this group of disconcerted men—I could not find one. These men, restless, hasty and jerky in their movements, starting at every sound, constantly looking for something behind their backs, trying to fill up that mysterious void into which they were too terrified to look, by superfluous gesticulations—were new, strange men, whom I did not know. And their voices sounded different, articulating the words with difficulty in jerks, easily passing into angry shouts or senseless, irrepressible laughter at the slightest provocation. And everything around us was strange to us. The tree was strange, and the sunset strange, and the water strange, with a peculiar taste and smell, as if we had left the earth and entered into a new world together with the dead—a world of mysterious phenomena and ominous sombre shadows. The sunset was yellow and cold; black, unillumined, motionless clouds hung heavily over it, while the earth under it was black, and our faces in that ill-omened light seemed yellow, like the faces of the dead. We all sat watching the samovar, but it went out, its sides

reflecting the yellowishness and menace of the sunset, and it seemed also an unfamiliar, dead and incomprehensible object.

"Where are we!" asked somebody, and uneasiness and fear sounded in his voice. Somebody sighed; somebody convulsively cracked his fingers; somebody laughed; somebody jumped up and began walking quickly round the table. These last days one could often meet with such men, that were always walking hastily, almost running, at times strangely silent, at times mumbling something in an uncanny way.

"At the war," answered he who had laughed, and again burst into a hollow, lingering laugh, as if something was choking him.

"What is he laughing at?" asked somebody, indignantly. "Look here, stop it!"

The other choked once more, gave a titter and stopped obediently.

It was growing dark, the cloud seemed to be settling down on the earth, and we could with difficulty distinguish each other's yellow phantom-like faces. Somebody asked,—

"And where is Fatty-legs?"

"Fatty-legs" we called a fellow-officer, who, being short, wore enormous water-tight boots.

"He was here just now. Fatty-legs, where are you?"

"Fatty-legs, don't hide. We can smell your boots."

Everybody laughed, but their laugh was interrupted by a rough, indignant voice that sounded out of the darkness,—

"Stop that! Are you not ashamed? Fatty-legs was killed this morning reconnoitring."

"He was here just now. It must be a mistake."

"You imagined it. Heigh-ho! you there, behind the samovar, cut me a slice of lemon."

"And me!"

"And me!"

"The lemon is finished."

"How is that, boys?" sounded a gentle, hurt voice, full of distress and almost crying; "why, I only came for the sake of the lemon."

The other again burst into a hollow and lingering laugh, and nobody checked him. But he soon stopped. He gave a snigger, and was silent. Somebody said,—

"To-morrow we begin the advance on the enemy."

But several voices cried out angrily,—

"Nonsense, advance on the enemy indeed!"

"But you know yourself—"

"Shut up. As if we cannot talk of something else."

The sunset faded. The cloud lifted, and it seemed to grow lighter; the faces became more familiar, and he, who kept circling round us, grew calmer and sat down.

"I wonder what it's like at home now?" asked he, vaguely, and in his voice there sounded a guilty smile.

And once again all became terrible, incomprehensible and strange—so intensely so, that we were filled with horror, almost to the verge of losing consciousness. And we all began talking and shouting at the same time, bustling about, moving our glasses, touching each other's shoulders, hands, knees—and all at once became silent, giving way before the incomprehensible.

"At home?" cried somebody out of the darkness. His voice was hoarse and quivering with emotion, fear and hatred. And some of the words would not come out, as if he had forgotten how to say them.

"A home? What home? Why, is there home anywhere? Don't interrupt me or else I shall fire. At home I used to take a bath every day—can you understand?—a bath with water—water up to the very edges. While now—I do not even wash my face

every day. My head is covered with scurf, and my whole body itches and over it crawl, crawl.... I am going mad from dirt, while you talk of—home! I am like an animal, I despise myself, I cannot recognise myself, and death is not at all terrifying. You tear my brain with your shrapnel-shots. Aim at what you will, all hit my brain—and you can speak of—home. What home? Streets, windows, people, but I would not go into the street now for anything. I should be ashamed to. You brought a samovar here, but I was ashamed to look at it."

The other laughed again. Somebody called out,—

"D—n it all! I shall go home."

"Home?"

"You don't understand what duty is!"

"Home? Listen! he wants to go home!"

There was a burst of laughter and of painful shouts—and again all became silent—giving way before the incomprehensible. And then not only I, but every one of us felt that. It was coming towards us out of those dark, mysterious and strange fields; it was rising from out of those obscure dark ravines, where, maybe, the forgotten and lost among the stones were still dying; it was flowing from the strange, unfamiliar sky. We stood around the dying-out samovar in silence, losing consciousness from horror, while an enormous, shapeless shadow that had risen above the world, looked down upon us from the sky with a steady and silent gaze. Suddenly, quite close to us, probably at the Commander's house, music burst forth, and the frenzied, joyous, loud sounds seemed to flash out into the night and stillness. The band played with frenzied mirth and defiance, hurriedly, discordantly, too loudly, and too joyously, and one could feel that those who were playing, and those who were listening, saw as we did, that same enormous, shapeless shadow, risen above the world. And it was clear the player on the trumpet carried in himself, in his very brain and ears, that same enormous dumb shadow. The abrupt and broken

sound tossed about, jumping and running away from the others, quivering with horror and insanity in its lonesomeness. And the other sounds seemed to be looking round at it, so clumsily they ran, stumbling, falling, and again rising in a disorderly crowd—too loud, too joyous, too close to the black ravines, where most probably the forgotten and lost among the boulders were still dying.

And we stood for a long time around the cold samovar and were silent.

Fragment V

... I was already asleep when the doctor roused me by pushing me cautiously. I woke, and jumping up, cried out, as we all did when anybody wakened us, and rushed to the entrance of our tent. But the doctor held me firmly by the arm, excusing himself,—

"I frightened you, forgive me. I know you want to sleep...."

"Five days and nights ..." I muttered, dozing off. I fell asleep and slept, as it seemed to me for a long time, when the doctor again began speaking, poking me cautiously in the ribs and legs.

"But it is very urgent. Dear fellow, please—it is so pressing. I keep thinking ... I cannot ... I keep thinking, that some of the wounded were left...."

"What wounded? Why, you were bringing them in the whole day long. Leave me in peace. It is not fair—I have not slept for five days!"

"Dear boy, don't be angry," muttered the doctor, awkwardly putting my cap on my head; "everybody is asleep, it's impossible to rouse anybody. I've got hold of an engine and seven carriages, but we're in want of men. I understand.... Dear fellow, I implore you. Everybody is asleep and everybody refuses. I'm afraid of falling asleep myself. I don't remember when I slept last. I believe I'm beginning to have hallucinations. There's a dear fellow, put down your feet, just one—there—there...."

The doctor was pale and tottering, and one could see that if he were only to lie down

for an instant he would fall asleep and remain so without waking for several days running. My legs sank under me, and I am certain I fell asleep as I walked—so suddenly and unexpectedly appeared before us a row of black outlines—the engine and carriages. Near them, scarcely distinguishable in the darkness, some men were wandering about slowly and silently. There was not a single light either on the engine or carriages, and only the shut ash-box threw a dim reddish light on to the rails.

"What is this?" asked I, stepping back.

"Why, we are going in the train. Have you forgotten? We are going in the train," muttered the doctor.

The night was chilly and he was trembling from cold, and as I looked at him I felt the same rapid tickling shiver all over my body.

"D—n you!" I cried loudly. "Just as if you couldn't have taken somebody else."

"Hush! please, hush!" and the doctor caught me by the arm.

Somebody out of the darkness said,—

"If you were to fire a volley from all the guns, nobody would stir. They are all asleep. One could go up and bind them all. Just now I passed quite close to the sentry. He looked at me and did not say a word, never stirred. I suppose he was asleep too. It's a wonder he does not fall down."

He who spoke yawned and his clothes rustled, evidently he was stretching himself. I leant against the side of the carriage, intending to climb up—and was instantly overcome by sleep. Somebody lifted me up from behind and laid me down, while I began pushing him away with my feet, without knowing why, and again I fell asleep, hearing as in a dream fragments of a conversation:

"At the seventh verst."

"Have you forgotten the lanterns?"

"No, he won't go."

"Give them here. Back a little. That's it."

The carriages were jerking backwards and forwards, something was rattling. And gradually, because of all these sounds and because I was lying comfortably and quietly, sleep deserted me. But the doctor was sound asleep, and when I took him by the hand, it was like the hand of a corpse, heavy and limp. The train was now moving slowly and cautiously, shaking slightly, as if groping its way. The student acting as hospital orderly lighted the candle in the lantern, lighting up the walls and the black aperture of the entrance, and said angrily,—

"D—n it! Much they need us by this time. But you had better wake him, before he falls into a sound sleep, for then you won't be able to do anything with him. I know by myself."

We roused the doctor and he sat up, rolling his eyes vacantly. He tried to lie down again, but we did not let him.

"It would be good to have a drop of vodki now," said the student.

We drank a mouthful of brandy, and all sleepiness disappeared entirely. The big black square of the door began to grow pink, then red—somewhere from behind the hills appeared an enormous mute flare of a conflagration: as if the sun was rising in the middle of the night.

"It's far away. About twenty versts."

"I feel cold," said the doctor, snapping his teeth.

The student looked out of the door and beckoned me to come up to him. I looked out: at different points of the horizon motionless flares of similar conflagration stood out in a mute row: as if dozens of suns were rising simultaneously. And now the darkness was not so great. The distant hills were growing more densely black, sharply outlined against the sky in a broken and wavy contour, while in the

foreground all was flooded with a red soft glow, silent and motionless. I glanced at the student; his face was tinged by the same red fantastic colour of blood, that had changed itself into air and light.

"Are there many wounded?" asked I.

He waved his hand.

"A great many madmen. More so than wounded."

"Real madmen?"

"What others can there be?"

He was looking at me, and his eyes wore the same fixed, wild expression, full of cold horror, that the soldier's had, who died of sunstroke.

"Stop that," said I, turning away.

"The doctor is mad also. Just look at him."

The doctor had not heard. He was sitting cross-legged, like a Turk, swaying to and fro, soundlessly moving his lips and finger-tips. And in his gaze there was the same fixed, stupefied, blunt, stricken expression.

"I feel cold," said he, and smiled.

"Hang you all!" cried I, moving away into a corner of the carriage. "What did you call me up for?"

Nobody answered. The student stood gazing out at the mute spreading glow, and the back of his head with its curly hair was youthful; and when I looked at him, I do not know why, but I kept picturing to myself a delicate woman's hand passing through that hair. And this image was so unpleasant, that a feeling of hatred sprang up in my breast, and I could not look at him without a feeling of loathing.

"How old are you?" I asked, but he did not turn his head and did not answer.

The doctor kept on rocking himself.

"I feel cold."

"When I think," said the student, without turning round, "when I think that there are streets, houses, a University...."

He broke off, as if he had said all and was silent. Suddenly the train stopped almost instantaneously, making me knock myself against the wall, and voices were to be heard. We jumped out. In front of the very engine upon the rails lay something, a not very large lump, out of which a leg was projecting.

"Wounded?"

"No, dead. The head is torn off. Say what you will, but I will light the head-light. Otherwise we shall be crushing somebody."

The lump with the protruding leg was thrown aside; for an instant the leg lifted itself up, as if it wanted to run through the air, and all disappeared in a black ditch. The head-light was lit and the engine instantly grew black.

"Listen!" whispered somebody, full of silent terror.

How was it that we had not heard it before! From everywhere—the exact place could not be defined—a groan, unbroken and scraping, wonderfully calm in its breadth, and even indifferent, as it seemed, was borne upon us. We had heard many cries and groans, but this resembled none of those heard before. On the dim reddish surface our eyes could perceive nothing, and therefore the very earth and sky, lit up by a never-rising sun, seemed to be groaning.

"The fifth verst," said the engine-driver.

"That is where it comes from," and the doctor pointed forwards. The student shuddered, and slowly turned towards us.

"What is it? It's terrible to listen to!"

"Let's move on."

We walked along in front of the engine, throwing a dense shadow upon the rails, but

it was not black but of a dim red colour, lit up by the soft motionless flares, that stood out mutely at the different points of the black sky. And with each step we made, that wild unearthly groan, that had no visible source, grew ominously, as if it was the red air, the very earth and sky, that were groaning. In its ceaselessness and strange indifference it recalled at times the noise of grasshoppers in a meadow—the ceaseless noise of grasshoppers in a meadow on a warm summer day. And we came upon dead bodies oftener and oftener. We examined them rapidly and threw them off the rails—those indifferent, calm, limp bodies, that left dark oily stains where the blood had soaked into the earth where they had lain. At first we counted them, but soon got muddled, and ceased. They were many—too many for that ominous night, that breathed cold and groans from each fibre of its being.

"What does it mean?" cried the doctor, and threatened somebody with his fist. "Just listen...."

We were nearing the sixth verst, and the groans were growing distinct and sharp, and we could almost feel the distorted mouths, from which those terrible sounds were issuing.

We looked anxiously into the rosy gloom, so deceitful in its fantastic light, when suddenly, almost at our feet, beside the rails, somebody gave a loud, calling, crying, groan. We found him instantly, that wounded man, whose face seemed to consist only of two eyes, so big they appeared, when the light of the lantern fell on his face. He stopped groaning, and rested his eyes on each of us and our lanterns in turn, and in his glance there was a mad joy at seeing men and lights—and a mad fear that all would disappear like a vision. Perhaps he had seen men with lanterns bending over him many times, but they had always disappeared in a bloody confused nightmare.

We moved on, and almost instantly stumbled against two more wounded, one lying on the rails, the other groaning in a ditch. As we were picking them up, the doctor, trembling with anger, said to me: "Well?" and turned away. Several steps farther on

we met a man wounded slightly, who was walking alone, supporting one arm with the other. He was walking with his head thrown back, straight towards us, but seemed not to notice us, when we drew aside to let him pass. I believe he did not see us. He stopped for an instant near the engine, turned aside, and went past the train.

"You had better get in!" cried the doctor, but he did not answer.

These were the first that we found, and they horrified us. But later on we came upon them oftener and oftener along the rails or near them, and the whole field, lit up by the motionless red flare of the conflagrations, began stirring as if it were alive, breaking out into loud cries, wails, curses and groans. All those dark mounds stirred and crawled about like half-dead lobsters let out of a basket, with outspread legs, scarcely resembling men in their broken, unconscious movements and ponderous immobility. Some were mute and obedient, others groaned, wailed, swore and showed such a passionate hate towards us that were saving them, as if we had brought about that bloodly, indifferent night, and been the cause of all those terrible wounds and their loneliness amidst the night and dead bodies.

The train was full, and our clothes were saturated with blood, as if we had stood for a long time under a rain of blood, while the wounded were still being brought in, and the field, come to life, was stirring wildly as before.

Some of the wounded crawled up themselves, some walked up tottering and falling. One soldier almost ran up to us. His face was smashed, and only one eye remained, burning wildly and terribly, and he was almost naked, as if he had come from the bath-room. Pushing me aside, he caught sight of the doctor, and rapidly seized him by the chest with his left hand.

"I'll smash your snout!" he cried, shaking the doctor, and added slowly and mordantly a coarse oath. "I'll smash your snouts! you rabble!"

The doctor broke away from the soldier, and advancing towards him, cried chokingly,—

"I will have you court-martialled, you scoundrel! To prison with you! You're hindering my work! Scoundrel! Brute!"

We pulled them apart, but the soldier kept on crying out for a long time: "Rabble! I'll smash your snout!"

I was beginning to get exhausted, and went a little way off to have a smoke and rest a bit. The blood, dried to my hands, covered them like a pair of black gloves, making it difficult for me to bend my fingers, so that I kept dropping my cigarettes and matches. And when I succeeded in lighting my cigarette, the tobacco smoke struck me as novel and strange, with quite a peculiar taste, the like of which I never experienced before or after. Just then the ambulance student with whom I had travelled came up to me, and it seemed to me as if I had met with him several years back, but where I could not remember. His tread was firm as if he were marching, and he was staring through me at something farther on and higher up.

"And they are sleeping," said he, as it seemed, quite calmly.

I flew into a rage, as if the reproach was addressed to me.

"You forget, that they fought like lions for ten days."

"And they are sleeping," he repeated, looking through me and higher up. Then he stooped down to me and shaking his finger, continued in the same dry and calm way: "I will tell you—I will tell you...."

"What?"

He stooped still lower towards me, shaking his finger meaningly, and kept repeating the words as if they expressed a completed idea,—

"I will tell you—I will tell you. Tell them...." And still looking at me in the same severe way, he shook his finger once more, then took out his revolver and shot himself in the temple. And this did not surprise or terrify me in the least. Putting my cigarette into the left hand, I felt his wound with my fingers, and went back to the

train.

"The student has shot himself. I believe he is still alive," said I to the doctor. The latter caught hold of his head and groaned.

"D—n him!... There is no room. There, that one will go and shoot himself too, soon. And I give you my word of honour," cried he, angrily and menacingly, "I will do the same! Yes! And let me beg you—just walk back. There is no room. You can lodge a complaint against me if you like."

And he turned away, still shouting, while I went up to the other who was about to commit suicide. He was an ambulance man, and also, I believe, a student. He stood, pressing his forehead against the wall of the carriage, and his shoulders shook with sobs.

"Stop!" said I, touching his quivering shoulder. But he did not turn round or answer, and continued crying. And the back of his head was youthful, like the other student's, and as terrifying, and he stood in an absurd manner with his legs spread out like a person drunk, who is sick; and his neck was covered with blood; probably he had clutched it with his own hands.

"Well?" said I, impatiently.

He pushed himself away from the carriage and, stooping like an old man, with his head bent down, he went away into the darkness, away from all of us. I do not know why, but I followed him, and we walked along for a long time away from the carriages. I believe he was crying, and a feeling of distress stole over me, and I wanted to cry too.

"Stop!" I cried, standing still.

But he walked on, moving his feet ponderously, bent down, looking like an old man with his narrow shoulders and shuffling gait. And soon he disappeared in the reddish haze, that resembled light and yet lit nothing. And I remained alone. To the left of me a row of dim lights floated past—it was the train. I was alone—amidst the dead

and dying. How many more remained? Near me all was still and dead, but farther on the field was stirring, as if it were alive—or so it seemed to me in my loneliness. But the moan did not grow less. It spread along the earth—high-pitched, hopeless, like the cry of a child or the yelping of thousands of cast-away puppies, starving and cold. Like a sharp, endless, icy needle it pierced your brain and slowly moved backwards and forwards—backwards and forwards....

Fragment VI

... They were our own men. During the strange confusion of all movements that reigned in both armies, our own and the enemy's, during the last month, frustrating all orders and plans, we were sure it was the enemy that was approaching us, namely, the 4th corps. And everything was ready for an attack, when somebody clearly discerned our uniforms, and ten minutes later our guess had become a calm and happy certainty: they were our own men. They apparently had recognised us too: they advanced quite calmly, and that calm motion seemed to express the same happy smile of an unexpected meeting.

And when they began firing, we did not understand for some time what it meant, and still continued smiling—under a hail of shrapnel and bullets, that poured down upon us, snatching away at one stroke hundreds of men. Somebody cried out by mistake and—I clearly remember—we all saw that it was the enemy, that it was his uniform and not ours, and instantly answered the fire. About fifteen minutes after the beginning of that strange engagement both my legs were torn off, and I recovered consciousness in the hospital after the amputation.

I asked how the battle had ended, and received an evasive, reassuring answer, by which I could understand that we had been beaten; and afterwards, legless as I was, I was overcome by joy at the thought that now I would be sent home, that I was alive—alive for a long time to come, alive forever. And only a week later I learnt some particulars, that once more filled me with doubts and a new, unexperienced

feeling of terror. Yes, I believe they were our own men after all—and it was with one of our shells, fired out of one of our guns by one of our men, that my legs had been torn off. And nobody could explain how it had happened. Something occurred, something darkened our vision, and two regiments, belonging to the same army, facing each other at a distance of one verst, had been destroying each other for a whole hour in the full conviction that it was the enemy they had before them. Later on the incident was remembered and spoken of reluctantly in half-words and—what is most surprising of all—one could feel that many of the speakers did not admit the mistake even then. That is to say, they admitted it, but thought that it had occurred later on, that in the beginning they really had the enemy before them, but that he disappeared somewhere during the general fray, leaving us in the range of our own shells. Some spoke of it openly, giving precise explanations, which seemed to them plausible and clear. Up to this very minute I cannot say for certain how the strange blunder began, as I saw with equal clearness first our red uniforms and then their orange-coloured ones. And somehow very soon everybody forgot about the incident, forgot about it to such an extent that it was spoken of as a real battle, and in that sense many accounts were written and sent to the papers in all good faith; I read them when I was back home. At first the public's attitude towards us, the wounded in that engagement, was rather strange—we seemed to be less pitied than those wounded in other battles, but soon even that disappeared too. And only new facts, similar to the one just described, and a case in the enemy's army, when two detachments actually destroyed each other almost entirely, having come to a hand-to-hand fight during the night—gives me the right to think that a mistake did occur.

Our doctor, the one that did the amputation, a lean, bony old man, tainted with tobacco smoke and carbolic acid, everlastingly smiling at something through his yellowish-grey thin moustache, said to me, winking his eye,—

"You're in luck to be going home. There's something wrong here."

"What is it?"

"Something's going wrong. In our time it was simpler."

He had taken part in the last European war almost a quarter of a century back and often referred to it with pleasure. But this war he did not understand, and, as I noticed, feared it.

"Yes, there's something wrong," sighed he, and frowned, disappearing in a cloud of tobacco smoke. "I would leave too, if I could."

And bending over me he whispered through his yellow smoked moustache,—

"A time will come when nobody will be able to go away from here. Yes, neither I nor anybody," and in his old eyes, so close to me, I saw the same fixed, dull, stricken expression. And something terrible, unbearable, resembling the fall of thousands of buildings, darted through my head, and growing cold from terror, I whispered,—

"The red laugh."

And he was the first to understand me. He hastily nodded his head and repeated,—

"Yes. The red laugh."

He sat down quite close to me and looking round began whispering rapidly, in a senile way, wagging his sharp, grey little beard.

"You are leaving soon, and I will tell you. Did you ever see a fight in an asylum? No? Well, I saw one. And they fought like sane people. You understand—like sane people." He significantly repeated the last phrase several times.

"Well, and what of that?" asked I, also in a whisper, full of terror.

"Nothing. Like sane people."

"The red laugh," said I.

"They were separated by water being poured over them."

I remembered the rain that had frightened us so, and got angry.

"You are mad, doctor!"

"Not more than you. Not more than you in any case."

He hugged his sharp old knees and chuckled; and, looking at me over his shoulder and still with the echo of that unexpected painful laugh on his parched lips, he winked at me slyly several times, as if we two knew something very funny, that nobody else knew. Then with the solemnity of a professor of black magic, giving a conjuring performance, he lifted his arm and, lowering it slowly, carefully touched with two fingers that part of the blanket, under which my legs would have been, if they had not been cut off.

"And do you understand this?" he asked mysteriously.

Then, in the same solemn and significant manner, he waved his hand towards the row of beds on which the wounded were lying, and repeated,—

"And can you explain this?"

"The wounded?" said I. "The wounded?"

"The wounded," repeated he, like an echo. "The wounded. Legless and armless, with pierced sides, smashed-in chests and torn-out eyes. You understand it? I am very glad. So I suppose you will understand this also?"

With an agility, quite unexpected for his age, he flung himself down and stood on his hands, balancing his legs in the air. His white working clothes turned down, his face grew purple and, looking at me fixedly with a strange upturned gaze, he threw at me with difficulty a few broken words,—

"And this ... do you ... also ... understand?"

"Stop!" whispered I in terror, "or else I will cry out."

He turned over into a natural position, sat down again near my bed, and taking breath, remarked instinctively,—

"And nobody can understand it."

"Yesterday they were firing again."

"Yes, they were firing yesterday and the day before," said he, nodding his head affirmatively.

"I want to go home!" said I in distress. "Doctor, dear fellow, I want to go home. I cannot remain here any longer. At times I cannot bring myself to believe that I have a home, where it is so good."

He was thinking of something and did not answer, and I began to cry.

"My God, I have no legs. I used to love my bicycle so, to walk and run, and now I have no legs. I used to dance my boy on the right foot and he laughed, and now.... Curse you all! What shall I go home for? I am only thirty.... Curse you all!"

And I sobbed and sobbed, as I thought of my dear legs, my fleet, strong legs. Who took them away from me, who dared to take them away!

"Listen," said the doctor, looking aside. "Yesterday I saw a mad soldier that came to us. An enemy's soldier. He was stripped almost naked, beaten and scratched and hungry as an animal, his hair was unkempt, as ours is, and he resembled a savage, primitive man or monkey. He waved his arms about, made grimaces, sang and shouted and wanted to fight. He was fed and driven out again—into the open country. Where could we have kept him? Days and nights they wander about the hills, backwards and forwards in all directions, keeping to no path, having no aim or resting-place, all in tatters like ominous phantoms. They wave their arms, laugh, shout and sing, and when they come across anybody they begin to fight, or, maybe, without noticing each other, pass by. What do they eat? Probably nothing, or, maybe, they feed on the dead bodies together with the beasts, together with those fat wild dogs, that fight in the hills and yelp the whole night long. At night they gather about the fires like monstrous moths or birds awakened by a storm, and you need only light a fire to have in less than half-an-hour a dozen noisy, tattered wild shapes, resembling chilled monkeys, gathering around it. Sometimes they are fired at by

mistake, sometimes on purpose, for they make you lose all patience with their unintelligible, terrifying cries...."

"I want to go home!" cried I, shutting my ears.

But new terrible words, sounding hollow and phantom-like, as if they were passing through a layer of wadding, kept hammering at my brain.

"They are many. They die by hundreds in the precipices and pitfalls, that are made for sound and clever men, in the remnants of the barbed wire and on the stakes; they take part in the regular battles and fight like heroes—always in the foremost ranks, always undaunted, but often turn against their own men. I like them. At present I am only beginning to go mad, and that is why I am sitting and talking to you, but when my senses leave me entirely, I will go out into the open country—I will go out into the open country, and I will give a call—I will give a call, I will gather those brave ones, those knights-errant, around me, and declare war to the whole world. We will enter the towns and villages in a joyous crowd, with music and songs, leaving in our wake a trail of red, in which everything will whirl and dance like fire. Those that remain alive will join us, and our brave army will grow like an avalanche, and will cleanse the whole world. Who said that one must not kill, burn or rob?..."

He was shouting now, that mad doctor, and seemed to have awakened by his cries the slumbering pain of all those around him with their ripped-open chests and sides, torn-out eyes and cut-off legs. The ward filled with a broad, rasping, crying groan, and from all sides pale, yellow, exhausted faces, some eyeless, some so monstrously mutilated that it seemed as if they had returned from hell, turned towards us. And they groaned and listened, and a black shapeless shadow, risen up from the earth, peeped in cautiously through the open door, while the mad doctor went on shouting, stretching out his arms.

"Who said one must not kill, burn, or rob? We will kill and burn and rob. We, a joyous careless band of braves, we will destroy all; their buildings, universities and

museums, and merry as children, full of fiery laughter, we will dance on the ruins. I will proclaim the madhouse our fatherland; all those that have not gone mad—our enemies and madmen; and when I, great, unconquerable and joyous, will begin to reign over the whole world, its sole lord and master, what a glad laugh will ring over the whole universe."

"The red laugh!" cried I, interrupting him. "Help. Again I hear the red laugh!"

"Friends!" continued the doctor, addressing himself to the groaning mutilated shadows. "Friends! we shall have a red moon and a red sun, and the animals will have a merry red coat, and we will skin all those that are too white—that are too white.... You have not tasted blood? It is slightly sticky and slightly warm, but it is red and has such a merry red laugh!..."

Fragment VII

... It was godless and unlawful. The red cross is respected by the whole world, as a thing sacred, and they saw that it was a train full of harmless wounded and not soldiers, and they ought to have warned us of the mine. The poor fellows, they were dreaming of home....

Fragment VIII

... Around a samovar, around a real samovar, out of which the steam was rising as out of an engine—the glass on the lamp had even grown dim, there was so much steam. And the cups were the same, blue outside and white inside, very pretty little cups, a wedding present. My wife's sister gave them—she is a very kind and good woman.

"Is it possible they are all whole?" asked I, incredulously, mixing the sugar in my glass with a clean silver spoon.

"One was broken," said my wife, absently; she was holding the tap open just then and the water was running out easily and prettily.

I laughed.

"What's it about?" asked my brother.

"Oh, nothing. Wheel me into the study just once more. You may as well trouble yourself for the sake of a hero. You idled away your time while I was away, but now that is over. I'll bring you to order," and I began singing, as a joke of course,—"My friends, we're bravely hurrying towards the foe...."

They understood the joke and smiled, only my wife did not lift up her face, she was wiping the cups with a clean embroidered cloth. And in the study I saw once again the light-blue wall-paper, a lamp with a green shade and a table with a water-bottle upon it. And it was a little dusty.

"Pour me some water out of this," ordered I, merrily.

"But you've just had tea."

"That doesn't matter, pour me out some. And you," said I to my wife, "take our son and go into the next room for a minute. Please."

And I drank the water with delight in small sips, while my wife and son were in the next room, and I could not see them.

"That's all right. Now come here. But why is he not in bed by this time?"

"He is so glad you have come home. Darling, go to your father."

But the child began to cry and hid himself at his mother's feet.

"Why is he crying?" asked I, in perplexity, and looked around, "why are you all so pale and silent, following me like shadows?"

My brother burst into a loud laugh and said, "We are not silent."

And my sister said, "We are talking the whole time."

"I will go and see about the supper," said my mother, and hurriedly left the room.

"Yes, you are silent," I repeated, with sudden conviction. "Since morning I have not

heard a word from you; I am the only one who chats, laughs, and makes merry. Are you not glad to see me then? And why do you all avoid looking at me? Have I changed so? Yes, I am changed. But I do not see any looking-glasses about. Have you put them all away? Give me a looking-glass."

"I will bring you one directly," answered my wife, and did not come back for a long time, and the looking-glass was brought by the maid. I looked into it, and—I had seen myself before in the train, at the station—it was the same face, grown older a little, but the most ordinary face. While they, I believe, expected me to cry out and faint—so glad were they when I asked calmly,—

"What is there so unusual in me?"

Laughing louder and louder, my sister left the room hurriedly, and my brother said with calm assurance: "Yes, you have not changed much, only grown slightly bald."

"You can be thankful that my head is not broken," answered I, unconcernedly. "But where do they all disappear?—first one, then another. Wheel me about the rooms, please. What a comfortable armchair, it does not make the slightest sound. How much did it cost? You bet I won't spare the money: I will buy myself such a pair of legs, better.... My bicycle!"

It was hanging on the wall, quite new, only the tyres were limp for want of pumping. A tiny bit of mud had dried to the tyre of the back wheel—the last time I had ridden it. My brother was silent and did not move my chair, and I understood his silence and irresoluteness.

"Only four officers remained alive in our regiment," said I, surlily. "I am very lucky.... You can take it for yourself—take it away to-morrow."

"All right, I will take it," agreed my brother submissively. "Yes, you are lucky. Half of the town is in mourning. While legs—that is really...."

"Of course I am not a postman."

My brother stopped suddenly and asked,—

"But why does your head shake?"

"That's nothing. The doctor said it will pass."

"And your hands too?"

"Yes, yes. And my hands too. It will all pass. Wheel me on, please, I am tired of remaining still."

They upset me, those discontented people, but my gladness returned to me when they began making my bed; a real bed, a handsome bed, that I had bought just before our wedding four years ago. They spread a clean sheet, then they shook the pillows and turned down the blanket, while I watched the solemn proceedings, my eyes full of tears with laughing.

"And now undress me and put me to bed," said I to my wife. "How good it is!"

"This minute, dear."

"Quicker!"

"This minute, dear."

"Why; what are you doing?"

"This minute, dear."

She was standing behind my back, near the toilette table, and I vainly tried to turn my head so as to see her. And suddenly she gave a cry, such a cry as one hears only at the war,—

"What does it all mean?"

She rushed towards me, put her arms round me, and fell down, hiding her head near the stumps of my cut-off legs, from which she turned away with horror, and again pressed herself against them, kissing them, and crying,—

"What have you become? Why, you are only thirty years old. You were young and

handsome. What does it all mean? How cruel men are. What is it for? For whom is it necessary? You, my gentle, poor darling, darling...."

At her cry they all ran up—my mother, sister, nurse—and they all began crying and saying something or other, and fell at my feet wailing. While on the threshold stood my brother, pale, terribly pale, with a trembling jaw, and cried out in a high-pitched voice,—

"I shall go mad with you all. I shall go mad!"

While my mother grovelled at my chair and had not the strength to cry, but only gasped, beating her head against the wheels. And there stood the clean bed with the well-shaken pillows and turned-down blanket, the same bed that I bought just before our wedding four years ago....

Fragment IX

... I was sitting in a warm bath, while my brother was pacing up and down the small room in a troubled manner, sitting down, getting up again, catching hold of the soap and towel, bringing them close up to his short-sighted eyes and again putting them back in their places. At last he stood up with his face to the wall and picking at the plaster with his finger, continued hotly.

"Judge for yourself: one cannot teach people mercy, sense, logic—teach them to act consciously for tens and hundreds of years running with impunity. And, in particular, to act consciously. One can become merciless, lose all sensitiveness, get accustomed to blood and tears and pain—for instance butchers, and some doctors and officers do, but how can one renounce truth, after one has learnt to know it? In my opinion it is impossible. I was taught from infancy not to torture animals and be compassionate; all the books that I read told me the same, and I am painfully sorry for all those that suffer at your cursed war. But time passes, and I am beginning to get accustomed to all those deaths, sufferings and all this blood; I feel that I am

getting less sensitive, less responsive in my everyday life and respond only to great stimulants, but I cannot get accustomed to war; my brain refuses to understand and explain a thing that is senseless in its basis. Millions of people gather at one place and, giving their actions order and regularity, kill each other, and it hurts everybody equally, and all are unhappy—what is it if not madness?" My brother turned round and looked at me inquiringly with his short-sighted, artless eyes.

"The red laugh," said I merrily, splashing about.

"I will tell you the truth," and my brother put his cold hand trustingly on my shoulder, but quickly pulled it back, as if he was frightened at its being naked and wet. "I will tell you the truth; I am very much afraid of going mad. I cannot understand what is happening. I cannot understand it, and it is dreadful. If only anybody could explain it to me, but nobody can. You were at the front, you saw it all—explain it to me."

"Deuce take you," answered I jokingly, splashing about.

"There, and you too," said my brother, sadly. "Nobody is capable of helping me. It's dreadful. And I am beginning to lose all understanding of what is permissible and what is not, what has sense and what is senseless. If I were to seize you suddenly by the throat, at first gently, as if caressing you, and then firmly, and strangle you, what would that be?"

"You are talking nonsense. Nobody does such things."

My brother rubbed his cold hands, smiled softly, and continued,—

"When you were away there were nights when I did not sleep, could not sleep, and strange ideas entered my head—to take a hatchet, for instance, and go and kill everybody—mother, sister, the servants, our dog. Of course they were only fancies, and I would never do so."

"I should hope not," smiled I, splashing about.

"Then, again, I am afraid of knives, of all that is sharp and shining; it seems to me that if I were to take up a knife I should certainly kill somebody with it. Now, is it not true—why should I not plunge it into somebody, if it were sharp enough?"

"The argument is sufficient. What a queer fellow you are, brother! Just open the hot-water tap."

My brother opened the tap, let in some hot water, and continued,—

"Then, again, I am afraid of crowds—of men, when many of them gather together. When of an evening I hear a noise in the street—a loud shout, for instance—I start and believe that ... a massacre has begun. When several men stand together, and I cannot hear what they are talking about, it seems to me that they will suddenly cry out, fall upon each other, and blood will flow. And you know"—he bent mysteriously towards my ear—"the papers are full of murders—strange murders. It is all nonsense that there are as many brains as there are men; mankind has only one intellect, and it is beginning to get muddled. Just feel my head, how hot it is. It is on fire. And sometimes it gets cold, and everything freezes in it, grows benumbed, and changes into a terrible dead-like piece of ice. I must go mad; don't laugh, brother, I must go mad. A quarter of an hour has passed, it's time for you to get out of your bath."

"A little bit more. Just a minute."

It was so good to be sitting again in that bath and listening to the well-known voice, without reflecting upon the words, and to see all the familiar, simple and ordinary things around me: the brass, slightly-green tap, the walls, with the familiar pattern, and all the photographic outfit laid out in order upon the shelves. I would take up photography again, take simple, peaceful landscapes and portraits of my son walking, laughing and playing. One could do that without legs. And I would take up my writing again—about clever books, the progress of human thought, beauty, and peace.

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared I, splashing about.

"What is the matter with you?" asked my brother, growing pale and full of fear.

"Nothing. I am glad to be home."

He smiled at me as one smiles at a child or on one younger than oneself, although I was three years older than he, and grew thoughtful, like a grown-up person or an old man who has great, burdensome old thoughts.

"Where can one fly to?" he asked, shrugging his shoulders. "Every day, at about the same hour, the papers close the circuit, and all mankind gets a shock. This simultaneousness of feelings, tears, thoughts, sufferings and horror deprives me of all stay, and I am like a chip of wood tossing about on the waves, or a bit of dust in a whirlwind. I am forcibly torn away from all that is habitual, and there is one terrible moment every morning, when I seem to hang in the air over the black abyss of insanity. And I shall fall into it, I must fall into it. You don't know all, brother. You don't read the papers, and much is held back from you—you don't know all, brother."

I took all his words for rather a gloomy joke—the usual attitude towards all those who, being touched by insanity, have an inkling of the insanity of war, and gave us a warning. I considered it as a joke, as if I had forgotten for the moment, while I was splashing about in the hot water, all that I had seen over there. "Well, let them hold things back from me, but I must get out of the bath, anyway," said I lightly, and my brother smiled and called my man, and together they lifted me out of my bath and dressed me. Afterwards I had some fragrant tea, which I drank out of my cut-glass tumbler, and said to myself that life was worth living even without a pair of legs; and then they wheeled me into the study up to my table and I prepared for work.

Before the war I was on the staff of a journal, reviewing foreign literature, and now, disposed within my reach, lay a heap of those dear, sweet books in yellow, blue and brown covers. My joy was so great, my delight so profound, that I could not make

up my mind to begin reading them, and I merely fingered the books, passing my hand caressingly over them. I felt a smile spread over my face, most probably a very silly smile, but I could not keep it back, as I contemplated admiringly the type, the vignettes, the severe beautiful simplicity of the drawings. How much thought and sense of beauty there was in them all! How many people had to work and search, how much talent and taste were needed to bring forth that letter, for instance, so simple and elegant, so clever, harmonious and eloquent in its interlaced lines.

"And now I must set to work," said I, seriously, full of respect for work.

And I took up my pen to write the heading and, like a frog tied to a string, my hand began plunging about the paper. The pen stuck into the paper, scratched it, jerked about, slipped irresistibly aside, and brought forth hideous lines, broken, crooked, devoid of all sense. And I did not cry out or move, I grew cold and still as the approaching terrible truth dawned upon me; while my hand danced over the brightly illuminated paper, and each finger shook in such hopeless, living, insane horror, as if they, those fingers, were still at the front and saw the conflagrations and blood, and heard the groans and cries of undescribable pain. They had detached themselves from me, those madly quivering fingers, they were alive, they had become ears and eyes; and, growing cold from horror, without the strength to move or cry out, I watched their wild dance over the clean, bright white page.

And all was quiet. They thought I was working, and had shut all the doors, so as not to interrupt me by any sound—and I was alone in the room, deprived of the power of moving, obediently watching my shaking hands.

"It is nothing," said I aloud, and in the stillness and loneliness of the study my voice sounded hollow and nasty like the voice of a madman. "It is nothing. I will dictate. Why, Milton was blind when he wrote his Paradise Regained. I can think, and that is the chief thing, in fact it is all."

And I began inventing a long clever phrase about the blind Milton, but the words got

confused, fell away as out of a rotten printing frame, and when I came to the end of the phrase I had forgotten the beginning. Then I tried to remember what made me begin, and why I was inventing that strange senseless phrase about Milton, and could not.

"Paradise Regained, Paradise Regained," I repeated, and could not understand what it meant.

And then I saw that I often forgot very many things, that I had become strangely absent-minded, and confused familiar faces; that I forgot words even in a simple conversation, and sometimes, remembering a word, I could not understand its meaning. And I clearly pictured to myself my daily existence. A strange short day, cut off like my legs, with empty mysterious spaces, long hours of unconsciousness or apathy, about which I could remember nothing.

I wanted to call my wife, but could not remember her name—and this did not surprise or frighten me. Softly I whispered,—

"Wife!"

The incoherent, unusual word sounded softly and died away without bringing any response. And all was quiet. They were afraid of disturbing me at my work by any careless sound, and all was quiet—a perfect study for a savant—cosy, quiet, disposing one to meditation and creative energy. "Dear ones, how solicitous they are of me!" I thought tenderly.

... And inspiration, sacred inspiration, came to me. The sun burst forth in my head, and its burning creative rays darted over the whole world, dropping flowers and songs—flowers and songs. And I wrote on through the whole night, feeling no exhaustion, but soaring freely on the wings of mighty, sacred inspiration. I was writing something great—something immortal—flowers and songs—flowers and songs....

PART II

Fragment X

... Happily he died last week on Friday. I say "happily," and repeat that my brother's death was a great blessing to him. A cripple with no legs, palsied, with a smitten soul, he was terrible and piteous in his senseless creative ecstasy. Ever since that night he wrote for two months, without leaving his chair, refusing all food, weeping and scolding whenever we wheeled him away from his table even for a short time. He moved his dry pen over the paper with wonderful rapidity, throwing aside page after page, and kept on writing and writing. Sleep deserted him, and only twice did we succeed in putting him to bed for a few hours, thanks to a strong narcotic, but, later, even a narcotic was powerless to conquer his senseless creative ecstasy. At his order the curtains were kept drawn over all the windows the whole day long and the lamp was allowed to burn, giving the illusion of night, while he wrote on, smoking one cigarette after another. Apparently he was happy, and I never happened to meet any healthy person with such an inspired face—the face of a prophet or of a great poet. He became extremely emaciated, with the waxen transparency of a corpse or of an ascetic, and his hair grew quite grey; he began his senseless work a comparatively young man, but finished it an old one. Sometimes he hurried on his work, writing more than usual, and his pen would stick into the pages and break, but he never noticed it; at such times one durst not touch him, for at the slightest contact he was overtaken by fits of tears and laughter; but sometimes, very rarely, he rested blissfully from his work and talked to me affably, each time asking the same questions: Who was I, what was my name, and since when had I taken up literature.

And then he would condescendingly tell, always using the same words, what an absurd fright he had had at the thought that he had lost his memory and was incapable of work, and how splendidly he had refuted the insane supposition there

and then by beginning his great immortal work about the flowers and songs.

"Of course I do not count upon being recognised by my contemporaries," he would say proudly and unassumingly at the same time, putting his trembling hand on the heap of empty sheets, "but the future—the future—will understand my idea."

He never once remembered the war or his wife and son; the mirage of his endless work engrossed his attention so undividedly that it is doubtful whether he was conscious of anything else. One could walk and talk in his presence—he noticed nothing, and not for an instant did his face lose its expression of terrible tension and inspiration. In the stillness of the night, when everybody was asleep and he alone wove untiringly the endless thread of insanity, he seemed terrible, and only his mother and I ventured to approach him. Once I tried to give him a pencil instead of his dry pen, thinking that perhaps he really wrote something, but on the paper there remained only hideous lines, broken, crooked, devoid of any sense. And he died in the night at his work. I knew my brother well, and his insanity did not come as a surprise to me: the passionate dream of work that filled all his letters from the war and was the stay of his life after his return, had to come into inevitable collision with the impotence of his exhausted, tortured brain, and bring about the catastrophe. And I believe that I have succeeded in reconstructing with sufficient accuracy the successive feelings that brought him to the end during that fatal night. Generally speaking, all that I have written down concerning the war is founded upon the words of my dead brother, often very confused and incoherent; only a few separate episodes were burnt into his brain so deeply and indelibly that I could cite the very words that he used in telling me them. I loved him, and his death weighs upon me like a stone, oppressing my brain by its senselessness. It has added one more loop to the incomprehensible that envelops my head like a web, and has drawn it tight. The whole family has left for the country on a visit to some relatives, and I am alone in the house—the house that my brother loved so. The servants have been paid off, and only the porter from the next door comes every morning to light the fires, while the

rest of the time I am alone, and resemble a fly caught between two window-frames,[1] plunging about and knocking myself against a transparent but insurmountable obstacle. And I feel, I know, that I shall never leave the house. Now, when I am alone, the war possesses me wholly and stands before me like an inscrutable mystery, like a terrible spirit, to which I can give no form. I give it all sorts of shapes: of a headless skeleton on horseback, of a shapeless shadow, born in a black thundercloud, mutely enveloping the earth, but not one of them can give me an answer and extinguish the cold, constant, blunt horror that possesses me.

[1] In Russia the windows have double panes during the winter for the purpose of keeping out the cold.—Trans.

I do not understand war, and I must go mad, like my brother, like the hundreds of men that are sent back from there. And this does not terrify me. The loss of reason seems to me honourable, like the death of a sentry at his post. But the expectancy, the slow and infallible approach of madness, the instantaneous feeling of something enormous falling into an abyss, the unbearable pain of tortured thought.... My heart has grown benumbed, it is dead, and there is no new life for it, but thought—is still alive, still struggling, once mighty as Samson, but now helpless and weak as a child, and—I am sorry for my poor thought. There are moments when I cannot endure the torture of those iron clasps that are compressing my brain; I feel an irrepressible longing to run out into the street, into the marketplace, where there are people and cry out,—

"Stop the war this instant—or else...."

But what "else" is there? Are there any words that can make them come to their senses? Words, in answer to which one cannot find just such other loud and lying words? Or must I fall upon my knees before them and burst into tears? But then, hundreds of thousands are making the earth resound with their weeping, but does that change anything? Or, perhaps, kill myself before them all? Kill myself.

Thousands are dying every day, but does that change anything?

And when I feel my impotence, I am seized with rage—the rage of war, which I hate. Like the doctor, I long to burn down their houses with all their treasures, their wives and children; to poison the water which they drink; to raise all the killed from their graves and throw the corpses into their unclean houses on to their beds. Let them sleep with them as with their wives or mistresses!

Oh, if only I were the Devil! I would transplant all the horrors that hell exhales on to their earth. I would become the lord of all their dreams, and, when they cross their children with a smile before falling asleep, I would rise up before them a black vision.... Yes, I must go mad—only let it come quicker—let it come quicker....

Fragment XI

... Prisoners, a group of trembling, terrified men. When they were led out of the train the crowd gave a roar—the roar of an enormous savage dog, whose chain is too short and not strong enough. The crowd gave a roar and was silent, breathing deeply, while they advanced in a compact group with their hands in their pockets, smiling with their white lips as if currying favour, and stepping out in such a manner as if somebody was just going to strike them with a long stick under their knees from behind. But one of them walked at a short distance from the others, calm, serious, without a smile, and when my eyes met his black ones I saw bare open hatred in them. I saw clearly that he despised me and thought me capable of anything; if I were to begin killing him, unarmed as he was, he would not have cried out or tried to defend or right himself—he considered me capable of anything.

I ran along together with the crowd, to meet his gaze once more, and only succeeded as they were entering a house. He went in the last, letting his companions pass before him, and glanced at me once more. And then I saw such pain, such an abyss of horror and insanity in his big black eyes, as if I had looked into the most wretched soul on earth.

"Who is that with the eyes?" I asked of a soldier of the escort.

"An officer—a madman. There are many such."

"What is his name?"

"He does not say. And his countrymen don't know him. A stranger they picked up. He has been saved from hanging himself once already, but what is there to be done!" ... and the soldier made a vague gesture and disappeared in the door.

And now, this evening I am thinking of him. He is alone amidst the enemy, who, in his opinion, are capable of doing anything with him, and his own people do not know him. He keeps silence and waits patiently for the moment when he will be able to go out of this world altogether. I do not believe that he is mad, and he is no coward; he was the only one who held himself with dignity in that group of trembling, terrified men, whom apparently he does not regard as his own people. What is he thinking about? What a depth of despair must be in the soul of that man, who, dying, does not wish to name himself. Why give his name? He has done with life and men, he has grasped their real value and notices none around him, either his own people or strangers, shout, rage and threaten as they will. I made inquiries about him. He was taken in the last terrible battle, during which several tens of thousands of men lost their lives, and he showed no resistance when he was being taken prisoner; he was unarmed for some reason or other, and, when the soldier, not having noticed it, struck him with his sword, he did not get up or try to act in self-defence. But the wound, unhappily for him, was a slight one.

But, maybe, he is really mad? The soldier said there were many such....

Fragment XII

... It is beginning. When I entered my brother's study yesterday evening he was sitting in his armchair at his table heaped with books. The hallucination disappeared the moment I lighted a candle, but for a long time I could not bring myself to sit

down in the armchair that he had occupied. At first it was terrifying—the empty rooms in which one was constantly hearing rustlings and crackings were the cause of this dread, but afterwards I even liked it—better he than somebody else. Nevertheless, I did not leave the armchair the whole evening; it seemed to me that if I were to get up he would instantly sit down in my place. And I left the room very quickly without looking round. The lamps ought to have been lit in all the rooms, but was it worth while? It would have been perhaps worse if I had seen anything by lamp-light—as it was, there was still room for doubt.

To-day I entered with a candle and there was nobody in the armchair. Evidently it must have been only a shadow. Again I went to the station—I go there every morning now—and saw a whole carriage full of our mad soldiers. It was not opened, but shunted on to another line, and I had time to see several faces through the windows. They were terrible, especially one. Fearfully drawn, the colour of a lemon, with an open black mouth and fixed eyes, it was so like a mask of horror that I could not tear my eyes away from it. And it stared at me, the whole of it, and was motionless, and glided past together with the moving carriage, just as motionless, without the slightest change, never transferring its gaze for an instant. If it were to appear before me this minute in that dark door, I do not believe I should be able to hold out. I made inquiries: there were twenty-two men. The infection is spreading. The papers are hushing up something and, I believe, there is something wrong in our town too. Black, closely-shut carriages have made their appearance—I counted six during one day in different parts of the town. I suppose I shall also go off in one of them one of these days.

And the papers clamour for fresh troops and more blood every day, and I am beginning to understand less and less what it all means. Yesterday I read an article full of suspicion, stating that there were many spies and traitors amongst the people, warning us to be cautious and mindful, and that the wrath of the people would not fail to find out the guilty. What guilty, and guilty of what? As I was returning from

the station in the tram, I heard a strange conversation, I suppose in reference to the same article.

"They ought to be all hung without any trial," said one, looking scrutinisingly at me and all the passengers. "Traitors ought to be hung, yes."

"Without any mercy," confirmed the other. "They've been shown mercy enough!"

I jumped out of the tram. The war was making everybody shed tears, and they were crying too—why, what did it mean? A bloody mist seemed to have enveloped the earth, hiding it from our gaze, and I was beginning to think that the moment of the universal catastrophe was approaching. The red laugh that my brother saw. The madness was coming from over there, from those bloody burnt-out fields, and I felt its cold breath in the air. I am a strong man and have none of those illnesses that corrupt the body, bringing in their train the corruption of the brain also, but I see the infection catching me, and half of my thoughts belong to me no longer. It is worse than the plague and its horrors. One can hide from the plague, take measures, but how can one hide from all-penetrating thought, that knows neither distances nor obstacles?

In the daytime I can still fight against it, but during the night I become, as everybody else does, the slave of my dreams—and my dreams are terrible and full of madness....

Fragment XIII

... Universal mob-fights, senseless and sanguinary. The slightest provocation gives rise to the most savage club-law, knives, stones, logs of wood coming into action, and it is all the same who is being killed—red blood asks to be let loose, and flows willingly and plentifully.

There were six of them, all peasants, and they were being led by three soldiers with loaded guns. In their quaint peasant's dress, simple and primitive like a savage's,

with their quaint countenances, that seemed as if made of clay and adorned with felted wool instead of hair, in the streets of a rich town, under the escort of disciplined soldiers—they resembled slaves of the antique world. They were being led off to the war, and they moved along in obedience to the bayonets as innocent and dull as cattle led to the slaughter-house. In front walked a youth, tall, beardless, with a long goose neck, at the end of which was a motionless little head. His whole body was bent forward like a switch, and he stared at the ground under his feet so fixedly as if his gaze penetrated into the very depths of the earth. The last in the group was a man of small stature, bearded and middle-aged; he had no desire of resistance, and there was no thought in his eyes, but the earth attracted his feet, gripped them tightly, not letting them loose, and he advanced with his body thrown back, as if struggling against a strong wind. And at each step the soldier gave him a push with the butt-end of his rifle, and one leg, tearing itself from the earth, convulsively thrust itself forward, while the other still stuck tightly. The faces of the soldiers were weary and angry, and evidently they had been marching so for a long time; one felt they were tired and indifferent as to how they carried their guns and how they marched, keeping no step, with their feet turned in like countrymen. The senseless, lingering and silent resistance of the peasants seemed to have dimmed their disciplined brains, and they had ceased to understand where they were going and what their goal was.

"Where are you leading them to?" I asked of one of the soldiers. He started, glanced at me, and in the keen flash of his eyes I felt the bayonet as distinctly as if it were already at my breast.

"Go away!" said the soldier; "go away, or else...."

The middle-aged man took advantage of the moment and ran away; he ran with a light trot up to the iron railings of the boulevard and sat down on his heels, as if he were hiding. No animal would have acted so stupidly, so senselessly. But the soldier

became savage. I saw him go close up to him, stoop down and, thrusting his gun into the left hand, strike something soft and flat with the right one. And then again. A crowd was gathering. Laughter and shouts were heard....

Fragment XIV

... In the eleventh row of stalls. Somebody's arms were pressing closely against me on my right- and left-hand side, while far around me in the semi-darkness stuck out motionless heads, tinged with red from the lights upon the stage. And gradually the mass of people, confined in that narrow space, filled me with horror. Everybody was silent, listening to what was being said on the stage or, perhaps, thinking out his own thoughts, but as they were many, they were more audible, for all their silence, than the loud voices of the actors. They were coughing, blowing their noses, making a noise with their feet and clothes, and I could distinctly hear their deep, uneven breathing, that was heating the air. They were terrible, for each of them could become a corpse, and they all had senseless brains. In the calmness of those well-brushed heads, resting upon white, stiff collars, I felt a hurricane of madness ready to burst every second.

My hands grew cold as I thought how many and how terrible they were, and how far away I was from the entrance. They were calm, but what if I were to cry out "Fire!" ... And full of terror, I experienced a painfully passionate desire, of which I cannot think without my hands growing cold and moist. Who could hinder me from crying out—yes, standing up, turning round and crying out: "Fire! Save yourselves—fire!"

A convulsive wave of madness would overwhelm their still limbs. They would jump up, yelling and howling like animals; they would forget that they had wives, sisters, mothers, and would begin casting themselves about like men stricken with sudden blindness, in their madness throttling each other with their white fingers fragrant with scent. The lights would be turned on, and somebody with an ashen face would appear upon the stage, shouting that all was in order and that there was no fire, and

the music, trembling and halting, would begin playing something wildly merry—but they would be deaf to everything—they would be throttling, trampling, and beating the heads of the women, demolishing their ingenious, cunning head-dresses. They would tear at each other's ears, bite off each other's noses, and tear the very clothes off each other's bodies, feeling no shame, for they would be mad. Their sensitive, delicate, beautiful, adorable women would scream and writhe helplessly at their feet, clasping their knees, still believing in their generosity—while they would beat them viciously upon their beautiful upturned faces, trying to force their way towards the entrance. For men are always murderers, and their calmness and generosity is the calmness of a well-fed animal, that knows itself out of danger.

And when, having made corpses of half their number, they would gather at the entrance in a trembling, tattered group of shamefaced animals, with a false smile upon their lips, I would go on to the stage and say with a laugh,—

"It has all happened because you killed my brother." Yes, I would say with a laugh: "It has all happened because you killed my brother."

I must have whispered something aloud, for my neighbour on the right-hand side moved angrily in his chair and said,—

"Hush! You are interrupting."

I felt merry and wanted to play a joke. Assuming a warning severe expression, I stooped towards him.

"What is it?" he asked suspiciously. "Why do you look at me so?"

"Hush, I implore you," whispered I with my lips. "Do you not perceive a smell of burning? There is a fire in the theatre."

He had enough power of will and good sense not to cry out. His face grew pale, his eyes starting out of their sockets and almost protruding over his cheeks, enormous as bladders, but he did not cry out. He rose quietly and, without even thanking me, walked totteringly towards the entrance, convulsively keeping back his steps. He

was afraid of the others guessing about the fire and preventing him getting away—him, the only one worthy of being saved.

I felt disgusted and left the theatre also; besides I did not want to make known my incognito too soon. In the street I looked towards that part of the sky where the war was raging; everything was calm, and the night clouds, yellow from the lights of the town, were slowly and calmly drifting past.

"Perhaps it is only a dream, and there is no war?" thought I, deceived by the stillness of the sky and town.

But a boy sprang out from behind a corner, crying joyously,—

"A terrible battle. Enormous losses. Buy a list of telegrams—night telegrams!"

I read it by the light of the street lamp. Four thousand dead. In the theatre, I should say, there were not more than one thousand. And the whole way home I kept repeating—"Four thousand dead."

Now I am afraid of returning to my empty house. When I put my key into the lock and look at the dumb, flat door, I can feel all its dark empty rooms behind it, which, however, the next minute, a man in a hat would pass through, looking furtively around him. I know the way well, but on the stairs I begin lighting match after match, until I find a candle. I never enter my brother's study, and it is locked with all that it contains. And I sleep in the dining-room, whither I have shifted altogether: there I feel calmer, for the air seems to have still retained the traces of talking and laughter and the merry clang of dishes. Sometimes I distinctly hear the scraping of a dry pen—and when I lay down on my bed....

Fragment XV

... That absurd and terrible dream. It seemed as if the skull had been taken off my brain and, bared and unprotected, it submissively and greedily imbibed all the horrors of those bloody and senseless days. I was lying curled up, occupying only

five feet of space, while my thought embraced the whole world. I saw with the eyes of all mankind, and listened with its ears; I died with the killed, sorrowed and wept with all that were wounded and left behind, and, when blood flowed out of anybody's body, I felt the pain of the wound and suffered. Even all that had not happened and was far away, I saw as clearly as if it had happened and was close by, and there was no end to the sufferings of my bared brain.

Those children, those innocent little children. I saw them in the street playing at war and chasing each other, and one of them was already crying in a high-pitched, childish voice—and something shrank within me from horror and disgust. And I went home; night came on—and in fiery dreams, resembling midnight conflagrations, those innocent little children changed into a band of child-murderers.

Something was ominously burning in a broad red glare, and in the smoke there swarmed monstrous, misshapen children, with heads of grown-up murderers. They were jumping lightly and nimbly, like young goats at play, and were breathing with difficulty, like sick people. Their mouths, resembling the jaws of toads or frogs, opened widely and convulsively; behind the transparent skin of their naked bodies the red blood was coursing angrily—and they were killing each other at play. They were the most terrible of all that I had seen, for they were little and could penetrate everywhere.

I was looking out of the window and one of the little ones noticed me, smiled, and with his eyes asked me to let him in.

"I want to go to you," he said.

"You will kill me."

"I want to go to you," he said, growing suddenly pale, and began scrambling up the white wall like a rat—just like a hungry rat. He kept losing his footing, and squealed and darted about the wall with such rapidity, that I could not follow his impetuous, sudden movements.

"He can crawl in under the door," said I to myself with horror, and as if he had guessed my thought, he grew thin and long and, waving the end of his tail rapidly, he crawled into the dark crack under the front door. But I had time to hide myself under the blanket, and heard him searching for me in the dark rooms, cautiously stepping along with his tiny bare feet. He approached my room very slowly, stopping now and then, and at last entered it; but I did not hear any sound, either rustle or movement for a long time, as if there was nobody near my bed. And then somebody's little hand began lifting up the edge of the coverlet, and I could feel the cold air of the room upon my face and chest. I held the blanket tightly, but it persisted in lifting itself up on all sides; and all of a sudden my feet became so cold, as if I had dipped them into water. Now they were lying unprotected in the chill darkness of the room, and he was looking at them.

In the yard, behind the house, a dog barked and was silent, and I heard the trail of its chain as it went into its kennel. But he still watched my naked feet and kept silence; I knew he was there by the unendurable horror that was binding me like death with a stony, sepulchral immobility. If I could have cried out, I would have awakened the whole town, the whole world, but my voice was dead within me, and I lay submissive and motionless, feeling the little cold hands moving over my body and nearing my throat.

"I cannot!" I groaned, gasping and, waking up for an instant, I saw the vigilant darkness of the night, mysterious and living, and again I believe I fell asleep....

"Don't fear," said my brother, sitting down upon my bed, and the bed creaked, so heavy he was dead. "Never fear, you see it is a dream. You only imagine that you were being strangled, while in reality you are asleep in the dark rooms, where there is not a soul, and I am in my study writing. Nobody understood what I wrote about, and you derided me as one insane, but now I will tell you the truth. I am writing about the red laugh. Do you see it?"

Something enormous, red and bloody, was standing before me, laughing a toothless laugh.

"That is the red laugh. When the earth goes mad, it begins to laugh like that. You know, the earth has gone mad. There are no more flowers or songs on it; it has become round, smooth and red like a scalped head. Do you see it?"

"Yes, I see it. It is laughing."

"Look what its brain is like. It is red, like bloody porridge, and is muddled."

"It is crying out."

"It is in pain. It has no flowers or songs. And now—let me lie down upon you."

"You are heavy and I am afraid."

"We, the dead, lie down on the living. Do you feel warm?"

"Yes."

"Are you comfortable?"

"I am dying."

"Awake and cry out. Awake and cry out. I am going away....."

Fragment XVI

.....To-day is the eighth day of the battle. It began last Friday, and Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday have passed—and Friday has come again and is gone—and it is still going on. Both armies, hundreds of thousands of men, are standing in front of each other, never flinching, sending explosive, crashing projectiles without stopping, and every instant living men are turned into corpses. The roar and incessant vibration of the air has made the very sky shudder and gather black thunderclouds above their heads,—while they continue to stand in front of each other, never flinching and still killing each other. If a man does not sleep for three nights, he becomes ill and loses his memory, but they have not slept for a

whole week and are all mad. That is why they feel no pain, do not retreat, and go on fighting until they have killed all to the last man. They say that some of the detachments came to the end of their ammunition, but still they fought on, using their fists and stones, and biting at each other like dogs. If the remnants of those regiments return home, they will have canine teeth like wolves—but they will not return, they have gone mad and die, every man of them. They have gone mad. Everything is muddled in their heads, and they cease to understand anything! If they were to be turned round suddenly and sharply, they would begin firing at their own men, thinking that they were firing at the enemy.

Strange rumours—strange rumours that are told in a whisper, those repeating them turning white from horror and dreadful forebodings. Brother, brother, listen what is being told of the red laugh! They say phantom regiments have appeared, large bands of shadows, the exact copy of living men. At night, when the men forget themselves for an instant in sleep, or in the thick of the day's fight, when the bright day itself seems a phantom, they suddenly appear, firing out of phantom guns, filling the air with phantom noises; and men, living but insane men, astounded by the suddenness of the attack, fight to the death against the phantom enemy, go mad from horror, become grey in an instant and die. The phantoms disappear as suddenly as they appear, and all becomes still, while the earth is strewn with fresh mutilated bodies. Who killed them? You know, brother, who killed them. When there is a lull between two battles and the enemy is far off, suddenly in the darkness of the night there resounds a solitary, frightened shot. And all jump up and begin firing into the darkness, into the silent dumb darkness, for a long time, for whole hours. Whom do they see there? Whose terrible, silent shape, full of horror and madness appears before them? You know, brother, and I know, but men do not know yet, but they have a foreboding, and ask, turning pale: "Why are there so many madmen? Before there never used to be so many."

"Before there never used to be so many madmen," they say, turning pale, trying to

believe that now it is as before, and that the universal violence done to the brains of humanity would have no effect upon their weak little intellects.

"Why, men fought before and always have fought, and nothing of the sort happened. Strife is a law of nature," they say with conviction and calmness, growing pale, nevertheless, seeking for the doctor with their eyes, and calling out hurriedly: "Water, quick, a glass of water!"

They would willingly become idiots, those people, only not to feel their intellect reeling and their reason succumbing in the hopeless combat with insanity.

In those days, when men over there were constantly being turned into corpses, I could find no peace, and sought the society of my fellow-men; and I heard many conversations and saw many false smiling faces, that asserted that the war was far off and in no way concerned them. But much oftener I met naked, frank horror, hopeless, bitter tears and frenzied cries of despair, when the great Mind itself cried out of man its last prayer, its last curse, with all the intensity of its power,—

"Whenever will the senseless carnage end?"

At some friends', whom I had not seen for a long time, perhaps several years, I unexpectedly met a mad officer, invalided from the war. He was a schoolfellow of mine, but I did not recognise him: if he had lain for a year in his grave, he would have returned more like himself than he was then. His hair was grey and his face quite white, his features were but little changed,—but he was always silent, and seemed to be listening to something, and this stamped upon his face a look of such formidable remoteness, such indifference to all around him, that it was fearful to talk to him. His relatives were told he went mad in the following circumstances: they were in the reserve, while the neighbouring regiment was ordered to make a bayonet charge. The men rushed shouting "Hurrah" so loudly as almost to drown the noise of the cannon,—and suddenly the guns ceased firing, the "Hurrah" ceased also, and a sepulchral stillness ensued: they had run up to the enemy and were charging him

with their bayonets. And his reason succumbed to that stillness.

Now he is calm when people make a noise around him, talk and shout, he listens and waits, but if only there is a moment's silence, he catches hold of his head, rushes up to the wall or against the furniture, and falls down in a fit resembling epilepsy. He has many relations, and they take turns and surround him with sound, but there remain the nights, long solitary nights—but here his father, a grey-haired old man, slightly wandering in his mind too, helped. He hung the walls of his son's room with loudly ticking clocks, that constantly struck the hour at different times, and at present he is arranging a wheel, resembling an incessantly-going rattle. None of them lose hope that he will recover, as he is only twenty-seven, and their house is even gay. He is dressed very cleanly—not in his uniform—great care is taken of his appearance and he is even handsome with his white hair, young, thoughtful face and well-bred, slow, tired movements.

When I was told all, I went up and kissed his hand, his white languid hand, which will never more be lifted for a blow—and this did not seem to surprise anybody very much. Only his young sister smiled at me with her eyes, and afterwards showed me such attention that it seemed as if I were her betrothed and she loved me more than anybody in the world. She showed me such attention that I very nearly told her about my dark empty rooms, in which I am worse than alone—miserable heart, that never loses hope.... And she managed that we remained alone.

"How pale you are and what dark rings you have under your eyes," she said kindly. "Are you ill? Are you grieving for your brother?"

"I am grieving for everybody. And I do not feel well."

"I know why you kissed my brother's hand. They did not understand. Because he is mad, yes?"

"Yes, because he is mad."

She grew thoughtful and looked very much like her brother, only younger.

"And will you," she stopped and blushed, but did not lower her eyes, "will you let me kiss your hand?"

I kneeled before her and said: "Bless me."

She paled slightly, drew back and whispered with her lips,—

"I do not believe."

"And I also."

For an instant her hand touched my head, and the instant was gone.

"Do you know," she said, "I am leaving for the war."

"Go? But you will not be able to bear it."

"I do not know. But they need help, the same as you or my brother. It is not their fault. Will you remember me?"

"Yes. And you?"

"And I will remember you too. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye for ever!"

And I grew calm and felt happier, as if I had passed through the most terrible that there is in death and madness. And yesterday, for the first time, I entered my house calmly without any fear, and opened my brother's study and sat for a long time at his table. And when in the night I suddenly awoke as if from a push, and heard the scraping of the dry pen upon the paper, I was not frightened, but thought to myself almost with a smile,—

"Work on, brother, work on! Your pen is not dry, it is steeped in living human blood. Let your paper seem empty—in its ominous emptiness it is more eloquent of war and reason than all that is written by the most clever men. Work on, brother, work on!"

... And this morning I read that the battle is still raging, and again I was possessed with a dread fear and a feeling of something falling upon my brain. It is coming, it is

near; it is already standing upon the threshold of these empty, light rooms. Remember, remember me, dear girl; I am going mad. Thirty thousand dead, thirty thousand dead!...

Fragment XVII

... A fight is going on in the town. There are dark and fearful rumours....

Fragment XVIII

This morning, looking through the endless list of killed in the newspaper, I saw a familiar name; my sister's affianced husband, an officer called for military service at the same time as my dead brother, was killed. And, an hour later, the postman handed me a letter addressed to my brother, and I recognised the handwriting of the deceased on the envelope: the dead was writing to the dead. But still it was better so than the dead writing to the living. A mother was pointed out to me who kept receiving letters from her son for a whole month after she had read of his terrible death in the papers: he had been torn to pieces by a shell. He was a fond son, and each letter was full of endearing and encouraging words and youthful, naïve hopes of happiness. He was dead, but wrote of life with a fearful accuracy every day, and the mother ceased to believe in his death; and when a day passed without any letter, then a second and a third, and the endless silence of death ensued, she took a large old-fashioned revolver belonging to her son in both hands, and shot herself in the breast. I believe she survived, but I am not sure; I never heard.

I looked at the envelope for a long time, and thought: He held it in his hands, he bought it somewhere, he gave the money to pay for it, and his servant went to fetch it from some shop; he sealed and perhaps posted it himself. Then the wheel of the complex machine called "post" came into action, and the letter glided past forest, fields and towns, passing from hand to hand, but rushing infallibly towards its destination. He put on his boots that last morning, while it went gliding on; he was

killed, but it glided on; he was thrown into a pit and covered up with dead bodies and earth, while it still glided on past forests, fields and towns, a living phantom in a grey, stamped envelope. And now I was holding it in my hands.

Here are the contents of the letter. It was written with a pencil on scraps of paper, and was not finished: something interfered.

"... Only now do I understand the great joy of war, the ancient, primitive delight of killing man—clever, scheming, artful man, immeasurably more interesting than the most ravenous animal. To be ever taking life is as good as playing at lawn-tennis with planets and stars. Poor friend, what a pity you are not with us, but are constrained to weary away your time amidst an unleavened daily existence! In the atmosphere of death you would have found all that your restless, noble heart yearned for. A bloody feast—what truth there is in this somewhat hackneyed comparison! We go about up to our knees in blood, and this red wine, as my jolly men call it in jest, makes our heads swim. To drink the blood of one's enemy is not at all such a stupid custom as we think: they knew what they were doing....

"... The crows are cawing. Do you hear, the crows are cawing. From whence have they all gathered? The sky is black with them; they settle down beside us, having lost all fear, and follow us everywhere; and we are always underneath them, like under a black lace sunshade or a moving tree with black leaves. One of them approached quite close to my face and wanted to peck at it: he thought, most probably, that I was dead. The crows are cawing, and this troubles me a little. From whence have they all gathered?...

"... Yesterday we stabbed them all sleeping. We approached stealthily, scarcely touching the ground with our feet, as if we were stalking wild ducks. We stole up to them so skilfully and cautiously that we did not touch a corpse and did not scare one single crow. We stole up like shadows, and the night hid us. I killed the sentry myself—knocked him down and strangled him with my hands, so as not to let him

cry out. You understand: the slightest sound, and all would have been lost. But he did not cry out; he had no time, I believe, even to guess that he was being killed.

"They were all sleeping around the smouldering fires—sleeping peacefully, as if they were at home in their beds. We hacked about us for more than an hour, and only a few had time to awake before they received their death-blow. They howled, and of course begged for mercy. They used their teeth. One bit off a finger on my left hand, with which I was incautiously holding his head. He bit off my finger, but I twisted his head clean off: how do you think—are we quits? How they did not all wake up I cannot imagine. One could hear their bones crackling and their bodies being hacked. Afterwards we stripped all naked and divided their clothes amongst ourselves. My friend, don't get angry over a joke. With your susceptibility you will say this savours of marauding, but then we are almost naked ourselves; our clothes are quite worn-out. I have been wearing a woman's jacket for a long time, and resemble more a ... than an officer of a victorious army. By the bye, you are, I believe, married, and it is not quite right for you to read such things. But ... you understand? Women. D—n it, I am young, and thirst for love! Stop a minute: I believe it was you who was engaged to be married? It was you, was it not, who showed me the portrait of a young girl and told me she was your promised bride?—and there was something sad, something very sad and mournful underneath it. And you cried. That was a long time ago, and I remember it but confusedly; there is no time for softness at war. And you cried. What did you cry about? What was there written that was as sad and mournful as a drooping flower? And you kept crying and crying.... Were you not ashamed, an officer, to cry?

"... The crows are cawing. Do you hear, friend, the crows are cawing. What do they want?"

Further on the pencil-written lines were effaced and it was impossible to decipher the signature. And strange to say the dead man called forth no compassion in me. I

distinctly pictured to myself his face, in which all was soft and delicate as a woman's: the colour of his cheeks, the clearness and morning freshness of the eyes, the beard so bushy and soft, that a woman could almost have adorned herself with it. He liked books, flowers and music, feared all that was coarse, and wrote poetry,—my brother, as a critic, declared that he wrote very good poetry. And I could not connect all that I knew and remembered of him with the cawing crows, bloody carnage and death.

... The crows are cawing....

And suddenly for one mad, unutterably happy instant, I clearly saw that all was a lie and that there was no war. There were no killed, no corpses, there was no anguish of reeling, helpless thought. I was sleeping on my back and seeing a dream, as I used to in my childhood: the silent dread rooms, devastated by death and terror, and myself with a wild letter in my hand. My brother was living, and they were all sitting at the tea-table, and I could hear the noise of the crockery.

... The crows are cawing....

No, it is but true. Unhappy earth, it is true. The crows are cawing. It is not the invention of an idle scribbler, aiming at cheap effects, or of a madman, who has lost his senses. The crows are cawing. Where is my brother? He was noble-hearted and gentle and wished no one evil. Where is he? I am asking you, you cursed murderers. I am asking you, you cursed murderers, crows sitting on carrion, wretched, imbecile animals, before the whole world. For you are animals. What did you kill my brother for? If you had a face, I would give you a blow upon it, but you have no face, you have only the snout of a wild beast. You pretend that you are men, but I see claws under your gloves and the flat skull of an animal under your hat; hidden beneath your clever conversation I hear insanity rattling its rusty chains. And with all the power of my grief, my anguish and dishonoured thought—I curse you, you wretched, imbecile animals!

Fragment the Last

"... We look to you for the regeneration of human life!"

So shouted a speaker, holding on with difficulty to a small pillar, balancing himself with his arm, and waving a flag with a large inscription half-hidden in its folds: "Down with the war!"

"You, who are young, you, whose lives are only just beginning, save yourselves and the future generations from this horror, from this madness. It is unbearable, our eyes are drowned with blood. The sky is falling upon us, the earth is giving way under our feet. Kind people...."

The crowd was buzzing enigmatically and the voice of the speaker was drowned at times in the living threatening noise.

"... Suppose I am mad, but I am speaking the truth. My father and brother are rotting over there like carrion. Make bonfires, dig pits and destroy, bury all your arms. Demolish all the barracks, and strip all the men of their bright clothes of madness, tear them off. One cannot bear it.... Men are dying...."

Somebody very tall gave him a blow and knocked him off the pillar; the flag rose once again and fell. I had no time to see the face of the man who struck him, as instantly everything turned into a nightmare. Everything became commotion, became agitated and howled; stones and logs of wood went flying through the air, fists, that were beating somebody, appeared above the heads. The crowd, like a living, roaring wave, lifted me up, carried me along several steps and threw me violently against a fence, then carried me back and away somewhere, and at last pressed me against a high pile of wood, that inclined forwards, threatening to fall down upon somebody's head. Something crackled and rattled against the beams in rapid dry succession; an instant's stillness—and again a roar burst forth, enormous, open-mouthed, terrible in its overwhelming power. And then the dry rapid crackling was heard again and somebody fell down near me with the blood flowing out of a

red hole where his eye had been. And a heavy log of wood came whirling through the air and struck me in the face, and I fell down and began crawling, whither I knew not, amidst the trampling feet, and came to an open space. Then I climbed over some fences, breaking all my nails, clambered up piles of wood; one pile fell to pieces under me and I fell amidst a cataract of thumping logs; at last I succeeded with difficulty in getting out of a closed-in space—while behind me all crashed, roared, howled and crackled, trying to overtake me. A bell was ringing somewhere; something fell with a thundering crash, as if it were a five-storey house. The twilight seemed to have stopped still, keeping back the night, and the roar and shots, as if steeped in red, had driven away the darkness. Jumping over the last fence I found myself in a narrow, crooked lane resembling a corridor, between two obscure walls, and began running. I ran for a long time, but the lane seemed to have no outlet: it was terminated by a wall, behind which piles of wood and scaffolding rose up black against the sky. And again I climbed over the mobile, shifting piles, falling into pits, where all was still and smelt of damp wood, getting out of them again into the open, not daring to look back, for I knew quite well what was happening by the dull reddish colour that tinged the black beams and made them look like murdered giants. My smashed face had stopped bleeding and felt numbed and strange, like a mask of plaster; and the pain had almost quite disappeared. I believe I fainted and lost consciousness in one of the black holes into which I had fallen, but I am not certain whether I only imagined it or was it really so, as I can only remember myself running.

I rushed about the unfamiliar streets, that had no lamps, past the black death-like houses for a long time, unable to find my way out of the dumb labyrinth. I ought to have stopped and looked around me to define the necessary direction, but it was impossible to do so: the still distant din and howl was following at my heels and gradually overtaking me; sometimes, at a sudden turning, it struck me in the face, red and enveloped in clouds of livid, curling smoke, and then I turned back and

rushed on until it was at my back once more. At one corner I saw a strip of light, that disappeared at my approach: it was a shop that was being hastily closed. I caught a glimpse of the counter and a barrel through a wide chink, but suddenly all became enveloped in a silent, crouching gloom. Not far from the shop I met a man, who was running towards me, and we almost collided in the darkness, stopping short at the distance of two steps from each other. I do not know who he was: I only saw the dark alert outline.

"Are you coming from over there?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And where are you running to?"

"Home."

"Ah! Home?"

He was silent for an instant and suddenly flung himself upon me, trying to bring me to the ground, and his cold fingers searched hungrily for my throat, but got entangled in my clothes. I bit his hand, loosened myself from his grip and set off running through the deserted streets with him after me, stamping loudly with his boots, for a long time. Then he stopped—I suppose the bite hurt him.

I do not know how I hit upon my street. It had no lamps either and the houses had not a single light, as if they were dead, and I would have run past without recognising it, if I had not by chance lifted my eyes and seen my house. But I hesitated for some time: the house in which I had lived for so many years seemed to me unfamiliar in that strange dead street, in which my loud breathing awakened an extraordinary and mournful echo. Then I was seized by a sudden wild terror at the thought that I had lost my key when I fell, and I found it with difficulty, although it was there all the time in the pocket of my coat. And when I turned the lock the echo repeated the sound so loudly and extraordinarily, as if all the doors of those dead houses in the whole street had opened simultaneously.

... At first I hid myself in the cellar, but it was terrible and dull down there, and something began darting before my eyes, so I quietly stole into the rooms. Groping my way in the dark I locked all the doors and after a short meditation decided to barricade them with the furniture, but the sound of the furniture being moved was terribly loud in the empty rooms and terrified me. "I shall await death thus. It's all the same," I decided. There was some water, very warm water in the water-jug, and I washed my face in the dark and wiped it with a sheet. The parts that were smashed galled and smarted much, and I felt a desire to look at myself in the looking-glass. I lit a match—and in its uneven, faint light there glanced at me from out of the darkness something so hideous and terrible, that I hastily threw the match upon the floor. I believe my nose was broken. "It makes no difference now," said I to myself. "Nobody will mind."

And I felt gay. With strange grimaces and contortions of the body, as if I were personating a thief on the stage, I went into the larder and began searching for food. I clearly saw the unsuitableness of all my grimaces, but it pleased me so. And I ate with the same contortions, pretending that I was very hungry.

But the darkness and quiet frightened me. I opened the window into the yard and began listening. At first, probably as the traffic had ceased, all seemed to me to be quite still. And I heard no shots. But soon I clearly distinguished a distant din of voices: shouts, the crash of something falling, a laugh. The sounds grew louder perceptibly. I looked at the sky; it was livid and sweeping past rapidly. And the coach-house opposite me, and the paving of the streets, and the dog's kennel, all were tinged with the same reddish glare. I called the dog softly,—

"Neptune!"

But nothing stirred in the kennel, and near it I distinguished in the livid light a shining piece of broken chain. The distant cries and noise of something falling kept on growing, and I shut the window.

"They are coming here!" I said to myself, and began looking for some place to hide myself. I opened the stoves, fumbled at the grate, opened the cupboards, but they would not do. I made the round of all the rooms, excepting the study, into which I did not want to look. I knew he was sitting in his armchair at his table, heaped with books, and this was unpleasant to me at that moment.

Gradually it began to appear that I was not alone: around me people were silently moving about in the darkness. They almost touched me, and once somebody's breath sent a cold thrill through the back of my head.

"Who is there?" I asked in a whisper, but nobody answered.

And when I moved on they followed me, silent and terrible. I knew that it was only a hallucination because I was ill and apparently feverish, but I could not conquer my fear, from which I was trembling all over as if I had the ague. I felt my head: it was hot as if on fire.

"I had better go there," said I to myself. "He is one of my own people after all."

He was sitting in his armchair at his table, heaped with books, and did not disappear as he did the last time, but remained seated. The reddish light was making its way through the red drawn curtains into the room, but did not light up anything, and he was scarcely visible. I sat down at a distance from him on the couch and waited. All was still in the room, while from outside the even buzzing noise, the crash of something falling and disjointed cries were borne in upon us. And they were nearing us. The livid light became brighter and brighter, and I could distinguish him in his armchair—his black, iron-like profile, outlined by a narrow stripe of red.

"Brother!" I said.

But he kept silence, immobile and black, like a monument. A board cracked in the next room and suddenly all became so extraordinarily still, as it is where there are many dead. All the sounds died away and the livid light itself assumed a scarcely perceptible shade of deathliness and stillness and became motionless and a little

dim. I thought the stillness was coming from my brother and told him so.

"No, it is not from me," he answered. "Look out of the window."

I pulled the curtains aside and staggered back.

"So that's what it is!" said I.

"Call my wife; she has not seen that yet," ordered my brother.

She was sitting in the dining-room sewing something and, seeing my face, rose obediently, stuck her needle into her work and followed me. I pulled back the curtains from all the windows and the livid light flowed in through the broad openings unhindered, but somehow did not make the room any lighter: it was just as dark and only the big red squares of the windows burned brightly.

We went up to the window. Before the house there stretched an even, fiery red sky, without a single cloud, star or sun, and ended at the horizon, while below it lay just such an even dark red field, and it was covered with dead bodies. All the corpses were naked and lay with their legs towards us, so that we could only see their feet and triangular heads. And all was still; apparently they were all dead, and there were no wounded left behind in that endless field.

"Their number is growing," said my brother.

He was standing at the window also, and all were there: my mother, sister and everybody that lived in the house. I could not distinguish their faces, and could recognise them only by their voices.

"It only seems so," said my sister.

"No, it's true. Just look."

And, truly, there seemed to be more bodies. We looked attentively for the reason and found it: at the side of a corpse, where there was a free space, a fresh corpse suddenly appeared: apparently the earth was throwing them up. And all the unoccupied spaces filled rapidly, and the earth grew lighter from the light pink

bodies, that were lying side by side with their feet towards us. And the room grew lighter filled with a light pink dead light.

"Look, there is not enough room for them," said my brother.

And my mother answered,—

"There is one here already."

We looked round: behind us on the floor lay a naked, light pink body with its head thrown back. And instantly at its side there appeared a second, and a third. And the earth threw them up one after the other, and soon the orderly rows of light pink dead bodies filled all the rooms.

"They are in the nursery too," said the nurse. "I saw them."

"We must go away," said my sister.

"But we cannot pass," said my brother.

"Look!"

And sure enough, they were lying close together, arm to arm, and their naked feet were touching us. And suddenly they stirred and swayed and rose up in the same orderly rows: the earth was throwing up new bodies, and they were lifting the first ones upwards.

"They will smother us!" said I. "Let us save ourselves through the window."

"We cannot!" cried my brother. "We cannot! Look what is there!"

... Behind the window, in a livid, motionless light, stood the Red Laugh.

THE END

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