

A Writer's Diary

F Y O D O R D O S T O E V S K Y

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The Meek One: A Fantastic Story

Author's Foreword

I apologize to my readers for providing, in place of my *Diary* in its usual form, merely a story this time. However, I truly have been working on this story for the better part of a month. In any case, I beg the indulgence of my readers.

Now, a few words about the story itself. I called it "fantastic," even though I consider it to be realistic to the highest degree. But it truly does contain something fantastic, which is the form of the story itself, and it is this which I find necessary to explain beforehand.

The fact is, this is neither a story nor a memoir. Imagine a husband whose wife only a few hours earlier has killed herself by jumping out a window; her body now lies on the table before him. He is in a state of bewilderment and still has not managed to collect his thoughts. He paces through the apartment, trying to make sense of what has happened, to "focus his thoughts." He is, as well, an out-an-out hypochondriac, the sort who talks to himself. And so he is talking to himself, telling the story, and trying to *make it clear* to himself. Despite the apparent coherence of his speech, he contradicts himself several times, both logically and emotionally. At times he justifies himself and blames her, then he launches into explanations of things which have little to do with the case: we see here the crudity of his thoughts and spirit, and we see deep feeling as well. Little by little he really does *make it clear* and "focus his thoughts." The series of memories he has evoked irresistibly leads him at last to *truth*; and truth irresistibly

elevates his mind and his spirit. By the end, even the tone of the story changes as compared with its confused beginning. The truth is revealed quite clearly and distinctly to the unhappy man—at least as far as he is concerned.

That is the subject. Of course, the process of the narrative goes on for a few hours, with breaks and interludes and in a confused and inconsistent form: at one point he talks to himself; then he seems to be addressing an invisible listener, a judge of some sort. But so it always happens in real life. If a stenographer had been able to eavesdrop and write down everything he said, it would be somewhat rougher and less finished than I have it here; still, it seems to me that the psychological structure would perhaps be just the same. And so it is this assumption of a stenographer recording everything (and whose account I simply polished) that I call the fantastic element of my story. Yet something quite similar to this has already been employed more than once in art: Victor Hugo, for example, in his masterpiece *The Last Day of a Man Condemned to Death*, employed virtually this same device, and even though he did not depict any stenographer, he allowed an even greater breach of verisimilitude when he presumed that a man condemned to execution could (and would have time to) keep a diary, not only on his last day, but even in his last hour and literally in his last moment of life. But had he not allowed this fantastical element, the work itself—among the most real and most truthful of all his writings—would not have existed.

I. Who Was I and Who Was She?

... So as long as she's still here everything's all right: every minute I go up to have a look at her; but they'll take her away tomorrow, and how will I ever stay here by myself? She's on the table in the anteroom now, they put two card tables together, but tomorrow there'll be a coffin, a white one—white *gros de Naples*. That's not the point, though.... I just keep walking, trying to find some explanation for this. It's been six hours now, and I still can't focus my thoughts. The fact is that I just keep on walking, back and forth, back and forth.... This is how it happened. I'll just tell it in order. (Order!) Gentlemen, I'm certainly not a literary man, and you'll see that for yourselves; but never mind: I'll tell you what happened as I understand it myself. That's what I find so horrible: I understand it all!

If you really want to know—I mean, if I'm going to start from the very beginning—then it was she who just started coming to me then to pawn some things in order to pay for an advertisement in *The Voice*: “So-and-so, a governess, willing to travel, give lessons in private homes, etc., etc.” That was at the very beginning, and I, of course, didn't see her as any different from the others. She came like all the rest, and so on. And then I did begin to see something different about her. She was so delicate and blonde, a little taller than average; she was always a little awkward with me, as if she were embarrassed (I suppose she was the same with all strangers, and of course to her I was no different from anyone else, I mean if you take me as a man and not as a pawnbroker). As soon as she got her money she would turn around and leave at once. And never a word. The others would argue, plead, try to haggle. Not this one, she'd just take what I offered.... Wait now, I think I'm getting confused.... Yes. What struck me first were the things she brought: cheap silver-plated earrings, a trashy little locket—twenty kopecks was all she'd get. And she herself knew they were worth next to nothing, but I could tell by her face that to her they were treasures. And sure enough, as I learned later, these were the only things she had left from mommy and daddy. Only once I allowed myself a little smirk at her things. You see, I never allow myself to do anything like that. I maintain a gentlemanly tone with my clients: keep it short, keep it polite, and be strict. “Strict, strict, strict.” But one day, to my surprise, she actually brought in the remnants (I mean, literally) of an old hare-skin jacket. I couldn't help myself and made a joke of sorts about it. Heavens, how she flushed! She had big, blue, wistful eyes, but there was fire in them then! She didn't say a word, though. Just took up her “remnants” and left. It was then that I particularly noticed her for the first time and thought something of this sort about her—I mean something quite particular. Oh yes, and I also recall an impression. What I mean is the main impression, the synthesis of everything: she seemed terribly young, so young she might have been fourteen. Whereas in actual fact she was only a few months short of sixteen. But that's not what I meant; that certainly wasn't the synthesis. She came back again the next day. I found out later that she had gone to Dobronravov's and to Moser's with this jacket, but neither of them takes anything but gold, so they wouldn't even talk to her. I, on the other hand, had once taken a cameo from her (a cheap little thing), but later, when

I had thought about it for a while, I was surprised. You see, I don't accept anything but gold and silver either, yet I allowed her to pawn a cameo. And that was my second thought about her at the time; that I remember.

This time—I mean after she had come from Moser—she brought an amber cigar-holder. It wasn't much of a thing, amateurish workmanship, and again, worthless to me because I only accept gold. Since this was right after her little *rebellion* of the previous day, I was strict with her. With me, being strict means being curt. However, as I was handing her the two rubles, I couldn't resist and said, as if somewhat irritated: "You know I'm only doing this *for you*; Moser wouldn't take a thing like this." I particularly stressed the words "*for you*," and did so deliberately, to give them *a certain implication*. I was angry. She flushed again when she heard the "*for you*," but she didn't say a word, didn't throw down the money; she took it. Well, that's what poverty is! How she flushed, though! I realized that I had stung her. And when she had gone I suddenly asked myself: "Is this victory over her really worth two rubles? Hee-hee-hee!" I recall that I asked myself that very question twice: "Is it worth it? Is it worth it?" And with a laugh I answered the question in the affirmative. I had tremendous fun at the time. But it wasn't a bad feeling on my part: I had something in mind; there was a purpose to what I was doing. I wanted to test her, because certain ideas about her suddenly began floating around in my mind. This was my third *particular* thought about her.

... Well, it all began from that time. Of course, I immediately tried to find out everything about her indirectly, and I waited with particular impatience for her to come again. You see, I had a feeling she would come soon. When she did come, I began a friendly conversation, was as polite as could be. I've not been badly brought up, after all, and have good manners. Hmm. It was just then that I realized she was kind and meek. Kind, meek people don't resist for long, and though they don't open themselves very easily, they still just don't know how to duck out of a conversation: they may not give you much of an answer, but they do answer, and the further you go, the more you get out of them. Only you mustn't let up if there's something you want. Of course, she didn't explain anything at that time. It was only later that I found out about *The Voice* and all the rest. At that time she was using her last resources on advertisements, and of course these were a bit presumptuous, at least at first: "Governess, willing to travel. Submit offers by

return mail." But later: "Willing to accept any work: teach, serve as companion, manage household, nurse an invalid lady; have sewing skills" and so on—you know what it is! Of course, all these latter things were added to the advertisements bit by bit, while at last, when she had reached the point of despair, they would read: "Willing to work without salary, for board alone." No, she couldn't find a position! I decided then to give her a final test: I suddenly picked up the latest issue of *The Voice* and showed her an ad: "Young lady, orphaned, seeks position as governess to young children, preferably with elderly widower. Can provide comforts in the home."

"There, you see, this girl's placed her ad this morning, and by evening she'll surely have found a position. That's how to write an ad!"

She flushed again, and again her eyes flashed; she turned and walked out at once. I was very pleased. However, at that time I was already certain of everything and wasn't the least bit concerned: no one else was going to take her cigar-holders. But she had used up even her cigar-holders. And so it was that she came in two days later, so pale and upset—I realized that something must have happened at home, and something really had happened. I'll explain in a minute what it was, but now I only want to recall how I managed to show her a bit of style and raise myself in her esteem. Suddenly this plan popped into my head. The fact was that she had brought this icon (she had at last made up her mind to bring it).... Oh, but listen to me! It had already begun then, and I'm getting things mixed up.... The point is that now I want to bring it all back in my mind, every little thing about it, every tiny detail. I just want to focus my thoughts and I can't, and all these tiny details....

It was an image of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin with the Infant Jesus—an ancient, family household icon in a silver, gilded frame, worth, maybe, six rubles. I could see that the icon meant a lot to her, and she was pawning it all, frame included.

"Wouldn't it be better to remove the frame and take back the icon?" I said. "It's an icon, after all, and somehow it seems not quite the thing to do...."

"Is it against the rules to take an icon?"

"No, it's not against the rules, but still, you yourself, perhaps...."

"Well, take off the frame."

"I'll tell you what," I said, after a little thought, "We'll keep it in the frame; I'll put it over there in the icon case with my others, under the lamp" (ever since I opened my pawnshop I've kept an icon lamp burning), "and I'll just give you ten rubles for it."

"I don't need ten. Just give me five, and I'll certainly redeem it."

"You don't want ten? The icon's worth that much," I added, noticing that her eyes again were flashing. She said nothing. I brought her the five rubles.

"Don't despise me," I said. "I've been in a similar bind myself, and even worse. And if you see me now, working at a profession like this . . . it's just the result of all that I've been through. . . ."

"You're taking revenge on society? Is that it?" she interrupted suddenly, with a rather sarcastic smile which, however, contained a good deal of innocence (I mean her sarcasm was general and not directed at me personally, because at that time she did not see me as any different from the others, so she said it almost without malice). "Aha!" —I thought to myself. "That tells me something about you! You're showing your character. One of the new generation."

"You see," I remarked, half in jest, half mysteriously, "'I am a part of that whole that wills forever evil but does forever good. . . .'"

She cast a quick glance at me, showing great interest (and also a good deal of childish curiosity).

"Wait. . . . What does that mean? Where does it come from? I've heard it somewhere. . . ."

"You needn't rack your brain; Mephistopheles introduces himself to Faust with those words. Have you read *Faust*?"

"Not. . . . not very carefully."

"In other words, you haven't read it at all. You must read it. But I can see that sarcastic smile again. Please, don't assume I have so little taste as to embellish my role as a pawnbroker by passing myself off as Mephistopheles. A pawnbroker is a pawnbroker, and so he shall remain. We all know that."

"You are a strange sort of person. . . . I didn't mean to imply anything of the kind. . . ."

She meant to say, "I never expected you to be a man of education," but she didn't say it, although I knew that she thought it. I had pleased her immensely.

"You see," I remarked, "one can do good in any field of endeavor.

I'm not speaking of myself, of course. Quite possibly I do nothing but evil, but. . . ."

"Of course one can do good in any place in life," she said, casting a swift and penetrating glance at me. "In any place, to be sure," she added suddenly.

Oh, I recall it; I recall all those moments! And I want also to add that when young people, those dear young people, want to say something very clever and profound they suddenly, with excessive sincerity and naiveté, put on a face that says: "There! Now I'm telling you something very clever and profound." And they do it not from vanity, as people like myself might. But you can see that they themselves put great store in all that; they believe in it and respect it, and think that you have the same respect as they do. Oh, the candor of youth! That is how they conquer. And in her it was so charming!

I remember it, I've forgotten nothing! When she left I at once made my decision. That same day I went off on my final investigation and learned the remaining facts about her, right down to the most intimate details of her current life. I had learned her earlier history from Lukeria, who was then their servant and whom I had bribed several days before. These details were so terrible that I simply cannot understand how she was able to laugh, as she had just now, and to take any interest in the words of Mephistopheles when she herself had to face such horrors. But such is youth! That was just how I thought of her then, proudly and joyfully, because here I could also see the signs of a great soul. It was as if she were saying: "Even on the very edge of perdition, the great words of Goethe shine out for me." Young people always have some greatness of soul—to a tiny degree, at least and perhaps in the wrong direction. I am speaking of her, I mean, of her alone. And the main thing was that I regarded her then as *my own* and had no doubt about my power over her. Do you know, that is a terribly voluptuous thought—when one no longer has any doubts.

But what's wrong with me? If I go on this way, when will I ever focus my thoughts? I must get on with it! Lord, this isn't the point at all!

2. A Proposal of Marriage

"The intimate details" I discovered about her I can explain in a few words: her father and mother had died some time ago, three

years before I met her, and she had been left in the charge of some aunts whose way of life was rather improper; in fact, "improper" is not a strong enough word to describe them. One aunt was a widow with a large family—six little children, all close in age; the other aunt, a spinster, was a nasty old piece of work. They were both nasty, in fact. Her father had been a minor civil servant, a copying clerk who had only personal, but not hereditary, nobility. In short, the whole situation suited me to a tee. I appeared as if from another, higher world: I was still a retired junior captain from a renowned regiment, a nobleman by birth, of independent means, and so on, and as far as the pawnshop was concerned, the aunts could only look upon that with respect. She had been enslaved to the aunts for three years, but still had managed to qualify at some sort of examination; she had managed to qualify, snatching moments from her merciless daily labor, and that signified something of her striving for what was sublime and noble! And why did I want to marry her? However, let's forget about me for the moment; that will come later.... As if that mattered, in any case! She gave lessons to her aunt's children, sewed their underclothes, and, in the end, not only washed clothes but, with her weak chest, scrubbed floors as well. To put it plainly, they even beat her and reproached her for every crust of bread. It ended by their planning to sell her. Foo! I'm omitting the sordid details. Later she told me the whole story. A fat shopkeeper in the neighborhood had watched the whole thing for a year (he was not simply a shopkeeper, in fact, but owned two grocery stores). He had already driven two wives to their graves with his beatings, and now he was looking for a third. His eye fell on her. "She's a quiet one," he thinks, "raised in poverty, and I'll marry her for the sake of my motherless children." He had children, to be sure. He started courting her and negotiating with the aunts. On top of everything else, he was a man of fifty; she was horrified. It was at this point that she started coming to me to get money for the advertisements in *The Voice*. At last she began pleading with the aunts to give her just a tiny bit of time to think the matter over. They allowed her a little time, but only a little, and kept nagging at her: "We don't know where our next meal is coming from ourselves, never mind having an extra mouth to feed." I already knew all about this, and during the day that followed our morning encounter I made my decision. The shopkeeper called on her in the evening, bringing a pound of sweets worth half a ruble from his store. She was sitting with him, while I called Lukeria

from the kitchen and told her to go back and whisper that I was at the gate with something urgent to tell her. I was pleased with myself. On the whole, I was terribly pleased that whole day.

Right there at the gate, with Lukeria standing by, I explained to her (and she was still amazed at my sending for her) that I would be happy and honored if.... In the second place, so that she shouldn't be surprised at the way I proposed to her right on the street, I told her, "I'm a straightforward man, and I know the circumstances of your case." And I wasn't lying when I said I was straightforward. Well, to hell with it; it doesn't matter. I spoke not only politely, that is, showing myself as a man with good manners, but also with originality, and that was the most important thing. Well, and what of it? Is it a sin to admit that? I want to judge myself and I am judging myself. I'm supposed to speak both *pro* and *contra*, and that's what I'm doing. Even afterward I would recall those moments with pleasure, as silly as it might have been. I told her plainly then, without any embarrassment, that in the first place I was not particularly talented or particularly clever, and, perhaps, not even particularly kind. I said I was a rather cheap egotist (I remember that expression; I made it up on the way to her house and was pleased with it) and that it was very likely that I had many other disagreeable qualities as well. All this was spoken with a particular kind of pride—you know how it is done. I had enough taste, of course, not to launch into listing all my virtues after having so nobly declared my shortcomings to her. I didn't say, "On the other hand, I am such-and-such." I could see that she was still terribly frightened, but I didn't tone down anything; in fact, seeing that she was frightened, I deliberately laid it on: I told her plainly that she would have enough food to eat, but there would be no fine dresses, theater, or balls. These might come at some future time when my goal had been achieved. I was quite carried away with this severe tone of mine. I added—doing my best to make it seem like a passing thought—that if I had taken up such an occupation (meaning the pawnshop), it was only because I had a certain goal, that there was one particular circumstance.... But I had the right to speak that way, after all: I really did have such a goal, and there really was such a circumstance. Wait a moment, ladies and gentlemen: I was the first to hate that pawnshop, and I hated it all my life. But you see, in essence (and even though it's ridiculous to talk to oneself in mysterious phrases), I was "taking my revenge on society," I really and truly was! So

her little joke that morning about my "taking revenge" was unfair. You see, if I had told her directly: "Yes, I'm taking my revenge on society," she would have laughed as she did in the morning and it really would have turned out to seem amusing. But by making an indirect hint and slipping in a mysterious phrase, I was able to capture her imagination. Besides, at that time I wasn't afraid of anything: I knew that the fat shopkeeper was more repulsive to her than I in any case, and that I, standing by her gate, would appear as her liberator. That I certainly did understand. Oh, human beings understand nasty tricks very well! But was that a nasty trick? How can one pass judgment on a man in a case like this? Did I not love her already, even then?

Wait a moment: of course, I didn't say a single word to her then about my doing her a good deed. On the contrary, quite on the contrary: "It is *I*," I said, "who is the beneficiary here, and not you." So I even expressed this in words, unable to restrain myself, and perhaps it came out stupidly, because I noticed a wrinkle pass over her brow. But on the whole I won a decisive victory. Wait now, if I'm going to recall this whole sordid thing, then I'll recall it down to the last bit of nastiness: I stood there and a thought stirred in my mind: "You are tall, well-built, well-mannered, and finally—speaking without any boasting—you're not bad-looking either." That was what was running through my mind. I scarcely need to tell you that she said yes right there by the gate. But . . . but I ought to tell you as well that she stood there by the gate and thought for a long time before she said, "Yes." She thought so long and hard that I was about to ask her, "Well, what is your answer?" And indeed, I couldn't restrain myself and asked, with a little flourish but very politely, "Well, what is your answer, Miss?"

"Wait a moment, let me think."

And her little face was so serious, so serious that even then I might have read it! But I was mortified. "Can she really be choosing between me and the shopkeeper?" I thought. Oh, but I still didn't understand it then. I didn't understand anything then, not a thing. I didn't understand until today! I remember Lukeria running out after me as I was leaving, stopping me on the road and saying, all in a rush: "God will reward you, sir, for taking our dear miss! Only don't tell her that; she's such a proud one."

A proud one, indeed! "I like those proud ones," I thought. Proud women are especially beautiful when . . . well, when you have no more doubts about your power over them, isn't it so? Oh, you

mean, clumsy man! Oh, how pleased I was! You know, when she was standing there by the gate, deep in thought about whether to answer yes, I was amazed, you know, that she could even be thinking such a thing as this: "If there's misery in store both here and there, then wouldn't it be better just to choose the worse—the fat shopkeeper—straightaway? Then he can beat me to death in a drunken fit." Eh! So what do you think, could she have had such a thought?

But even now I don't understand; I don't understand a thing! I just said that she might have had such a thought: to choose the worse of two evils, meaning the shopkeeper. But who was the worse for her then: the shopkeeper or I? A shopkeeper or a pawnbroker who quotes Goethe? That's still a question! What question? And you don't understand even that: the answer is lying on the table, and you're talking about a "question"! Well, to hell with me! I'm not the issue here at all. . . . And what do I care now, anyway, whether I'm the issue or not? That's something I certainly can't solve. I'd better go to bed. My head aches. . . .

3. The Noblest of Men, but I Don't Believe It Myself

I couldn't get to sleep. Anyhow, how could I sleep with this throbbing in my head? I want to come to terms with all this, all this filth. Oh, the filth! Oh, the filth I rescued her from then! Why, she must have understood that and appreciated what I did! There were other ideas I savored as well. For example: I'm forty-one, and she's only sixteen. That was alluring, that feeling of inequality; a thing like that is delectable, very delectable.

I wanted to arrange our wedding *à l'anglaise*, meaning just the two of us with only two witnesses, one of whom would be Lukeria, and then straight off to the train, to Moscow, say (it happened that I had some business to do there), to a hotel for a couple of weeks. She was very much against that and wouldn't hear of it, and I had to go pay my respects to the aunts as her nearest relatives from whom I was taking her. I gave in, and the aunts were paid appropriate respect. I even presented the creatures with a hundred rubles each and promised them still more—not saying anything to her, of course, so as not to grieve her with sordid dealings like this. The aunts at once became as cordial as could be. There was also an argument about her trousseau: she had—almost literally—nothing, but she didn't want anything. However, I managed to

show her that it simply wouldn't do to have nothing at all, and so it was I who collected her trousseau, for if I hadn't, then who would have? But never mind about me; that's not important. I did manage to pass on some of my ideas to her then, so that at least she knew. Perhaps I was even hasty. What mattered was that, right from the very start, despite some attempt at restraint, she rushed to meet me with love, she would greet me with delight when I visited her in the evening, she would babble on (that charming, innocent babble of hers) about her childhood, her earliest years, her parents' home, her father and mother. But I at once threw cold water on all this rapture of hers. That was just my plan, you see. When she was elated, I would respond with silence—a benevolent silence, of course . . . but still she would quickly see that we were two very different people and that I was an enigma. And my main point was to keep working at that enigma! Maybe it was just for the sake of solving an enigma that I did this whole stupid thing! Strictness, in the first place. It was strictness when I brought her into my house. In short, while I went on with my daily round, quite satisfied, I created a whole system. Oh, it happened without any effort and just sprang up on its own. And it couldn't have happened any other way: the course of events compelled me to create this system—why on earth should I slander myself! It was a genuine system. Wait a moment, now, and listen: if you are going to judge a man, then you have to know the facts of his case. . . . So listen.

I'm not sure how to begin this, because it's very difficult. When you begin to justify yourself—that's when it becomes difficult. You see, young people generally are scornful of money, for instance. So I at once set to work on the issue of money. I stressed the money question. And I stressed it so much that she began more and more to keep silent. She would open her big eyes, listen to me, look and me, and not say a word. Young people are noble, you see—the best young people, I mean; they are noble and impulsive, but have little tolerance; just as soon as something doesn't go quite their way, they show their contempt. But I wanted her to have a broad, tolerant outlook; I wanted to instill this breadth right into her heart, to make it a part of her. Don't you see what I had in mind? Let me take a trivial example: how could I explain my pawnshop to a person like her, for instance? Of course, I didn't start to talk of it immediately, or else it would have seemed as if I were apologizing for keeping a pawnshop; but I acted with pride,

and barely said a word of it. I am an expert at speaking while barely saying a word; I've been speaking without saying a word all my life, and have endured whole inner tragedies without saying a word. Oh, of course I myself was unhappy! Everyone had cast me off, cast me off and forgotten me, and not a single soul knows it! And suddenly this sixteen-year-old got hold of a few details about me from some contemptible people and thought she knew everything; but the real secret still lay in the bosom of this man alone! I just kept silent, and especially with her I kept silent, right until yesterday. Why did I do that? Because I'm a proud man. I wanted her to find out herself, with no help from me, and this time not from tales told by scoundrels. No, she should come to a conclusion *herself* about this man and discover what he is! When I took her into my home I wanted complete respect. I wanted her to stand before me in ardent homage because of my sufferings, and I deserved that. Oh, I was always proud; I always wanted all or nothing! And that's just why I'm not content with halfway measures where happiness is concerned; I wanted it all. That's just why I had to act as I did then, as if to say to her: "You draw your own conclusion and appreciate my worth!" Because you have to agree that if I began explaining things to her myself and dropping hints, ingratiating myself and asking her to respect me, it would be no better than begging for charity. . . . But yet . . . yet why am I talking about this!

Stupid, stupid, stupid, and stupid again! Frankly and mercilessly (and I stress the fact that it was merciless), I explained to her then, in a few words, that "the nobility of youth is very charming but isn't worth a penny. And why not? Because it is acquired cheaply and is not obtained through experience. It's all 'the first impressions of existence.' But let's have a look at you when you have to earn your daily bread! Cheap nobility is always easy; even sacrificing your life—even that is cheap, because it's just a matter of a stirring of the blood and an excess of energy, a passionate longing for beauty! No, take on some noble deed that is difficult, unobtrusive, unsung, one with no glamour, but which involves criticism, a great deal of sacrifice, and not a drop of glory, one where you, the radiant youth, are held up as a scoundrel by everyone when you are more honorable than any of them. Well, now, try taking on a deed like that! No, ma'am, you'll turn it down! And I—I have done nothing but bear the weight of such a deed my whole life long." At first she would argue. And how she argued! But then she began to keep quiet,

and at last she wouldn't say a word; only she would open her eyes as wide as could be while she listened, such big, big eyes, full of attention. And . . . and apart from that I suddenly noticed a smile, a skeptical, silent, unpleasant smile. And so it was with this smile that I brought her into my house. It's true, of course, that she had nowhere else to go....

4. Plans and More Plans

Which one of us first began it? Neither of us. It began by itself right from the very start. I said that I was going to be strict when I brought her into the house, but from the first step I softened. Even before we married I explained to her that she would take charge of accepting the articles for pawn and paying out the money, and she didn't say a word at the time (I draw your attention to that). Moreover, she set about the job even with some enthusiasm. Of course, the apartment and the furniture all remained as they had been. It's a two-room apartment: the large anteroom has the pawnshop and is divided by a counter; the other room, also large, is our parlor and serves as a bedroom as well. I only have a little furniture; even her aunts had better. The icon case and lamp are in the anteroom with the pawnshop; the other room has my bookcase, with a few books in it, and a chest the key for which I keep; and then there's the bed, a couple of tables, and some chairs. Before we married I told her that I set aside a ruble a day and no more for our subsistence—I mean for food for me, her, and Lukeria (whom I'd managed to lure away). "I need thirty thousand in three years," I told her, "and there's no other way to raise it." She didn't object, but I raised our subsistence allowance by thirty kopecks. The same with the theater. I had told my fiancée that there wouldn't be any theater, but all the same I decided that once a month I would take her to a play, and do it in proper fashion, too, with orchestra seats. We went together, three times, and saw *The Pursuit of Happiness* and *The Singing Birds*, I think. (Oh, to hell with it; what difference does it make!) We went in silence, and we came back in silence. Why was it that we started by keeping silent right from the very beginning? Why? We didn't quarrel at first, you see, but still we kept silent. I remember how she would always steal furtive glances at me; as soon as I noticed that, I kept an even more determined silence. True enough, it was I who insisted on the silence, not she. Once or twice she had fits of affection when

she rushed to embrace me; but since these outbursts of hers were unhealthy and hysterical, while I needed happiness that was solid, with respect from her, I reacted coldly. And I was right: the day after every outburst we would have a quarrel.

They weren't really quarrels, I mean, but there was silence, and it took on a more and more insolent manner on her part. "Rebellion and independence"—that's what she had in mind, only she didn't know how to manage it. Yes, that gentle face of hers grew more and more insolent. Believe it or not, she began to find me obnoxious; I could tell that. And it was obvious enough that she was having fits of temper. Now tell me, how could she, coming from such squalor and poverty—after scrubbing floors, in fact—how could she suddenly start fuming because we lived poorly! But you see, ladies and gentlemen, it was not poverty, it was frugality, and in the things that mattered—even luxury: in our linen, for instance, or in cleanliness. I had always imagined before that a wife finds cleanliness attractive in her husband. However, it wasn't poverty that bothered her, it was my supposed stinginess in housekeeping: "He has a goal," she would probably say to herself, "and is showing off his strong character." She herself suddenly refused to go to the theater. And that mocking look of hers became more and more obvious . . . while I made my silence more and more intense.

Should I have tried to justify myself? The pawnshop caused the most trouble. Let me explain: I knew that a female, and especially a girl of sixteen, could do nothing other than submit completely to her husband. Women have no originality: why, that's an axiom, and even now, even now I consider that an axiom! What does it prove that she's lying out there in the anteroom: truth is truth, and even John Stuart Mill himself can do nothing about it! But a loving woman—oh, a loving woman will worship even the flaws, even the vices of her beloved. He himself can't find such ways to excuse his vices as she can. This is noble, but it's not original. It is lack of originality, and only that, that has been the ruin of women. And so, I repeat: what if you do point to that table out there? Is it something original that's lying on the table? Oh-h-h!

Listen to me: I was confident she loved me then. Why, she used to rush over to embrace me. So she loved me, or rather she wanted to love me. Yes, that's how it was: she wanted to love me; she was trying to love me. And the main thing was that I didn't have any vices that she'd have to try to excuse. "Pawnbroker," you say; everybody says it. And what if I am a pawnbroker? It means there

must be reasons for the noblest of men to become pawnbrokers. You see, ladies and gentlemen, there are certain ideas . . . I mean, there are some ideas which, when you try to put them into words, sound very silly. They simply make one ashamed. Why is that? No reason at all. Because we are all worthless, and none of us can bear the truth. That's the only reason I can think of. I said "the noblest of men" just now. That may sound ridiculous, yet that's just how it was. It's the truth; it's the truest truth of all! Yes, at the time I *had the right* to try to secure my future and to open this pawnshop: "You have rejected me (you people, I mean); you have cast me out with your scornful silence. You answered my passionate longing to love you with an insult I will feel all my life. So now I am quite justified in walling myself off from you, collecting my thirty thousand rubles, and living the rest of my life somewhere in the Crimea, on the Southern Shore, amid mountains and vineyards, on my own estate, purchased with that thirty thousand. What matters most is to live faraway from all of you, bearing no malice, but with an ideal in my soul, with the woman I love next to me, with a family, if God blesses me with one, spending my days helping the neighboring settlers." It's all very well, of course, to say this to myself now, but what could have been stupider than to try painting her a picture of all that back then? That explains my proud silence; that explains why we sat without exchanging a word. Because what could she have understood? Sixteen years old, barely into her youth! Could she have accepted my justifications? Could she have understood my sufferings? She has a simple, "straight-line" way of thinking; she knows little of life, is full of young, cheap convictions, suffers from the blindness of "the beautiful soul"; and above all, there's the pawnshop—that was enough! (But was I some criminal in the pawnshop? Didn't she see how I acted? Did I ever charge more than my due?) Oh, what a dreadful thing is truth in the world! This charming girl, this meek one, this heavenly creature—she was a tyrant, an insufferable tyrant over my soul, a tormenter! I am defaming myself unless I say that! You think I didn't love her? Who can say that I didn't love her? Don't you see the irony here, the wicked irony of fate and nature? We are damned; human life in general (and mine, in particular) is damned! Of course, I understand now that I made some mistake! Something went wrong back then. Everything was clear; my plan was as clear as the air: "Severe, proud, needing no one's moral consolation, suffering in silence." That is how it was; I didn't lie,

really I didn't! "One day she will see for herself that it was a matter of my nobility"—only she wasn't able to see it then—"and when she eventually realizes it, she will have ten times more esteem for me and will fall to her knees, her hands folded in ardent prayer." That was the plan. But at this point I forgot something; or there was something I didn't take into consideration. There was something I couldn't manage to do properly. But, never mind, that's enough. Whose forgiveness is there to ask now? What's done is done. Take courage, man, and be proud! It's not your fault! . . .

And so, I'll tell the truth; I'm not afraid to face the truth head on: it was *her* fault, *her* fault! . . .

5. The Meek One Rebels

The quarrels started because she suddenly took it into her head to loan money on her own terms and to appraise articles at higher than their real value. Twice she even presumed to quarrel with me on the topic. I wouldn't agree to what she was doing. It was at this point that the captain's widow turned up.

An old widow came in with a locket, a gift of her late husband, the captain, and a keepsake, of course. I gave her thirty rubles for it. She started whining and pleading for us not to sell the thing, and of course I said we wouldn't. Well, to cut the story short, she suddenly turned up five days later to exchange the locket for a bracelet that wasn't worth even eight rubles; I refused her, of course. I suppose she must have been able to read something in my wife's eyes; anyway, she came again when I wasn't there, and my wife exchanged the bracelet for the locket.

When I found out that same day what had happened, I spoke mildly but firmly and reasonably to her. She was sitting on the bed, looking at the floor, flicking her right toe against the carpet (a gesture of hers); a nasty smile played on her lips. Then, without raising my voice at all, I stated calmly that the money was *mine*, that I had the right to regard life through *my* eyes, and that when I brought her into my house I had hidden nothing from her.

Suddenly she jumped to her feet, all a-tremble, and—can you believe it?—suddenly started stamping her feet at me. She was a wild beast; she was having a fit; she was a wild beast having a fit. I was numb with amazement: I had never expected antics like this. But I kept my head and didn't even make a move; once more, in the same calm voice as before, I told her plainly that henceforth

I would let her have no more part in my business affairs. She laughed in my face and walked out of the apartment.

The fact is, she did not have the right to walk out of the apartment. Nowhere without me: such was the agreement made before we married. She came back toward evening; I didn't say a word.

The next day she went out in the morning, and did the same the day after that. I closed up the shop and went off to see her aunts. I had had no dealings with them since the wedding: I would not have them call on me or call on them. But it turned out that she had not been visiting them. They listened to my story with interest and then laughed in my face: "That's just what you deserve." Yet I had expected them to laugh. Right then I offered the younger aunt, the old maid, a hundred-ruble bribe, giving her twenty-five in advance. Two days later she came to see me, saying: "There's an officer, a Lieutenant Efimovich, one of your army friends, who's involved in the affair." I was astonished. This Efimovich had done me more harm than anyone in the regiment, and about a month before, being the shameless creature he is, he had come into the pawnshop twice, pretending he wanted to pawn something, and I recall he began laughing with my wife. I approached him right then and told him that in view of our former relations he should not dare to call on me again, but I hadn't the least notion of anything like this; I simply thought he was being impudent. And now, suddenly, the aunt tells me that she already has a rendezvous arranged with him and the whole affair is being managed by a former acquaintance of the aunts, a certain Julia Samsonovna, and a colonel's wife to boot. "She's the one your wife visits now," the aunt tells me.

Let me summarize this episode. The whole affair cost me nearly three hundred rubles, but within two days I had arranged things so that I could stand in an adjoining room behind a door and listen to my wife's first rendezvous alone with Efimovich. In anticipation of this, I had a brief but—for me—very significant encounter with her on the eve of the event.

She had returned home toward evening and sat on the bed looking mockingly at me, tapping her little foot against the rug. Looking at her, the thought suddenly flew into my head that for this whole past month or, rather, for the previous two weeks, she had absolutely not been herself; one could even say that she had become the antithesis of herself: here was a violent, aggressive creature—I couldn't call her shameless, but she was agitated and looking to

cause a commotion. She was deliberately seeking out ways to cause a commotion. Her gentle spirit held her back, however. When a woman like that begins to revolt, even if she may have stepped over the limit, you can still always tell that she is only forcing herself, pushing herself further, and that she herself cannot overcome her own sense of morality and shame. And that is the reason such women sometimes go to such lengths that you can scarcely believe your eyes. The woman used to debauchery will, on the contrary, always tone things down; such a one will do something far worse, but will do it with an air of decorum and respectability that attempts to claim superiority over you.

"Tell me, is it true they kicked you out of the regiment because you were afraid to fight a duel?" she asked me suddenly, right out of the blue, her eyes flashing.

"It's true. By decision of the officers I was asked to leave the regiment, though I had sent in my resignation even before that."

"They kicked you out as a coward?"

"Yes, the verdict was that I was a coward. But I refused the duel not as a coward but because I didn't want to submit to their tyrannical decree and challenge a man who, in my view, had caused me no offense. You must realize," I couldn't resist adding, "that standing up to that sort of tyranny and accepting all the consequences meant showing far more courage than fighting in any duel."

I couldn't resist; I said it as if to justify myself. But this was all she needed, this new humiliation for me. She laughed spitefully.

"And is it true that for three years afterward you wandered the streets of Petersburg like a tramp, begging for small change and spending the nights under billiard tables?"

"I even used to sleep in the Haymarket, at the Viazemsky house. Yes, that's true. After leaving the regiment there were a good many shameful things in my life, and much degradation. But it wasn't moral degradation, because I was the first to despise my own actions even then. It was only a degradation of my will and my mind, and it was caused only by despair at my situation. But that's all past...."

"Oh, and now you are an important figure—a financier!"

That was a dig at the pawnshop. But by then I had managed to gain my self-restraint. I could see that she was eager to hear some humiliating explanations and—I didn't provide any. At that point a customer rang and I went to the anteroom to look after him. An hour later, when she had suddenly dressed to go out, she stopped

in front of me and said, "Still, you didn't tell me anything about that before the wedding?"

I did not reply, and she left.

And so, on the next day, I stood behind the door in this room listening to my fate being decided. I had a revolver in my pocket. She was sitting at the table, nicely dressed, and Efimovich was preening himself in front of her. And what do you think? What happened (and it's to my credit that I say this) was exactly the thing I had supposed and anticipated would happen, although I was not conscious of supposing and anticipating it. I don't know if that makes sense to you.

This is what happened. I listened for a whole hour, and for a whole hour I was present at a duel between the noblest and most elevated of women and a depraved, dull creature of society with a groveling soul. And how, I thought in utter amazement, how could this naive, this meek, this reticent girl possibly know all this? The wittiest author of a high-society comedy could not have created this scene of ridicule, naive laughter, and the saintly scorn of virtue for vice. And what brilliance there was in her words and little turns of phrase; how witty were her quick replies; what truth there was in her condemnations! And, at the same time, how much almost girlish naiveté. She laughed in his face at his declarations of love, at his gestures, at his propositions. Having arrived with the notion of storming the fortress head on and not anticipating any resistance, he suddenly was disarmed. At first I was prepared to believe that she was simply playing the flirt: "the coquetry of a creature who, though depraved, is witty, and so works to increase her own value." But no: truth radiated like the sun, and there was no possibility of doubt. She, with her lack of experience, might have decided to arrange this rendezvous out of hatred for me, a hatred that was both insincere and impetuous, but when it came to the crux of the matter her eyes were opened at once. It was simply a matter of a woman who was trying desperately to injure me in any way she could but who, once she had resolved to do such a dirty deed, was unable to bear the messy consequences. And could Efimovich, or any of those other society creatures, seduce a woman like her—she, pure and sinless, with her ideals? On the contrary: he only made her laugh. The whole truth rose up from her soul, and her anger brought the sarcasm from her heart. I repeat: this buffoon at last fell into a complete daze and sat frowning, scarcely answering her, so that I even began to fear that he might go so far as to insult

her out of a mean wish for revenge. Again I repeat: it is to my credit that I listened to this whole scene with scarcely any surprise. It was as if I were encountering only things I already knew. It was as if I had gone there to have that encounter. I had come believing nothing, with no accusation against her—although I had taken a revolver in my pocket: that's the truth! And could I have imagined her in any other way? Why was it I loved her? Why was it I cherished her? Why was it I had married her? Oh, of course I was all too convinced of how much she hated me then, but I was also convinced of how pure she was. I put a sudden end to the scene when I opened the door. Efimovich leapt up; I took her hand and invited her to leave with me. Efimovich recovered and suddenly burst into a loud peal of laughter.

"Oh, there's nothing I can say against sacred conjugal rights! Take her away! And do you know," he shouted as I left, "even though a real gentleman wouldn't stoop to fight a duel with you, out of respect for your lady, I'm at your service... that's if you dare, of course...."

"Do you hear that!" said I, stopping her for a moment on the threshold.

And then not a single word all the way home. I led her by the hand, and she offered no resistance. On the contrary: she seemed terribly shocked. But that lasted only until we reached the apartment. When we arrived she sat down on a chair and fixed her gaze on me. She was extraordinarily pale; even though her lips at once assumed their mocking expression, she looked at me with a solemn and stern challenge, and I think for the first few moments she seriously believed that I was going to shoot her. But I silently drew the revolver from my pocket and laid it on the table. She looked at me and at the revolver. (Note this: she was already familiar with this revolver. I had acquired it when I opened the pawnshop and had kept it loaded ever since. When I opened the shop, I decided not to keep huge dogs or a muscular manservant as Moser does, for example. The cook lets in my customers. But those who practice our trade cannot deprive themselves of the means of self-defense—one never knows what might happen. And so I kept a loaded revolver. During her first days in my house, she took a great interest in this revolver and had a lot of questions about it. I explained its mechanism and how it works and once even persuaded her to fire at a target. Keep all that in mind.) Paying no heed to her frightened glance, I lay down on the bed, half undressed. I felt quite exhausted;

it was around eleven o'clock. She went on sitting in the same spot, not stirring, for nearly an hour more and then put out the light and lay down, also dressed, on the sofa by the wall. This was the first time she did not lie down beside me. Bear that in mind as well. . . .

6. A Dreadful Recollection

Now, this dreadful recollection. . . .

I woke up the next morning about eight o'clock, I think, and the room was already quite light. I awakened at once, my mind fully clear, and opened my eyes. She was standing by the table, holding the revolver. She didn't notice that I was awake and was looking at her. And suddenly I saw her begin to move toward me, still holding the revolver. I quickly closed my eyes and pretended to be sound asleep.

She came up to the bed and stood over me. I could hear everything; even though a deathly silence had fallen on the room, I could hear that silence. Then a shudder passed through me and, unable to resist, I suddenly—I couldn't help it—I had to open my eyes. She was staring right into my face, holding the pistol to my temple. Our eyes met. But we looked at each other for no more than a moment. With an effort I closed my eyes again and at the same time resolved with all the strength I could muster that I would not move another muscle and would not open my eyes no matter what fate awaited me.

In actual fact it happens that a soundly sleeping person can suddenly open his eyes, and even raise his head for a second and look around the room; then, a moment later, he can lay his head on the pillow once more and fall asleep without remembering a thing. When I, having met her gaze and having felt the pistol at my temple, suddenly closed my eyes again and did not stir, as if I were sound asleep, she certainly might have assumed that I really was sleeping and had seen nothing, the more so that it would be quite improbable for one who had seen what I had to close his eyes again at *such* a moment.

Yes, quite improbable. But still, she might have guessed the truth as well: that thought also flashed in my mind at that same moment. Oh, what a whirlwind of thoughts and sensations rushed through my mind in less than an instant. Hurrah for the electricity of human thought! If that were the case (I felt)—if she had guessed the truth

and knew I was not sleeping—then I had already crushed her by my readiness to accept death, and her hand might be trembling in hesitation at this moment. The resolve she had shown earlier might have been shattered by this amazing new realization. I've heard that people standing on a great height seem to be drawn downward, into the abyss, by their own accord. I think that many suicides and murders have been committed simply because the person had already taken the pistol into his hand. There's an abyss here as well, a forty-five-degree slope that you cannot help but slip down; there is an irresistible call for you to pull the trigger. But the awareness that I had seen it all, that I knew it all, and was silently awaiting death at her hand—that might keep her from sliding down the slope.

The silence continued, and suddenly I felt the cold touch of iron at the hair on my temple. You might ask: was I firmly convinced I would survive? I will answer, as before God: I counted on nothing, except perhaps one chance in a hundred. Why, then, could I accept death? But let me ask you: what was my life worth now, after the creature I loved had pointed a revolver at me? Besides, I knew with all the strength of my being that a struggle was going on between us at that very moment, a terrible duel of life and death, a duel fought by that very same coward of yesterday, the man whose comrades had thrown him out of his regiment for cowardice. I knew it, and she knew it—as long as she had guessed the truth that I was not asleep.

Perhaps this didn't happen, perhaps I didn't think anything of the sort at the time; yet it all must have happened—without my thinking anything, perhaps—because I have done nothing but think of it every hour of my life ever since.

But now you ask: why didn't I save her from this criminal act? Oh, I have asked myself that same question a thousand times since, every time when, a chill gripping my spine, I recall that second. But I was in such a state of black despair at the time: I myself was perishing, truly perishing, so how could I save anyone else? And what makes you think I even wanted to save anyone? Who knows what I was feeling at the time?

Still, my mind was seething with activity; seconds passed; the silence was deadly; she continued to stand over me, and suddenly I shuddered with hope! I opened my eyes at once. She was no longer in the room. I rose from the bed: I had conquered, and she had been vanquished forever!

I went out to get myself some tea. The samovar was always set up in our other room, and she was always the one to pour the tea. I took a seat at the table without saying a word and accepted a glass of tea from her. Five minutes later I glanced at her. She was dreadfully pale, even paler than yesterday, and she was looking at me. And suddenly—suddenly, noticing that I was looking at her, her pale lips broke into a pale smile; her eyes posed a timid question. “So, she still doesn’t know for sure and is asking herself: does he know, or doesn’t he? Did he see, or didn’t he?” Indifferently, I looked away. After I had tea I closed the shop, went to the market, and bought an iron bedstead and a screen. On returning home, I had the bed set up in the anteroom with the screen around it. This was a bed for her, but I said not a word to her about it. She needed no words to understand. This bed told her that I “had seen it all and knew it all,” and that there could be no more doubts. I left the revolver on the table for the night, as always. That night she lay down in silence on this new bed: the marriage was dissolved, she was “vanquished, but not forgiven.” During the night she became delirious, and by morning had developed a high fever. She was in bed for six weeks.

2

I. A Dream of Pride

Lukeria has just announced that she will not go on living here and will leave as soon as the mistress has been buried. I spent five minutes on my knees in prayer. I wanted to pray for an hour, but I kept thinking and thinking, and all my thoughts were painful. My head aches—so how can I pray? It would only be a sin! It’s strange as well that I don’t feel sleepy: when there is an immense grief—one that can scarcely be borne—one always wants to sleep, at least after the first paroxysms. I’ve heard that those condemned to death sleep exceptionally soundly on the last night. And so it should be; this is nature’s way; otherwise they wouldn’t have the strength. . . . I lay down on the sofa, but I couldn’t fall asleep. . . .

. . . We looked after her day and night for the six weeks of her illness—I, Lukeria, and a trained nurse whom I hired from the hospital. I didn’t begrudge the money and even wanted to spend it on her. I called in Dr. Schroeder and paid him ten rubles per visit. When she regained consciousness I spent less time around her. Still, why bother to describe all this? When she was completely on her feet again, she quietly and without a word sat herself down in my room at a special table which I had also bought for her at that time. . . . Yes, it’s true: we said not a word to one another. Well, actually, we did begin speaking later on, but only about quite ordinary things. I made a point, of course, of not letting myself talk too much, but I could see very well that she, too, was happy not to say more than she had to. It seemed to me that this was absolutely natural on her part: “She’s too distraught, and feels too crushed,” I thought, “and naturally I have to give her time to forget and to come to terms.” And so it was that we went on in

silence, although privately I was constantly preparing myself for the future. I assumed that she was doing the same thing, and I found it awfully intriguing to speculate on just what was going on in her mind.

One more thing: no one knows, of course, how much I suffered while grieving over her during her illness. But I suffered in silence and stifled my groans even from Lukeria. I couldn't imagine, I couldn't even suppose, that she might die before learning everything. But when she was out of danger and her health began to return, I recall that I quickly recovered my composure. Besides, I had decided to *put off our future* as far as possible and keep things in their present form for the time being. Yes, something very odd and peculiar happened to me then—I don't know how else to describe it. I was triumphant, and the very awareness of that turned out to be quite sufficient for me. And so the whole winter passed this way. Oh, I was satisfied as I had never been before, and for the whole winter.

You see, there had been one terrible external event in my life which up to this point—that is, until the catastrophe with my wife—had oppressed me every day and every hour: this was my loss of reputation and my leaving the regiment. To put it briefly, there had been a tyrannical injustice committed against me. It is true that my fellow officers did not like me because I was not an easy person to get along with and, perhaps, because there was an element of the ridiculous about me, although it often happens that something which you revere and regard as sublime and sacred will at the same time be cause for the amusement of your whole crowd of friends. Oh, even in school people never liked me. No one anywhere ever liked me. Even Lukeria isn't able to like me. That same incident in the regiment, while a consequence of the general dislike for me, still was largely a matter of chance. I mention this because there is nothing more offensive and painful than to be ruined by a matter of chance, by something that might or might not have happened, by an unlucky conglomeration of circumstances that might have simply passed over like a cloud. For an intelligent creature this is humiliating. The incident happened as follows.

Once, in the theater, I went to the bar during the intermission. The hussar A—v came in suddenly and, in the presence of all the officers and general public who were standing there, began loudly telling two of his fellow hussars that Captain Bezumtsev of our regiment had only just caused a disgraceful row in the corridor

and that "he was drunk, by the look of it." This conversation did not go any further, and it was a mistake in any case, since Captain Bezumtsev was not drunk and, strictly speaking, the row wasn't really a row. The hussars began speaking of something else, and there the matter ended. But the next day the story had reached our regiment and talk at once began to the effect that I had been the only officer of our regiment present in the bar, and that when the hussar A—v had made such an impudent remark about Captain Bezumtsev, I had not gone up and rebuked him. But what would have been the point of that? If he had a grudge against Bezumtsev, then it was their personal affair; why should I get involved? Meanwhile, our officers began insisting that it was not a personal affair but concerned the regiment as a whole; and since I was the only officer of our regiment present, in failing to act I had proved to all the other officers and civilians in the bar that our regiment could have officers who were not particularly fussy about their own honor and the honor of their regiment. I could not agree with such a view. They let me know that I could correct the matter even now—although belatedly—by asking for a formal explanation from A—v. I did not want to do this, and in my exasperation I gave them a haughty refusal. Then I resigned at once. That's the whole story. I left the regiment proudly, yet crushed in spirit. My will and my mind had suffered a very severe blow. At the same time, as it happened, my sister's husband in Moscow had squandered our modest legacy, including my own tiny share in it, so I was left on the street without a penny. I could have taken some civilian job, but I didn't: after wearing a brilliant uniform I couldn't accept work for some railway. And so: if it's to be shame, let it be shame; if disgrace, then disgrace; if degradation, then degradation—the worse, the better. That is what I chose. Thereafter, three years of gloomy memories, and even the Viazemsky house. A year and a half ago a wealthy old woman, my godmother, died in Moscow, and to my surprise she left me (among her other bequests) three thousand rubles. I thought things over for a time and then chose my fate. I decided on a pawnshop, offering apologies to no one: money, then a cozy home and, at last, a new life far removed from my old memories—that was my plan. Nevertheless, my gloomy past and my once honorable reputation, now destroyed forever, haunted me every hour and every minute. But then I married. Whether that was chance or not I don't know. But when I brought her into my house I thought that I was bringing in a friend, and

I was so much in need of a friend. But I saw clearly that I had to train my friend, that I had to add the final touches to her, even conquer her. And could I have explained it all at once to this sixteen-year-old with her prejudices? For example, how could I, without the chance assistance of the terrible catastrophe with the revolver, have convinced her that I was not a coward and that my regiment had unjustly accused me of cowardice? But the catastrophe came along at the right moment. When I held up against the revolver, I avenged myself on all my gloomy past. And even though no one knew about it, *she* knew, and that meant everything to me, because she herself meant everything to me—all my hope for the future of my dreams! She was the only human being whom I was developing for myself, and I had no need of any other. And now she had discovered it all; she had discovered, at least, that she had been unjust in rushing off to ally herself with my enemies. I was delighted by this thought. I could no longer be a scoundrel in her eyes, merely an odd sort of fellow. But after everything that had happened, even this thought was not entirely displeasing to me. Oddness is not a vice; on the contrary, women sometimes find it attractive. In short, then, I was deliberately putting off the denouement: what had already happened was, for the moment, more than enough to ensure my peace of mind and contained abundant images and material for me to dream about. That's the trouble, you see: I am a dreamer. I had enough raw material for myself, and as for her, I thought that she could *wait*.

And so the whole winter passed in a kind of expectation of something. I loved to steal glances at her as she sat at her little table. She would work at her sewing, and sometimes in the evening would read books she took from my shelf. The selection of books on my shelf also should have testified on my behalf. She scarcely went out at all. Just before dusk every day, after dinner, I would take her out for a walk for the sake of some exercise, but not in complete silence as before. I tried to keep up the appearance that we were not keeping silent but talking cordially; but as I said, neither of us spoke too much. I did this deliberately; as for her, I thought it was essential to "give her some time." It's odd, of course, that it was almost the end of winter before it occurred to me that while I loved to steal glances at her, never once through the winter did I catch her looking at me! I thought this was simply a matter of her shyness. Besides, she had a look of such submissive

timidity, such weakness after her illness. No, better wait and "suddenly she will approach you herself...."

I was absolutely delighted by this thought. I'll add one thing more: sometimes, as if deliberately, I would work myself up and in fact push my emotions and my mind to the point where I actually seemed to feel as if she had offended me. And so it continued for some time. But my hatred never managed to ripen and take root in my inner being. And I myself felt that this was really only a game of some sort. And even then, although I had dissolved the marriage when I bought the cot and the screen, I never ever regarded her as a guilty party. That was not because I judged her offense lightly, but because I had the sense to forgive her completely, from the very first day, even before I bought the cot. In short, it was an oddity on my part, for I am a morally strict person. To the contrary: I could see that she was so vanquished, so humbled, so crushed, that there were times when I was in an agony of pity for her, even while sometimes being absolutely pleased with the notion of her humiliation. The idea of this inequality between us appealed to me....

That winter I deliberately did several good deeds. I forgave two loans; I loaned money to one poor woman without a pawn. And I said nothing to my wife about it, and did not do it in order for her to find out; but the old woman herself came to thank me, almost on her knees. And so the deed became known. I think that my wife truly was pleased to learn about the old woman.

But spring was coming on. It was already the middle of April, the storm windows had been taken down and the sun began to bring bright patches of light into our silent rooms. But a shroud hung before me and blinded my reason. That terrible, fateful shroud! How did it happen that it all suddenly fell away from my eyes and that suddenly my sight was restored and I understood it all! Was it a matter of chance, or had the appointed day simply arrived, or was it a ray of sunlight that kindled the thought and the surmise in my benumbed mind? No, it was not a thought and not a surmise; it was a little vein that suddenly began to throb, a little vein that had all but atrophied but which twitched and came to life, bringing new feeling to my benumbed soul and exposing my diabolical pride. At the time it seemed as though I leapt from my chair. And it happened suddenly, when I least expected it. It happened before evening, about five o'clock, after dinner....

2. Suddenly the Shroud Fell Away

A word or two first. As long as a month before I had noticed a peculiar sort of melancholy in her. It wasn't just her silence, it was real melancholy. That also I noticed suddenly. She was sitting at her work, her head bent over her sewing, and she didn't notice that I was looking at her. And it suddenly struck me right then how thin and gaunt she had become; her face was pale, her lips white. All this, together with her melancholy, gave me a great shock. Even before this I had heard her little dry cough, especially at nights. I got up at once to call Doctor Schroeder, saying nothing to her.

Schroeder came the next day. She was quite surprised and looked first at Schroeder, then at me.

"But I'm quite well," she said, smiling uncertainly.

Schroeder did not give her a very careful examination (the haughty manner of these medical men sometimes doesn't permit them to be careful) and told me only, in the next room, that this was a result of her illness and that when spring came it would not be a bad idea to go to the seaside or, if that were impossible, simply to move to a country place. In short, he didn't tell me anything except that she was sickly or something of the sort. When Schroeder left she said once more, looking at me with terrible seriousness, "I am quite, quite well."

But having said that she blushed at once, evidently from shame. Evidently it was shame. Oh, now I understand: she felt ashamed that I, who was still *her husband*, was looking after her just as if I still were her real husband. But at that time I did not understand and assumed she blushed out of modesty. (The shroud!)

And so it was, a month after this, some time after four o'clock on a bright, sunny day in April, I was sitting in the shop checking my accounts. Suddenly I heard her, sitting in our room and working at her table, begin ever so softly... to sing. This new event surprised me enormously, and even now I do not understand it. Previously I had scarcely ever heard her sing—oh, perhaps in the very first days after I brought her home, when we still could rollick about, target shooting with the pistol. Then her voice was still quite strong and clear, although not always true, but very pleasant and sound. But now her little song was so weak. I don't mean to say it was mournful (it was an old love song of some sort); but it was as if something in her voice had cracked and broken, as if her

little voice could not cope any more, as if the song itself were ill. She was singing in a low voice which rose and then suddenly broke off—such a poor little voice, and it broke off so pitifully. She cleared her throat and once more began to sing ever so quietly....

You may laugh at my getting upset, but no one will ever understand why I was so moved! No, I still wasn't sorry for her; this was something quite different. At first, at least in the first moments, I felt suddenly perplexed and greatly surprised, strangely and terribly, painfully and almost spitefully surprised: "She's singing, and in my presence! *Has she forgotten about me or what?*"

Completely shocked, I remained at my place for a time; then I suddenly rose, took my hat, and went out, scarcely knowing what I was doing. At least I didn't know where I was going and why. Lukeria came to help me with my overcoat.

"She's singing?" I couldn't help but ask Lukeria. She did not understand and looked at me, still uncomprehending; however, it's no surprise that she failed to understand me.

"Is that the first time she's been singing?"

"No, she sometimes sings when you're not home," Lukeria answered.

I recall it all. I went down the stairs, onto the street, and set off with no notion of where I was going. I reached the corner and stared off into the distance. People passed and jostled me, but I didn't feel anything. I hailed a cab and told the driver to take me to the Police Bridge—Lord knows why. Then, suddenly, I gave him twenty kopecks and dismissed him.

"That's for your trouble," I said, laughing senselessly; in my heart, however, a sort of ecstasy suddenly welled up.

I turned toward home, increasing my pace. The poor, cracked, broken note began to ring in my soul once more. I could scarcely catch my breath. The shroud was falling from my eyes! If she could start singing in my presence, it meant she had forgotten about me—that was clear and that was dreadful. My heart could sense that. But rapture radiated in my soul and overcame the dread.

Oh, the irony of fate! You see, there had been nothing and could not have been anything in my soul that whole winter apart from this rapturous feeling. But where had I been all winter? Was I aware of what was happening in my soul? I ran up the stairs in a great rush; I don't recall if I had any apprehension when I entered the room. I remember only that the whole floor seemed to undulate beneath my feet and I moved as if floating down a river. I came

into the room; she was sitting in her usual place sewing, her head bent over her work, but wasn't singing any more. She cast a passing, uncurious glance at me; in fact, it was not a glance but merely an instinctive and indifferent gesture, the kind directed at anyone who enters a room.

I made straight for her and took a chair close beside her, like one scarcely in his right mind. She glanced quickly at me, as if taking fright; I took her hand and don't recall what I said to her—or rather, what I tried to say to her, because I couldn't even speak properly. My voice had broken and would not obey me. And in any case, I didn't know what to say; I was gasping for breath.

"Let's talk . . . you know . . . say something to me!" I babbled something stupid. How could I collect my thoughts? She shuddered and drew back in great fear, staring at my face. But suddenly I could see *stern amazement* in her eyes. Amazement, yes, and it was *stern*. She looked at me wide-eyed. This sternness, this stern amazement was like a blow that shattered my skull. "So is it still love you want? Is it love?" This was what her amazed expression seemed to be asking me, although she still didn't say a word. But I could read everything, absolutely everything. I felt a tremor pass through my whole being and I simply collapsed at her feet. Yes, I fell down at her feet. She leapt up quickly, but with extraordinary strength I grasped both her hands to hold her back.

And I understood the full depth of my despair, I understood it completely! But—can you believe it?—my soul was so overflowing with rapture that I thought I would die. I kissed her feet in happiness, in ecstasy. Yes, in immeasurable, boundless happiness—and this with complete awareness of the hopelessness of my despair! I wept, I tried to say something but could not. Her frightened and amazed expression suddenly changed to one of concern, to a look of profound questioning, and she gazed at me strangely, even wildly; there was something she wanted to understand at once and she smiled. She felt terribly ashamed that I was kissing her feet and pulled them away, but I at once began kissing the spot on the floor where her feet had been. She noticed that and laughed with embarrassment (you know how people laugh with embarrassment). She was about to go into hysterics, I could see; her hands were trembling. But I wasn't thinking about that and kept mumbling that I loved her, that I would not get up: "Let me kiss the hem of your dress . . . let me worship you this way for the rest of my life. . . ." I don't know—I don't remember, but suddenly she broke into shudders and sobs; a terrible fit of hysterics began. I had frightened her.

I carried her over to the bed. When her fit had passed, she sat up on the edge of the bed, and with a terribly distraught air she seized my hands and begged me to calm down: "Enough! Don't torment yourself, calm down!" And she began to cry again. I didn't leave her the whole evening. I kept telling her that I would take her to Boulogne to bathe in the sea—right away, this moment, in two weeks; that her poor voice was so weak, as I had heard the other day; that I would close the shop, sell it to Dobronravov; that everything would begin anew. Above all, Boulogne, Boulogne! She listened, growing more frightened all the while. But the most important thing for me was not that, it was my urge—which grew ever stronger—to lie down again at her feet, to kiss them, to kiss the ground on which her feet stood, to worship her. "There is nothing, nothing more that I ask of you," I kept repeating. "Don't say anything, don't pay any attention to me, just let me sit in the corner and look at you. Turn me into your thing, your lapdog. . . ." She wept.

"And I thought you would just let me go on like that." This burst forth from her involuntarily, so much so that perhaps she wasn't even aware of saying it. And meanwhile—oh, this was the most important thing, the most fateful thing she said, the thing I understood best during that whole evening, and it was like a knife slashing my heart! It made everything clear to me, everything! But as long as she was by my side, as long as I could look at her, hope was overpowering and I was terribly happy. Oh, I exhausted her terribly that evening and I knew it, but I kept thinking that I would at once be able to remake everything anew. At last, much later in the evening, she became completely exhausted; I persuaded her to go to sleep, and she at once fell into a sound sleep. I expected that she might become delirious, and she was delirious, but only very slightly. I kept getting up during the night and tiptoeing quietly in my slippers to have a look at her. I wrung my hands over her, looking at that frail creature on that poor little bed, that iron cot I had bought her for three rubles. I got down on my knees but did not dare kiss her feet while she slept (without her permission!). I knelt to pray to God, but jumped up again. Lukeria kept coming out of the kitchen to keep an eye on me. I went out and told her to go to bed and that tomorrow "something altogether different" would begin.

And I believed that, blindly, madly, terribly. Oh, I was drowning in ecstasy! I could barely wait for the next day. The main thing was that I couldn't believe any disaster would happen, despite all

the symptoms. My good sense had still not entirely returned to me, despite the shroud that had fallen; it did not return for a very long time—oh, not until today, not until this very day!! But then how could my good sense have returned to me then: she was still alive, after all; she was right before me, and I before her. “She’ll wake up tomorrow and I’ll tell her all this, and she will see everything.” That was how I thought at the time—simply and clearly—and that was why I was in ecstasy! The main thing was this trip to Boulogne. For some reason I kept thinking that Boulogne was everything, that something conclusive would happen in Boulogne. “To Boulogne, to Boulogne! . . .” And with that insane thought I awaited the morning.

3. I Understand All Too Well

Why this was only a few days ago, five days, just five days ago, last Tuesday! No, no, if there had been only a little more time, if only she had waited just a little and—and I would have cleared away all the fog that surrounded us! But she did calm down, didn’t she? The next day she listened to me with a smile, despite her confused state of mind. . . . The main thing was that this whole time, all five days, she was in a state of confusion or shame. And she was afraid, too, very much afraid. I won’t dispute it; I won’t contradict you like some madman: she was frightened, but why shouldn’t she be, after all? We had been like strangers to one another for such a long time, you see; we had grown so far apart from one another, and then suddenly all this. . . . But I paid no attention to her fear; our new life was shining before my eyes! . . . It’s true, absolutely true, that I made a mistake. And perhaps there were even many mistakes. Just as soon as we woke the next day I made a mistake, right that same morning (this was on Wednesday): I suddenly made her my friend. I was in far too great a rush, of course, but I absolutely needed to confess—much more than confess, in fact! I didn’t even hide the things that I had been hiding from myself my whole life. I declared frankly that all winter long I had thought of nothing but the certainty of her love for me. I explained to her that my pawnshop had only been the perversion of my mind and my will, my personal idea of both punishing and exalting myself. I explained that in the theater bar I truly had been a coward—it was a matter of my character and my overly self-conscious nature: I had been taken aback by the circumstances,

by the bar itself; taken aback by the thought that if I did step forward I might make a fool of myself. It wasn’t the duel that made me fearful, it was the possibility of making a fool of myself. . . . And later I didn’t want to admit it and tormented everyone, and tormented her because of it; in fact, that was the reason I married her—to torment her for my past. I spoke for the most part as if in a delirious fever. She took my hands and begged me to stop: “You are exaggerating . . . you’re tormenting yourself.” And the tears began again, and again she was on the verge of hysterics! She kept pleading with me to say no more about it and to stop dredging up my past.

I paid no heed to her pleas, or scarcely any heed: Spring! Boulogne! The sun over there, our new sun—that was all I could talk about! I closed the pawnshop and transferred my business to Dobronravov. I suddenly suggested to her that we should give it all away to the poor, apart from the original three thousand which I had inherited from my godmother. That we would use to go to Boulogne, and then return and begin a new life of honest labor. And so it was decided, because she didn’t say a word . . . she only smiled. And I think that she smiled more as a matter of tact, so as not to hurt my feelings. I could see, after all, that I was putting a great burden on her, don’t think that I was so stupid and such an egotist that I didn’t see that. I could see it all, right down to the last detail; I saw it and knew it better than anyone: all my despair stood out for all to see!

I told her everything about me and about her. And about Lukeria. I told her that I had wept. . . . Oh, of course I would talk on other subjects. I was also trying hard not to remind her of certain things. And she even showed some enthusiasm once or twice, I remember that! Why do you say that I looked and saw nothing? And if only *this* had not happened, then everything would have been restored to life again. Why, she was telling me just the other day, when we began talking about reading and what she had read that winter; she laughed when she recalled that scene between Gil Blas and the archbishop of Granada. And how she laughed: sweet, childish laughter, just as she used to, before we were married. (A moment! A moment!) How delighted I was! I was much struck, however, by her mention of the archbishop: so she had found enough happiness and peace of mind to be able to laugh at this masterpiece as she sat there in the winter. That meant she must have begun to recover her stability; she must have begun to believe that I would

not leave her *like that*. "I thought you would just let me go on *like that*." That's what she told me that Tuesday! Oh, this was how a ten-year-old girl would think! And yet she believed, she truly did, that everything in fact would remain *like that*: she sitting at her table and I at mine, and so we would both go on until we were sixty. And suddenly I come up to her, the husband; and the husband needs love! Oh, what misunderstanding, what blindness on my part!

It was also a mistake for me to look at her with such rapture on my face: I should have kept a grip on myself so my rapture wouldn't frighten her. And in fact I did keep a grip on myself. I didn't kiss her feet any more. Never once did I let it show that . . . well, that I was her husband. Oh, that never entered my mind; I only wanted to worship her! But, you see, I couldn't keep altogether silent; I had to say something! I suddenly told her how much I enjoyed her conversation and that I considered her vastly, incomparably more educated than I, and better developed mentally. She blushed terribly and said, embarrassed, that I was exaggerating. And here, like a fool, I couldn't restrain myself and told her of the ecstasy I had felt that time when I stood outside the door listening to her duel—a duel of innocence with that creature—and how I delighted in her intelligence, her brilliant wit, both coupled with her childish naiveté. Her whole body seemed to shudder and she mumbled something about my exaggeration; but suddenly her whole face clouded over and she covered it with her hands and burst into sobs. . . . And here again I couldn't restrain myself: once more I knelt before her; once more I began kissing her feet; and once more it ended in her having a fit, as she had on Tuesday. That was yesterday evening, and the next morning. . . .

The next morning?! Madman, why that was this morning, just a little while ago!

Listen and try to comprehend: when we sat together by the samovar a few hours ago (this was after her fit of yesterday), she surprised me by her air of calm. That's how she was! But I spent the whole night trembling with terror over what had happened that day. But suddenly she came up to me, stood before me, folding her hands (only hours ago!), and began to tell me that she was the guilty party and she knew it, that her crime had tormented her all winter and was tormenting her even now . . . that she cherished my magnanimity. . . . "I will be your faithful wife; I will respect

you. . . ." At this point I jumped up and, like a madman, I embraced her! I kissed her; I kissed her face and her lips, and I kissed her like a husband for the first time after a long separation. And why did I ever leave her? Only for two hours . . . our passports for abroad. . . . Oh, God! Just five minutes, if only I had come back just five minutes earlier! . . . And here was this crowd of people at our gate, people staring at me. . . . Oh, Lord!

Lukeria says—(oh, now I'll never let Lukeria go; she knows everything. She was here all winter; she'll be able to tell me)—she says that after I left the house, and only some twenty minutes before I came back, she suddenly went to the mistress in our room to ask something—I don't remember what—and noticed that her icon (that same icon of the Virgin Mary) had been removed from the icon case and was standing before her on the table; the mistress, it seemed, had just been praying before it.

"What is it, ma'am?"

"It's nothing, Lukeria, you may go. . . . Wait, Lukeria."

She came up to Lukeria and kissed her.

"Are you happy, ma'am?" Lukeria asked.

"Yes, Lukeria."

"The master should have come to ask your forgiveness a long time ago, ma'am. Thanks be to God you've made it up."

"That's fine, Lukeria," she said. "You may go now."

And she smiled, but oddly somehow. It was such an odd smile that ten minutes later Lukeria came in again to have a look at her: "She was standing by the wall, right near the window, her arm against the wall and her head against her arm, just standing there, thinking. And she was so deep in thought that she didn't even notice me standing there watching her from the other room. I could see she had a kind of smile on her face, standing there, thinking and smiling. I looked at her, turned and went out on tiptoe, wondering about her. But suddenly I heard the window open. Right away I went in to tell her that it was still cool outside and she might catch a cold if she wasn't careful. And I saw that she'd climbed up on the windowsill and was standing upright in the open window, her back to me, holding the icon. My heart just sank inside me, and I shouted 'Ma'am, ma'am!' She heard me and made a move as if to turn toward me, but didn't. She took a step, pressed the icon to her bosom, and leapt out the window!"

I remember only that when I came through the gate she was still

warm. The worst thing was that they were all staring at me. They shouted at first, and then suddenly they all fell silent and made way before me, and . . . and she was lying there with the icon. I have a vague memory of coming up to her, silently, and looking for a long time. They all surrounded me and were saying something to me. Lukeria was there, but I didn't see her. She tells me she spoke to me. I only remember some fellow shouting to me that "there wasn't but a cupful of blood came out of her mouth, you could hold it in your hand!" And he showed me the blood there on the paving stone. I think I touched the blood and smeared the end of my finger with it; I recall looking at my finger while he kept on: "You could hold it in your hand!"

"What do you mean, in your hand?" I yelled at the top of my voice (so people say) and raised my arms to attack him. . . .

Oh, savage, how savage! A misunderstanding! It's unbelievable! Impossible!

4. I Was Only Five Minutes Late

And isn't it so? Can you believe this? Can you really say it was possible? For what, why did this woman die?

Oh, believe me, I understand; but why she died is still a question. She was frightened by my love, asked herself the solemn question whether to accept it or not, found the question too much for her to bear, and thought it better to die. I know—there's no point racking my brain about it: she had made too many promises and got frightened that she wouldn't be able to keep them; that much is clear. There are some facts about the case that are absolutely terrible.

Because why did she die? The question remains. The question keeps pounding in my brain. I would have left her *like that* if she had wanted to be left *like that*. She didn't believe it, that was the thing! But no, wait, I'm not telling the truth; it wasn't that way at all. It was simply because with me there had to be honesty: if she was going to love me, then she had to love me completely, not as she would have loved that shopkeeper. And since she was too chaste and too pure to compromise on the kind of love that would have satisfied the shopkeeper, she didn't want to deceive me. She didn't want to deceive me with a half-love or a quarter-love that masked itself as complete love. People like her are just too honest,

that's the thing! And I wanted to instill some breadth of feeling into her then, you remember? A strange idea.

I'm awfully curious: did she respect me? I wonder, did she despise me or not? I don't think she did despise me. It's awfully queer: why didn't it even once, all winter long, enter my head that she despised me? I was as convinced as could be of the contrary, right until that moment when she looked at me with *stern amazement*. And it was specifically *stern*. At that point I realized at once that she despised me. I realized it unalterably and forever! Ah, let her despise me, even for the rest of her life, but let her go on living! Only hours ago she was still walking about, talking. I simply can't understand how she could have jumped out of the window! And how was I to have suspected it even five minutes before? I've called Lukeria in. I will never let Lukeria go now. Never!

Oh, we still could have come to terms. It was just that we had grown so terribly alienated from one another over the winter. But couldn't we have made that up? Why, oh why couldn't we have come together and begun a new life? I'm a noble, generous person, and so is she: and there's a point in common! Just a few more words, no more than a couple of days, and she would have understood everything.

What hurts me most is that the whole thing was a matter of chance—simple, barbaric, blind chance! That's what hurts! Five minutes, just five short minutes late! Had I arrived five minutes earlier, the moment would have passed over like a cloud and the notion would never have entered her head again. And the result would have been her understanding everything. And now the empty rooms again, and I'm alone again. There's the pendulum ticking; what does it care? It has pity for no one. I have no one now—that's the calamity.

I just keep pacing and pacing the floor. I know, I know—don't tell me: you think it's ridiculous for me to be complaining about a matter of chance and "five minutes." But it's obvious, surely. Just think of this one thing: she didn't even leave a note saying, "Don't blame anyone for my death," as all the others do. Couldn't she have realized that even Lukeria might get into some trouble: "You were alone with her," they could say, "and you pushed her out." They might have dragged Lukeria off to jail if it hadn't been for the four people looking out of the windows of the building in the courtyard. They saw her standing with the icon in her hands and saw her throw herself out. But the fact that there were people

standing there looking on is also a matter of chance, you see. No, the whole thing was just a moment, only one unaccountable moment. An impulse, a passing fancy! And what of the fact that she prayed before the icon? That doesn't mean she was saying her prayers just before dying. The moment lasted no more than ten minutes, perhaps; the decision was made just while she was standing by the wall, her head resting against her arm, and smiling. The thought flew into her head, made her dizzy and—and she couldn't resist it.

Say what you like, but this is a clear case of misunderstanding. She could have gone on living with me. And what if anemia were the cause? Simply a case of anemia, of exhaustion of her vital energy? She was worn out from that winter, that's all. . . .

I was too late!!!

How slender she looks in her coffin, and how sharp her little nose has become! Her eyelashes lie straight as arrows. And when she fell she didn't break anything, she wasn't disfigured! There was only this little bit of blood, "you could hold it in your hand." Not more than a spoonful. It was internal concussion. Here's a queer idea: what if I didn't have to bury her? Because if they take her away, then . . . oh, no, it's hardly possible that they can take her away! Oh, of course I know that they should take her away; I'm not a madman and I'm not raving. On the contrary, my mind was never so clear. But how can it be? No one in the house again, these two rooms again, alone with my pawned goods again. I'm raving! Now I'm raving! I tormented her till she couldn't take it any more. That's it!

What do I care for your laws now? What do I care for your customs and your manners, your life, your state, your religion? Let your judge judge me, let them bring me to court, to your public court, and I will say that I don't acknowledge any of it. The judge will shout, "Be silent, sir!" And I will shout in reply: "What force do you have that can compel me now to obey? Why did this blind, immutable force destroy what was dearest to me? Why do I need your laws now? I will withdraw from your world." Oh, what do I care!

She cannot see! She's dead; she cannot hear! You don't know what a paradise I would have created for you. I had a paradise in my soul and I would have planted it all around you! So what if you wouldn't have loved me—what would that matter? Everything would have been *like that*, everything would have remained *like*

that. You would only have talked to me as to a friend, and we would have been happy and laughed joyously as we looked into each other's eyes. And so we would have lived. And if you had come to love another, well so be it! You would have walked with him, laughing, and I would have watched you from the other side of the street. . . . I don't care what would have happened, if only she would open her eyes just once! Just for a moment, only one moment, if she would look at me just as she did a little while ago when she stood before me and vowed to be my faithful wife! Oh, in one glance she would understand everything!

Immutability! Oh, nature! People are alone on earth, that's the calamity! "Is there a man alive on the field?" cries the hero of the Russian epic. I cry the same, though not a hero, and no one responds. They say the sun gives life to the universe. The sun will rise and—look at it, is it not a corpse? Everything is dead, and everywhere there are corpses. There are only people alone, and around them is silence—that is the earth! "Love one another." Who said that? Whose commandment is that? The pendulum ticks, unfeelingly, disgustingly. It's two o'clock in the morning. Her little shoes stand by her cot, just as if they were waiting for her. . . . No, in all seriousness, when they take her away tomorrow, what will become of me?