Women Writers in Russian Modernism

AN ANTHOLOGY

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THE MAD WOMAN

I

Along the way, Ivan Vasilyevich found plenty to talk about. It was astonishing to me, since those two or three times I had seen him before—I think, at the priest's and at the mayor's—he had been silent, stiff, and seemed to be a sullen and unsociable man. In the small, remote district town where I came to spend about a month, he had been serving as the district police officer for something like ten years. I remember that, when I found this out, I immediately thought his sullenness was completely natural. The little town was worse than any village: empty, dusty streets, slanting rows of overgrown, soft grass on the market square, gloomy huts surrounded by half-sandy, half-swampy fields, not one garden, not one forest to be seen. The little town immediately struck me as being horrible, but we often judge by our own yardstick and refuse to believe that something which seems awful to us could possibly be otherwise in reality, or at least for some.

We were travelling by post—I, to visit a friend on a distant estate; Ivan Vasilyevich, on business to the district town. We left at the same time, and since we were going the same way to the first station, Ivan Vasilyevich invited me to ride in his carriage.

"From Makarikha you will be able to travel faster, since the road there is a bit better," said Ivan Vasilyevich. "But here, before we reach Makarikha, you will probably be a bit bored. The distance is great—twenty-six *versts*, and the road passes through a forest. You probably already know what a lot of forest roads we have."

The road, for a number of *versts*, actually did pass through a forest. There were potholes, puddles from the fallen rain, thickly interlaced roots, and some other sort of things—not exactly stumps, nor rotten pickets, either. The forest road was indeed very interesting. We travelled on at a slow, constant pace. From the branches which bent toward us from both sides of the forest, thick and dark, there came a smell of freshness, dampness, and the strong, sharp fragrance of fir trees. The scent of apples seemed to float in the air. The sun had not quite disappeared, and the sky, suffused with its last light, was quietly turning from blue to gold. The solitary troika, with its bells dully ringing, cautiously drove

on—one moment the driver would be engrossed in his thoughts, and the next, be dozing.

I looked to the side, close by, at Ivan Vasilyevich, at his white cap; now his face seemed to me to be absolutely free of moroseness, and only very serious—one sometimes sees such simple solemnity. From under his cap his face appeared dark. He could have been about fifty, or perhaps younger.

He was strong, heavy-set, and somewhat stiff. When he looked at me, I saw the same serious, immobile simplicity in his brown eyes. He had an unusual wrinkle on his cheek: a long, deep furrow which extended from his eye down to the very middle of his face. It was as sharp as if someone had purposely marked him on his cheek. I noticed that he never smiled, even when he talked cheerfully, as if these wrinkles didn't allow him to smile. In general, however, the face of Ivan Vasilyevich was very ordinary. I have difficulty recalling him now, either because I had seen him too many times, or had seen men who resembled him.

He didn't begin speaking at once. He would, however, answer my questions simply and willingly. Then suddenly he asked me:

"Have you heard of my misfortune?"

"You have . . . a sick wife, don't you?"

"Yes . . . She is in the hospital in the provincial capital. The second year has gone by."

"The second year? What have the doctors said? Is there hope?"

"How can I say? Mental illnesses belong to an area . . . that science knows little about. I can't get any definite answer. I know nothing."

He uttered these last words with such a strange expression that I raised my head.

"How is it that you know nothing? The type of illness is certainly known?"

"No . . . Neither the type of illness nor the cause is known. Even . . . of course, I admit this to you in a moment of weakness . . . but I don't hide it, such moments do occur . . . It seems to me that she's not mentally ill at all, and never has been."

"What! Then why did you commit her to an insane asylum?"

"I didn't commit her . . . You must excuse me. I made a slip of the tongue; these are only momentary thoughts of mine. She is no

stranger to me, you know. I know nothing about medicine. The doctors know better than I."

Although I saw that Ivan Vasilyevich himself desired to speak with me, to ask him any further questions was completely inappropriate, and I fell silent, waiting to hear what he would say.

He took off his cap, ran his hand through his short hair, and, having slightly raised his heavy eyelids, glanced at me and all around. The road, as before, went through the woods. Night was falling and the twilight was such a quiet, fragrant, golden color!

"By now I've become accustomed to my sorrow," continued Ivan Vasilyevich. "Little by little one grows used to everything. Before, how hard it was to say anything more about it. How can you explain to someone else what you yourself don't really understand? It would seem to be quite simple—and yet, in reality, it's not so simple at all. However," he added in all seriousness, and with an almost indifferent simplicity, "most likely it's true; after all, she's not a stranger to me . . ."

I glanced at him, at the strange wrinkles on his cheeks, at his kind eyes, and I asked him to tell me from the beginning how this "misfortune" had occurred. Here is what he told me.

II

"My wife, Vera Ivanovna, is now a bit over thirty. However, she looks much older—thin, pale, her face dominated by dark brows. She married me when she was sixteen and a half; if only you could have seen how she was in bloom! Simply a beauty! She was, I must tell you, of a noble family; that is, her mother was an impoverished princess, an orphan who had married a minor official in our district town. I didn't know her. At the time that I met Vera Ivanovna, her father had long been married a second time to a woman from a very simple family; they had many children, and Vera looked after them. In spite of this, she graduated from high school. They were poor; Vera had no dowry, but it didn't matter to me—I already had a position as an assistant in another district. I thought, somehow we would make a living. I liked Vera very much.

"As for myself, you see, I entered Kazan' University; I had dreamed of another road, but I didn't finish my education. I was involved in an incident—you know, in his youth a man is hot-

blooded and unreasonable, and our time was so peculiar . . . it wasn't a serious incident, yet I was expelled from the university. I can firmly say"—here Ivan Vasilyevich glanced at me almost severely—"that I have remained true to my strong convictions. Just as I was then—I am now. Only my reasonableness, tenacity, and experience have increased. My sole belief is in humanity—love of man, and strong, vital help to him who needs light and bread. Don't consider this a boast, because I'm not speaking of what I have done, but only of what I always believed in. My sister and I were also the children of a minor civil servant in Kazan'. When our parents died, my sister became a village schoolteacher, and I entered the service of the district government. For a long time I tormented myself over my entering the civil service, but then I understood how much good I could accomplish there. For three years my sister wouldn't associate with me, but then she, too, understood it. It was pretty hard at the beginning, and even now, at times, it isn't easy; however, what a comparison one could make! Things change from year to year. Thirty or forty years ago a man such as myself, with my convictions, wouldn't have been tolerated for even one day, yet now I am held in the highest regard at the governor's. Yes, the principles of humanity and enlightenment are beginning to triumph. Everything is moving in that direction."

"Is that so?" I involuntarily challenged him.

"Yes, sir, it is. Haven't you noticed it yourself? You will see that it's true, if you speak with someone of higher rank. The wind is blowing in that direction. Mankind is developing, and though progress is slow, culture, science, and knowledge are performing great wonders."

"That means you believe that men are on a straight path to universal happiness?" Again I didn't restrain myself and interrupted him.

He raised his brows in surprise.

"How can it be otherwise? The straight path, perhaps, isn't smooth, and patience is still required . . . but all will develop of its own accord, and its own will. Think of it like this: education spreads, superstitions are extinguished one after another; the intellect is developing, and with it a reasonable gratification of needs, and a respect for another's individuality in the name of the ideal of mankind."

I saw that this conversation could lead us far afield, and so I didn't voice my objections. Ivan Vasilyevich returned to our former discussion.

"And so, I married Verochka. Remembering back to that time, I can see that even then there was something not entirely normal about her. There were no hysterics, nothing of that sort, but, as the doctors say, an aggravated sensitivity. I think that it was so even then. I loved her, I tell you truthfully, with all my soul. But she, to put it simply, was ecstatic all the time. She would continuously tell me how much she loved me—so much so that later she would even be angry with herself.

"'I cannot express my love. I would like to, but I am unable to. Help me, if you have any pity for me.'

"I would calm her down.

"'This,' I would tell her, 'Verusha, is your romanticism. I know that you love me, and I am happy. What more could you want?' There was no reason to be surprised at her romanticism: after all, she wasn't quite seventeen years old, whereas I was no longer an innocent youth.

"However, she became angry at me more and more often. Then once she suddenly said:

"'You amuse yourself with me as though you were playing with a doll. I know nothing about you. Tell me, what do you think about?'

"This reproach wounded me, since, after all, I am a just man. What could I do? She was such a young thing, and so pretty, and I was so in love with her. During this period after the wedding . . . I, of course, came to my senses, and begged her pardon.

"'Just wait a bit, everything will come in time.'

"Then she pleaded: 'Give me some sort of work. I'm bored.'

"I was glad to do this. I saw that in time she would be a real woman—and not only a woman, but a human being as well. But now she was such a child. And so again I said:

"'Wait a while, everything will work out. Take care of the household, of the apartment. Speak with good people, try to understand them. I will order some new books for you from St. Petersburg, and you read the old ones that I already have. You really should read them, too.'

"This was all right with her, and she agreed. I travelled; she attended to the house. The little town in which we lived was even

worse than my present one. The location, however, was somewhat more pleasant; it was surrounded by a stream and some woods. I managed to find a nice apartment—a new little house with three rooms—like a doll's house. I introduced Vera to the wife of the archbishop and the wife of a member of the court; you know how it is, the usual country society. They're very kind people. They were worse then, less educated, but now one might say that even in our town we have a marvelous society, all quite educated, and not apathetic.

"And so, sir, that's how we lived. We lived there one year, two, three. Vera became completely accustomed to our new life. She read many books, we subscribed to the newspapers, and I, by then, you know, discussed with her everything that was in my soul just as I would with a dear friend. I talked about my work, my doubts; I shared everything with her. She would reason everything out properly, and she established ties with our society. Moreover, she had friends among the townspeople. Even throughout the neighboring villages she struck up acquaintances. People would visit, and she would speak with quite a number of them. I didn't interfere. It was a good thing, as I'm not such a good friend of the nobility. There was such ignorance in our villages that, if Vera spoke with the townspeople, only good could have come of it.

"Then an official from St. Petersburg arrived in our town. Such a pleasant man, you know, quite young. We took to him, and he dined with us on two occasions. Verochka would tell him how she visited various villages, and things like that, and he would praise her and talk about enlightenment and about the ignorance of the people. I listened and was happy. But then, in my most joyous moment, I realized for the first time that something wasn't quite right with Vera. She had been talking animatedly, and then suddenly became quiet and pensive.

"'What's wrong with you?' I asked.

"Our guest looked at us.

"She raised her eyes to him and said harshly: 'Yes, we're not very good. We live basely and occupy ourselves with base pursuits.'

"Can you imagine how that startled us! I simply couldn't come to my senses. I couldn't even understand what she was talking about. The official was a most honorable man. And indeed she knew me quite well, I thought.

"I couldn't find the right thing to reply, while the official, although he retained his composure, turned red and, smiling, politely asked: 'Why are you so harsh, Vera Ivanovna? What don't you like?'

"It was summer and we sat drinking tea. She got up from her chair, walked up to the window, looked out at the street, sighed, and said indifferently: 'No, it's nothing, forgive me . . . I am speaking in general terms. What we do is not base, only boring.'

"'Are you bored? But . . .'

"'No, I am not bored, but these affairs, mine and yours, are boring. You continue to think about the happiness of mankind, and perhaps about reading physics books. But imagine—what if everything were already achieved, and everyone, even Mit'ka—the drunkard from Ukhabny—were living, right now, as we do. What if they knew everything that we know. So what?'

"I jumped up.

"'Vera. What are you saying?'

"She continued: 'Well, so there's happiness. Only it's a boring happiness. Wouldn't you agree that it's a boring one?'

"The official gave her a great deal of sensible advice, developed some broad ideas—a charming, eloquent person! She didn't answer, as if she agreed.

"Afterward I rebuked her severely. She didn't even say one word to me; it was as if I weren't even talking to her. I reproached her with her old romanticism. She smiled ironically and then left. For three days I was angry at her—then it passed, and we again lived as we had before."

Ivan Vasilyevich sighed and fell silent as if remembering something—then he began talking again.

III

"Everything was as it had been before—yet it was somehow different. Vera was very depressed and silent. And if I, as before, upon returning from a trip, would begin to tell her about something (many curious things do happen when travelling), she would not respond. If I walked through the room, she would remain silent, sullenly following me with her eyes.

"'What's the matter with you, Vera?'

"'Nothing. Talk. I am looking at you. All of you are very interesting people.'

"What a nuisance! If only she would have explained what was bothering her. No, she would only sit in her corner and watch me constantly, and in that sullen way follow me. At times I would be beside myself:

"'Why do you watch me like this? Do you want to write a novel or something? Then write. It's an occupation, after all.'

"'Why shouldn't I watch you? You're an interesting type.'

"She would say this, smile ironically, and walk out.

"In spite of everything, I pitied her. Perhaps she really was bored? So young, no children, and I was constantly travelling. How could she be happy with the company of the archbishop's wife and the wife of the local government official? Of course, I dreamed of seeing Vera a real woman, a person working as I did, as much as possible for her younger fellow men, her uneducated brothers; I conceived of her as a helpmate . . . But she was young yet. Youthful years would pass and she would freely take to that task. After all, do we not have many truly sacred jobs for women in our remote provinces? To teach and to nurse—these two words mean so much.

"However, I saw that Vera was bored with me. I'm not a beast; we didn't live according to the Domostroy. Whatever a person wishes for himself, he has the right to have. That's the way I talked to Vera. She seemed to be happy. Well, that's fine, I thought.

"I let her go to visit with her family in the district capital. From there she wrote, 'I am going to Moscow for a month with my aunt.' Let her visit the theatre, I thought. She spent approximately three months in Moscow, and in February she returned. It happened that exactly at that time an army regiment was transferred to our town. It became gay—terribly so. In the spring there were picnics, horseback riding, rides in the carriage; the commander of the regiment gave evening parties, where even the priests' young wives danced—there were two of them living in the town then.

"My Vera became very busy and gay. She told me hardly anything about Moscow.

"'Was it pleasant there?'

"'Yes.'

"'Well, are you satisfied now?'

"'I? How?'

"I was having difficulty explaining myself.

"'What do you mean, how? In general . . . with life, you know . . .'

"'With whose life? With my own?'

"Her answers were somehow simply out of place. I continued, nevertheless: 'If you don't want me to understand—it's not really necessary.'

"Here she embraced me tenderly: 'Don't be angry; I'm happy. Only don't ask me about anything again.'

"I confess that these words struck me as both offensive and insulting. Not ask! Who was it that cared for her, that arranged it so her life could be free, happy, gay—arranged it, perhaps, without approving of it, though with hopes for the future? And suddenly this 'Don't ask'! What kind of secrets had she acquired?

"Vera, at that time, read hardly a single book. Well, she was a lady, like any other, only somehow more active. She would gallop on horseback daringly and tirelessly, dance until dawn in the club. A certain officer (he was from a good family and handsome) was courting her ardently. She would laugh, and together they would either lag behind the others or go in front of them—and then, well, they began to be noticed. You know, giving cause for gossip leads people into sin. And they did indulge in gossip.

"So, once when we returned home, I hinted to her about the gossip. What was this? She puffed up indignantly, her eyes became evil.

"'What, are you jealous or something?'

"And, not waiting for my reply, she took the candle and left.

"I thought to myself: What will come of this? You know, in the depth of my soul I felt very nasty and somehow numb. For the first time I couldn't sleep that night. However, I overcame that nonsense, and all went well.

"Vera at once became more restrained with that officer Stoletov, but she was gloomier than a dark cloud. I, however, calmed down. 'Everything,' I thought, 'will be all right. Life will take care of itself.'

"One time, you know, Vera and I were returning from visiting a member of the local courthouse—he had had a rather small party and we were returning home late. The streets were deserted; it

was already autumn, although still warm. From time to time black clouds would pile one upon another, now covering the moon, now uncovering it and becoming brighter again. To tell you the truth, I was tired out. I had just returned from a business trip to the district capital that day, and then—that party. I don't play cards, so most of the time I dozed. On the way home I was quiet; Vera was also silent. When we were already in front of the house, I said to her:

"'You know, Verochka, my transfer most likely will go through. That little town is better than ours, it's closer to the capital . . .'

"I didn't manage to finish what I was saying, when suddenly she let go of my hand and began to sob. I was simply astounded. Right in the street, and, you know, she cried very rarely; I wasn't accustomed to it. We had discussed my new appointment long before, and there was nothing unexpected about it for her. As for myself, to tell you the truth, I had wanted it for a long time. The new job was almost the same as the other, only more responsible, which meant I could accomplish more good in it. I had already grown accustomed to my job, and had even come to love it.

"Vera was weeping torrents.

"'What's the matter with you?' I said, even becoming angry. 'Please tell me.'

"Through the sobbing I suddenly heard: 'If you only knew how unhappy I am. There's nothing I can tell you! Oh, I'm so unhappy!'

"You know, I was shocked! Of course, I thought, she had fallen in love with Stoletov! That was indeed a nice thing for me! Here I was worrying myself about gossip, whereas it was a far more serious problem, and one I hadn't even thought about.

"You know, I loved her deeply. And a loving husband, no matter what convictions he may hold, feels in the first moments after such a disclosure nothing but pain and anger. One must wait for that first moment to pass. Luckily, I have the ability to remain silent; and then later reason, will, and respect for another's personality awaken within me.

"We proceeded silently, isolated from each other; the moon showed through the clouds. Vera had by now stopped sobbing and was barely weeping. I felt very depressed; however, I thought for a minute and said:

"'Vera! I am a human being and you are a human being. Let's talk like two people. You are not my slave, remember. If you have

come to love someone seriously, then tell me. Can it be that you don't know me? I love you—but above everything else I value personal human freedom. I will agree to a divorce.'

"We had already reached the porch of our house. Vera entered first. She knocked on the door, and then turned toward me; I saw how her eyes sparkled with surprise from under her black lace kerchief. She didn't have time to reply, for the door opened at that moment and the candle light illumined us. Silently, we ascended the stairs. I was displeased both with the candle light and with Vera's silence. She undressed without a word and then went into the bedroom. When I entered, she was sitting in a white gown, sad and quiet, at her dressing table.

"However difficult it was, I wanted to begin our conversation once more, but she anticipated me:

"'Here is what I will tell you, my dear friend, Ivan Vasilyevich.' (It was the first time she had addressed me this way.) 'You consider me to be more stupid than I am. I know you well, and I know your convictions also; think, if I had fallen in love with Stoletov—what would I have to be unhappy about? You would have given me a divorce; well, you would have grieved for a little while, but soon you would have calmed down, because you would have acted according to your convictions. But the fact is, I haven't fallen in love with anyone, I am not going to leave you, and I have no place to go.'

"She said all this without looking up. I was terribly happy, I even held out my arms to her.

"'Vera!' I cried to her. 'Vera, my dear! Please, forgive me! What were you crying for? What are you unhappy about?'

"She neither looked up nor moved.

"'You won't understand this, Ivan Vasilyevich. I am suffocating; it's disgusting.'

"'You are not cheerful? And here you went to Moscow . . .'

"She sprang up. I looked, and again there were tears in her eyes.

"'Not happy! And do you think that this gaiety is important to me? It is like vile, dirty vodka! And not even vodka, but just dirty water. For, after all, one can become drunk with vodka. It's even more suffocating than being with you . . . Yes, being with you is suffocating. Everywhere—this offensive closeness and filth.'

"I frowned a bit.

"'What exactly do you want, Vera? What is it that you don't like? What is it—romanticism, philosophy? You don't see the meaning of life, or what?'

"I got ready to reason with her in all seriousness. She was my wife, and it was my responsibility to support her in moments of doubt. In the past I had often come upon such restless minds. Many people are subject to the same experiences.'

"But the things that she began to tell me I couldn't understand at all. She kept repeating 'It's suffocating; it's suffocating.' At last she became bitter:

"'Why is it that no one loves you? Why? You're a good man and are kind to people, but when you meet a real person, he can't love you. No one can love any of you "humanists," you people who think only about "utility" and about your own nobility of thought. They feel that you are leading them into an abyss. If everyone were like you, you would all fail!'

"'Vera, come to your senses! Why are you being so unjust? When have I ever thought about myself? My faith in mankind . . .'

"'Might just as well be in an empty rubber boot.'

"I looked at her simply with horror.

"'Now you've told the truth, everything is going your way. Go ahead and enjoy it! There are others like you, with your faith in rational public welfare, in enlightenment through physics books—all of you are born like that, all of you are born with pride. Or there are the silent ones—the officers with their Moscow gaiety . . . well then, lead on, lead them all on under the cover of your great nobility! Sew God's earth into the skin of a dead ram! And you will succeed in doing it; only for a long time afterward you will all be cursed!'

"I had never seen her in such a frenzy. I no longer argued, but only tried to calm her down. I even begged her forgiveness and assured her that I understood her, although most decidedly I understood neither what was wrong with her nor where her fierce words had come from. We talked through the night. But I was by now hardly listening to her. She just repeated what she had already said—that I, in fact, believed that all was going for the better, whereas she could see that it was all turning out for the worse. In short, whatever I would say, she would state the opposite . . .

"'You, that is, the humanists,' (Imagine what a word she had invented!) 'are slowly stifling the human soul by pressing against it with the weight of your bodies. But the body needs a living soul. You have forgotten that small detail!'

"I wanted to voice my objections, when she added: 'But the soul doesn't live only by reading physics books.'

"Then I gave up. She either was trying to be original or was ill. I didn't contradict her and she seemed to calm down. She even became affectionate toward me. It was as though we were completely reconciled.

"And then the following happened: she caught a bad cold shortly after our conversation that night, and her leg began hurting her. It got worse and worse. I took her to various doctors, but there were no positive results. Then I received my appointment here in this town, and I moved her to this place while she was still ill. She became very quiet and submissive. In the summer I sent her with some of her acquaintances for a *koumiss* cure. She was ill for two years, if not longer. She suffered terribly; she had cramps in her leg and could hardly walk. The third year I took her to Moscow. There they cauterized her leg. What she went through! But after that she started to recover and to walk, with only a slight limp."

IV

"I know," continued Ivan Vasilyevich after a brief silence, "that you're going to ask me if Verochka was religious. No, she wasn't; nothing of that sort was evident in her. One couldn't reproach her with being particularly religious. Of course, she occasionally went to church, there were long church services, she received communion as was customary (we were very open in our manner of life), but to fast, to pray hypocritically or something like that—no, never! There was never anything of that sort.

"It's rather difficult, you know, for us to be carried away with the clergy. We live with the priests in a secular fashion; we are acquainted with their families, trying to be friendly to them in every possible way. On the other hand, to tell you the truth, our priests and their wives constitute the least educated section of the urban population. It seems that they're not quite equal to us—everybody feels it, they themselves most of all. This fact, of course, does them credit. You understand, I'm not speaking of their idleness—

you can judge for yourself—but of the average level of intellectual development. It's natural that academicians among the clergy, if they live in the realm of pure learning, usually become monks. If there is an intelligent man (even if he is a priest), one who understands morality and the moral significance of religion in its true historical meaning—he won't go to the village; his place is somewhere in St. Petersburg. The village doesn't interest him, although it's there that he would be most useful. We in the village get priests of our own level; and for the most part they come for bread. He will acquire a bit of learning in the town seminary, our own brother peasant, and he's ready. He will gradually learn to pasture the flock. Well versed in dogmatism and in what he's learned by rote, he will explain, if necessary, to the peasant woman, which icon of the Mother of God—of Vladimir or Kazan'—walked through the air, or to which of them the priest must offer a service for someone's lost eyesight—this he can do; what else is necessary? They understand each other, the priest and the peasants, because before the seminary they used to catch crayfish together. Such a priest doesn't philosophize, and since he is strong in his faith, he doesn't engage in heresy. Not long ago, even in our province an utterly simple little peasant was appointed priest—in his own village. It's true, he didn't have a strip of land and, although he studied in a district school, he never managed to complete his education. So he scraped together a living somehow; he was an agent for the Singer sewing machine company, and he was always travelling through the district. He became friendly with our priests and, imitating them, he engaged in a little missionary work. Certainly you know our schismatic region. There are so many schismatics here! Our priests liked him, and so they helped him out. Now he's a priest in the village, and he's doing quite well.

"In the city, of course, the priests are somewhat more educated and polished, but all the same, you know, they're of that same type. This is, of course, good for their position. It's quieter. I look at it this way: All this is normal and necessary for the future when the natural course of events will itself establish our cause.

"Here I've been speaking to you about our district. We have schismatics, and Stundists, and Molokans, and other various sects—multitudes of them; however, now there are fewer of them. Why? Do you suppose from missionary work? Not a bit of it. Which

of them would our missionaries convert, and to what? Maybe some leave because of business or something of that sort, but this decrease is actually taking place according to the natural flow of events. The wind is beginning to blow from another direction. Before, they were spied upon, vigorously persecuted, and treated with caution, and this made them bristle with resistance, meaning 'We'll fight you! You will remember us!' But today—no one even cares to glance at them. I, for example, visit the district when something or other has happened. I don't even try to understand their beliefs! I ask for the sake of form: 'Are you Molokans? Old Believers? Good. Stundists? That's good, too. Just pay a small fine, and continue your religious activities if you wish.' They see, the Old Believers especially, that no one is interested in them, so all of a sudden they cool down; their belligerence evaporates. They become more attentive toward their work—and even send their children to the church school! The young boy grows up a bit; he looks around and sees that an ecclessiastical man has more time at his disposal, his position is more secure and more profitable; some of these boys may even get to the seminary. So, time takes its own course quietly and peacefully.

"Some of the sectarians, I tell you, interested me. They said, 'We are neither Molokans nor Stundists, nor Baptists.' 'Who are you then? Dukhobors?' 'No.' 'Who, then?' 'We,' they said, 'are "seekers." We,' they continued, 'are something quite different.' I, however, didn't care to look deeper. I replied that there is no such sect, and therefore I would report them as Molokans—it makes no difference whatever to me. 'But if you want to be more exact,' I said, 'go to the priest, perhaps he will be able to describe your attitudes better.' I really don't know if they ever went.

"By the way, as people—the sectarians are all right; they are even quieter and more educated than the clerics, only their reading matter is foolish. They've become all mixed up. The Dukhobors as well as the Tolstoyans are, in my opinion, abnormal, because they've appeared prematurely.

"But excuse me, I have digressed from my story. This digression wasn't irrelevant, though, since my Verochka, as she recovered a bit and we became settled in our town, gradually became interested in these beliefs. Once she even drove out with me to the village of Bezzemel'noe, just for the ride. She had a chat with the

townspeople and even asked some of them to visit her. I said nothing. Even long before this she had been interested in people.

"'You, Vera, rather than merely listening to them, should read something or other to them, tell them something.'

"'What could I tell them? What could I teach them? I myself know nothing.'

"'Well, my dear, there is always something to teach the peasants.'

"She smiled.

"'You never talk to them, so don't judge what they know or don't know. Anyway, let them stay untouched by your "knowledge." They don't stifle me. Whereas you, well, you are convinced that one must live in the name of man, and yet there is this stuffiness in your life. You can't limit your life to only mankind.'

"I saw that she had begun to get irritated with me again. I had had, for a long time, but one thought concerning her. If Verochka, I thought, had had a child, none of this would have happened. But how could we adopt a child all of a sudden? However, here chance came to my aid. Vera herself got the same notion.

"Her stepsister in the provincial capital had died. She had been married to some sort of a clerk; her husband was still young. They had about five children and were living in poverty. The youngest, Andryusha, was only ten months old, and he was a sickly child as well.

"Vera returned from the town in a serious mood. Then she asked me:

"'Ivan Vasilyevich, let us take Andryusha. Let's adopt him. It doesn't matter that he's sickly. I'll nurse him back to health.'

"I was the happiest of men; however, I purposely didn't agree right away so that she wouldn't think that I only wanted to give her a toy to play with.

"She went to fetch the child. It went all right with us, although Andryusha would often fall ill. It seemed as if Verochka had spent all of her life romping with children, she loved him so much. I began to take to the child as well. We adopted him.

"Although Vera was occupied with Andryusha, her character changed little. Whenever we would converse, she would not abandon her own thoughts, all of them being contrary to mine. (She

made friends with the sectarians and talked to them; however, it was still with a certain moderation.)

"Soon afterward there was a further addition to our family. My sister arrived. Although we hadn't seen each other for many years, I loved and respected her and had long before tried to persuade her to come live with us. She was older than I and, when I first started working, she was already teaching in the village. For three years following that, she didn't write to me, yet we remained close because we understood each other. She didn't come to see me while she was physically well. She was so energetic—while living in the village she learned about surgery and that sort of thing. That's the way she was. But that year she fell ill; she wasn't young anymore, and, well, she agreed to rest, to give up her post, and to stay with me. If there is sufficient strength, a man will always find some work to do.

"I also thought that Klavdia would be of some help to Verochka.

"Klavdia was older and more experienced, and a person very worthy of respect because of the excellent work she performed.

"However, I immediately noticed that she and Vera didn't take to each other. Perhaps it was because they were very different. Klavdin'ka was an elderly person, similar physically to me—large boned, although not fat, big, her face energetic, her lips compressed. Verochka, although she had grown pale and thin, was still very beautiful. She was not very tall, or fashionably dressed, but always attired carefully and somehow accurately. In every detail of appearance they differed; for example, Vera's brows were very thick, dark, and slanted. My sister was fair, and her brows were hardly even noticeable.

"And as far as character is concerned, there, too, they bore little resemblance. Verochka was easily irritated, and she would often scream, but Klavdia's tone of voice was so unemotional and restrained; it was like the beating of a hammer. I never noticed any malice in Klavdia, though there was some peevishness, a trait which must be excused in old maids. But what a marvelous person! Such energy, such forcefulness in her activities, such honesty! It was very unpleasant for me that it wasn't working out well between her and Verochka. But, it's nothing, I thought; it will turn out all right.

"Vera took care of our child; Klavdia did the housework, and she also frequented the hospital (she was acquainted with the district doctor). Klavdia didn't take care of Andryusha, though, as he was still too small.

"Even then Vera was negative toward both of us, and she would often become annoyed with Klavdia. Klavdia evidently felt sorry for me. She considered Vera hysterical, unbalanced, and immature, and one time she even told me that she noticed signs of abnormality in her. This was unpleasant for me; I loved both of them, but what could I do?"

V

"Everything, you know, followed in its own course. I was satisfied with my work, and my superiors were likewise satisfied with me—I worked as hard as I could. Even a little wheel, if it spins properly, is indispensable in the gigantic mechanism of the entire world. Hitches occur, of course, little knots, but they don't disturb the general direction; they can't impede the flow of history.

"One unpleasant incident did occur. During the cholera epidemic an additional surgeon was sent to us from the town. He was, you know, a man of the common people, from the town bourgeoisie, still young—but how surprisingly quickly everything is assimilated nowadays, if a man comes in contact with modern enlightenment! He was still somewhat crude, but of course he had only just pushed his way into the world of educated people. Only very recently had he understood what science is and begun to feel that he, an educated man, was surrounded by such ignorance. I very much liked this Kasyan Demyanych's confidence about everything. I even invited him to stay with us for a while, since there was no room at the hospital. In our town proper there wasn't one case of cholera. We had built a temporary barracks, though, and someone from the district city was lying ill there. He convalesced, and after that there were no more cases of cholera. Kasyan Demyanych, however, still lived with us, went to the barracks and to the hospital; and in his free time he took an interest in the town. Before this, he had never been away from the large provincial center.

"He got along very well with Klavdia. She would sit and talk with him for a long time, obviously taking good note of his words; Klav-

din'ka was very well-read. I sometimes entered into their conversations, and at those times we would discuss a great many things.

"Only Vera was always quiet. She would be silent, and then smile ironically. I wouldn't interfere with her, for I was afraid of what she might say. Although I disapproved, she didn't avoid the peasants; yet she looked askance at Kasyan Demyanych. Whereas I felt we had to be glad that such types came; we had to forgive a lot and not turn up our noses.

"There was an important summer holiday—the dean of the cathedral was conducting the service. Vera and I had just returned from the service (we had to go there, you know, we were in the public eye; this was, in a way, an established custom), and Klavdia was waiting for us with tea in the dining room. We sat down. Kasyan Demyanych wasn't there, and he hadn't been in church. Klavdia said: 'Today Kasyan Demyanych wanted to avail himself of the occasion to speak to the people . . . You know, about measures to prevent cholera. Indeed, we lack even the most primitive notions of hygiene.'

"She didn't manage to finish what she was saying, when the door opened and in flew the town constable.

"'Your honor, a disturbance! On the square they're beating the doctor!'

"'What are you saying!' Such a thing had never happened in my district. I grabbed my uniform and cap and ran out. Where was the doctor's assistant? They informed me that he had run to the square, too.

"You have perhaps heard that, during the cholera epidemics, barracks were destroyed in some places, and even doctors were beaten up. What was to be done? Indeed, there is still a great deal of ignorance and darkness in Russia! Russia has until now been resisting the real light. Yet we must be grateful that the light has at last begun to shine. We know where it is. In our town, however, the population was of a different sort; furthermore, we had no cases of cholera, so I thought that nothing would happen. What sort of riot could take place?

"And I was right—there was no riot. We immediately arranged the trial and the punishment. We managed to calm their passions, and before half an hour had passed Kasyan Demyanych was sitting in our dining room, while Klavdia treated him to tea.

"They had succeeded, however, in giving him a huge black eye, so that his face, naturally, had acquired a terribly evil, gloomy, and fierce expression. Such barbarity can drive one to hatred; I understand this.

"Klavdin'ka sympathetically inquired: 'How did it happen? Were they drunk? What did you say to them?'

"'What did I say? Nothing in particular. I talked about cleanliness and about the role of disinfectant in times of cholera. They were able to understand.'

"'Then how did it happen?' I asked. 'Is it true that Evtikhy Ivanov was the first to strike you?'

"'The devil take him, how am I supposed to know . . . what a violent peasant. You see, I spoke to them about disinfectant, then I described to them the situation in a cholera hospital, and they listened. Only some old woman squeaked: "We should hold a service to the Mother of God!" I answered that during a cholera epidemic it is dangerous to hold church services, since they would allow the infection to spread through the crowd. They began to hoot; however, nothing happened, and I continued. Again someone shouted: "Save us, Lord!" This, to tell you the truth, irritated me considerably, and I said: "It would be better for you to be thinking about disinfectant, do you understand?" "How could we not understand," they shouted, "you believe in disinfectants rather than in God." At this point I became very angry and they began to shout: "Beat him, brothers, what kind of a doctor is he who has been sent to lure us into believing in disinfectants . . ." I began to yell myself, and then they started to hit me.'

"I was never so vexed and indignant; yet, I couldn't suppress a smile. 'A disinfectant faith! What a thing they've concocted!'

"My Verochka burst out into loud laughter. Klavdia looked at her: 'I am amazed at your laughter and thoughtlessness. Kasyan Demyanych is young and sincere, and he has suffered for his youthful, honest zeal . . .'

"'Yes,' I said. 'You don't know our people. It is still impossible to talk to them that way. You just can't come out and insult some of their superstitions. You have to sidestep a lot, carefully leading them forward, without prematurely taking away from them something that they themselves, in time, will discard.'

"'Ah yes, yes,' suddenly Vera began to speak emotionally and stood up. 'I recognize you, Ivan Vasilyevich, in these words. You lie, dissemble, and avoid these people whom you designate the "ignorant folk." Take this away, and then this, and so on. And in this way you hope to rob them entirely!'

"'Vera! Vera!' I tried to reason with her.

"'What do you mean "Vera!" I am speaking the truth. Somewhere or other you have dreamed up some kind of petty human happiness, and you self-righteously proceed by any means to shove it down the throat of the entire world! You have decided for yourselves and for others as well what everyone needs, what's right for everyone. And how has it happened that the most narrow-souled have been able to cut down the broadest? How has it happened that life, obedient to these narrow-souled ones, has arranged itself as if to please them?'

"Klavdia couldn't contain herself: 'It's your sectarians with their broad souls, apparently, who thrashed Kasyan Demyanych . . .'

"'There is nothing to get angry about,' Vera answered calmly. 'You are all so disgusting to me, with your self-satisfied, successful stupidity, that I would have left you long ago, if only . . . unfortunately, there weren't people like you, and the same situations, everywhere. Man for man, man in the name of man . . . How much scope and breadth there are in these words!'

"She burst out laughing. Klavdia, although obviously restraining herself, nevertheless hissed: 'I see that you want to jump higher than your own head.'

"'Man is created in such a way, Klavdia Vasiliyevna, that he is able to live only as long as he knows or believes that there is something higher than he. Those who have lost this necessity are dead people. Not only you and your dear brother, but perhaps one half of the world now, and even Kasyan Demyanych, are such people. The young are like shiny, red apples, but there are worms in them.'

"No one contradicted her.

"'I want to find such people,' she continued, 'who will look into life—not into death . . . Such people who will arrange their lives not for their own sake, but in the name of the One Who is higher than they.'

"Klavdia again spoke to her, and so affectionately: 'What are you waiting for then? Go on, look for them . . . Read the *Chetya-Minei*. They may even sprinkle you with holy water to free you from the evil eye.'

"Vera just glared and walked away. At the door she said:

"'I'm not going anywhere. You will bite right through everyone's veins . . . And there are millions of you approaching from everywhere. I perished long ago, but I am not sorry for myself. I am only sorry for our child.'

"Three of us remained in the room. I heard Klavdia saying to the doctor in a low voice: 'You know, she's not normal.'

"The doctor only nodded his head. Klavdia then said more loudly: 'How sorry I am for my brother! But now I am also worried about the future of their unfortunate boy.'

"It was then, for the first time, that I began to think about Andryusha."

VI

"Well, now, there's not much left; we're approaching the end of my story. Fortunately, we'll soon be leaving the forest. And from the forest to Makarikha it's only about half a *verst*, not more. How quickly it becomes dark! The sun hasn't set so very long ago, and already its afterglow can't be seen. If you're not bored with my story, I'll finish it, otherwise there won't be any time—we'll soon be arriving."

I earnestly entreated him to finish, and Ivan Vasilyevich pulled his hat down more tightly and continued his story.

"It was an extremely difficult time for me. It was hard to live with Vera. She was becoming pale and withered, and I didn't know how to help her. I tried not to say anything against her without reason, but in spite of this her irritability didn't lessen. Every trifle caused an outburst and those eternal accusations. For all of us—even for herself—life in our house was unbearable. Whereas before she had been so unassuming, now she had become almost cynical. It wasn't that she spoke rudely, just awfully unpleasantly, positively cynically. She quarrelled once, for example, with Klavdia; I listened quietly. Then she finished with her and turned to me.

"'You, Vanya,' she said, 'are a little better, since at least there is no malice in you. Do you know what you resemble? Imagine soup being served, not for dinner, but alone and when no one is hungry. Very full bowls are served on a plain table without a cloth. It's a light, bright yellow broth with big circular globs of grease, which move slowly because the broth is barely lukewarm. And not one drop of salt has been added to it; it is absolutely bland. One has to eat this soup with a little teaspoon. That's what you all are like. As for those of you who are malicious as well, it's as if someone came up and spat into the soup.'

"It was so unpleasant to listen to her that I actually got up and walked out.

"The only consolation in the house was our Andryusha. Vera would change completely when she was with him (and she spent more and more time with him). She was so good natured, and even sang songs to him. I, too, became terribly attached to the child. I dreamed of how he would grow up with me, how I would teach him, how he would enter the university . . . It's terrible, you know, the way children fill you with a thirst for life! Whatever you might say—that is real immortality!

"'Well sir, he was growing up; he would get sick occasionally, but then he would recover. He followed Vera everywhere she went. Numerous times Klavdia hinted to me, wasn't it harmful for an impressionable child to be constantly in the company of Vera, who was so nervous?

"'He can already understand. You should hear what she's teaching him! Superstitions worse than any old nanny. And three days ago when those peasants came to you for some reason or other, Vera Ivanovna invited them into her room, and they had mystical conversations about the *Chetya-Minei,* and the child was there. Really, brother, such an education isn't rational. You are an unpardonable weakling.'

"Well, I wasn't guilty of any weakness. I'm a decent and humane man, that's true; I'm very patient, but if something goes against my beliefs, I do have character. I'm saying this without boasting, and you, I think, have already arrived at your own opinion of me. Klavdia, as women do, anticipated the events, and besides she didn't love Vera, whereas Vera was still dear to me. I remained

silent, although I involuntarily began to worry. And, as I said, I became terribly attached to Andryusha.

"Once during Lent we were sitting in the parlor after tea. Klavdia was reading a book; Vera came in, having just put Andryusha to bed. She took something from the table and said to me rather casually: 'Tomorrow I plan to go to mass with Andryusha. I am taking him to receive communion.'

"'Communion? No, my dear, that's absolutely unnecessary.'

"She approached calmly, sat down next to me, and frowned sternly.

"'Why? I, on the contrary, believe that it is essential for the child.'

"'Your reasoning is wrong. Remember, we even discussed this together once. First of all, Andryusha's health is important to me, not to speak of the crowding and the stuffiness in the church. Just think, they bring so many unknown children there, yet there is only one spoon . . .'

"Vera frowned even more severely.

"'Splendid! And what else?'

"'And then also, I think that so long as he cannot consciously accept or reject these rituals, they must not be thrust upon him. They must not even be discussed with him at this time, because that would be, if you like, unscrupulous coercion. When he grows up, his reason will tell him what is to be done. Then, he will have his own will.'

"Vera didn't say a word. She just silently stared at me.

"'You have let the nurse go, and this is fine. I beg you,' I added firmly, 'not to discuss anything of this kind with the child. If necessary, be content just to give him the most simple and brief explanation.'

"I must confess that, knowing her whimsical thoughts and lack of restraint, I expected a fit of anger from her, but she continued to stare at me and suddenly said, with an ironical smile:

"'I understand you. Only one thing is not clear to me: why do you yourself go to church and receive communion? Does that mean that your reason tells you that it's necessary?'

"I was already angry; however, I restrained myself.

"'You do understand, Vera, that for me it's a matter of conscience. Every adult who happens to be in a church may, in his

soul, pray in whatever manner he desires. Only he must not offend his neighbor with the demand that he convert to his religion. Finally, one must understand and pay attention to the fact that there is a period of childhood in the life of mankind . . .'

"'Splendid,' Vera interrupted. 'I am not concerned with you. However, you said "childhood." If what you have said is true for children (let it stand according to your words!), then why do you hinder them from going to church—the real children who need this nourishment in order to grow? Is that not coercion? If we have something, even if it's very little—the tiniest thing—why shouldn't we give it to the child? Place a spark in him—and it may flare up. As for the compulsory ignorance to which you would doom my son . . .'

"'He's mine, too. Vera, don't keep harping on it, and please don't try to catch me with your feminine tricks. It will also be futile to attempt to dissuade me in any way. You understand my words very well, so now let's please end this unpleasant conversation.'

"Perhaps I was cruel. Here Klavdia interfered again:

"'Why do you worry, Vera Ivanovna? The boy will enter a high school, and he will learn everything in due time. Indeed, to stimulate his oversensitive impressionability, to influence his fantasy while he is still so nervous—this would be to prepare him for a less than enviable future. I am convinced that my brother will put an end to it.'

"I had never before seen Vera in such a state! She jumped up, very pale, almost terrifying. She wanted to speak—but she was panting.

"'You . . . you . . . it is not enough that you have ruined me . . . In addition, you want to ruin my child as well . . . To deprive him of everything which is dear in one's childhood . . . Of that which enables a man to remain spiritually alive throughout his life . . . You will gnaw through his veins in no time . . . Oh, you godless, godless people!'

"I firmly took her by the hand.

"'Calm down, Vera. Come to your senses,' I said almost severely. 'Everything has its limits.'

"She pulled her hand away, turned to me, and spoke quickly, almost imploringly:

"'Tell me, Vanya, it was a joke, wasn't it? You obviously don't understand it yourself—but you do believe me a little, don't you? You do believe that I wish Andryusha no evil? You won't decide what I should tell him and what I shouldn't? Certainly you know me—have I ever been a bigot? Or dishonest? Or hypocritical? Vanya, Vanya, do forgive me if I was concerned with myself, if I was angry with you . . . what do I matter? It's Andryusha I'm worried about now. Leave him to me, Vanya!'

"I cannot tell you how I pitied her. But I was concerned about the child, seeing her in such a frenzy, and I understood that I could not, had no right, to yield anything to her just at that moment.

"'My convictions, Vera, are unshakable. Remember that Andryusha is also my son. I have no human right to abandon him to the will of such a whimsical and abnormal woman as you . . . no matter how much I love you. Do you hear me?'

"This time she didn't even pull her hand away. She only raised her eyes to me and then fell silent. I began to think that all had resolved itself and that she had come to her senses somewhat. But, no, she gave a kind of rigid laugh and quickly left the room.

"The next day she didn't take Andryusha to the church. A few days later, however, Klavdia told me that she still insisted on her desire, and that morning I had to stop them on the threshold almost by force. Such a mode of life developed in our family that I can't even describe it; besides, that would take a long time and would be very painful. Finally, hideous scenes began taking place, even in front of the child. I was forced to tell Vera that I would send Andryusha away if she didn't calm down. Klavdia, after a great deal of trouble, obtained permission to open something like a kindergarten or a small school in our town; she had even found a suitable location. Later on I really planned to send Andryusha there, but for the time being I wanted only to scare Vera. For indeed, it was impossible to continue living like that. We were all exhausted, and Andryusha wept every day.

"Vera listened to me calmly.

"'Yes,' she said, 'it is time to put an end to it. It is impossible to live this way. I am tired.'

"She slowly walked to the bedroom and lay down. From that day on we didn't hear a word from her. Andryusha would call her—she seemed not to hear him.

"'Vera,' I would say to her, 'Do go to him.'

"'Why? I myself can see that I am harmful to him.'

"There was no longer any clamor in the house, but the atmosphere, instead of being better for that, was even worse. The child was weeping, walking around pale and ill.

"'Mama is dying. Mama needs some medicine.'

"Later, it seemed that by force of habit everything had settled down—but what a life it was! Vera would be in bed until dark, as if constantly thinking about something. Although there was little reason for hope, I nevertheless hoped that she would change her mind. If not, then what next—I didn't know myself. All of us were exhausted. Klavdia's complexion had become jaundiced; Andryusha tossed in his bed every night, and his disposition began to deteriorate. The atmosphere in our house, you know, was just as if there were a corpse there.

"One evening Klavdia and I were sitting in the drawing room with only one candle, in silence. We would spend hours like that. Suddenly the door squeaked. It was Vera.

"I was surprised. I looked at her—and remained silent.

"She sat beside me, at the table. How she had changed! She had aged ten years and her expression was unpleasant.

"'Are you well, Verochka?' I inquired. I involuntarily posed the question, seeing her in this condition.

"'Not very well.'

"Klavdia cut in: 'You should undergo treatment, Vera Ivanovna. Perhaps you ought to go for a *koumiss* cure in the summer.'

"I am convinced that she meant well. But Vera, all of a sudden, replied in her old way: 'Be quiet, you!'

"Klavdia, in order to avoid a quarrel, lowered her eyes to her needle work and only grumbled through her teeth: 'Mad woman!'

"I had hoped that Vera hadn't heard it—but she had and, as if suddenly rejoicing, she began to talk quickly and excitedly: 'Yes, yes, I am mad . . . that is, I am not really mad, but my nerves are shattered . . . Isn't it so, Vanya?'

"'Vera, do calm down.'

"'I am calm now, but I am ill. I feel that I am ill. I cannot control myself. I would like to undergo some treatment. I have come to inform you of that.'

"'What, do you wish me to send at once for Fyodor Ivanovich?'

"'No, what's the matter with you! I would like to go to a specialist in the provincial capital. Yes, to Lazarevsky . . .'

"'To Lazarevsky? But isn't his specialty . . . nervous disorders?'

"'Yes, he is a psychiatrist. He has his own hospital. He has other patients. I want to join them.'

"'Vera, what's wrong with you?'

"Suddenly she frightened me.

"'I am ill, really. Take me there tomorrow, Ivan Vasilyevich. I would like to rest, to undergo a treatment.'

"You know, I laughed at this, although I didn't feel at all like laughing.

"'Do you really want to be committed to a mental institution?'

"I was joking, but she looked at me so seriously and imploringly and said in a low voice: 'I beg you, Vanya, do take me to the doctor. If I go and stay there for a while—I will feel more at ease. Obviously, I must go away somewhere, but where?'

"And what do you think? In that quiet tone she persuaded me to take her on the following day to the provincial capital. Of course, I didn't doubt for one second that they wouldn't keep her in the clinic, since she was completely healthy. I thought that we would have a nice drive, and that the doctors would prescribe some regimen or other for her. I was even glad. She took leave of Andryusha indifferently, as if she were dead. The farewell was very short, but, nevertheless, I was amazed. She didn't even say good-bye to Klavdia, which was unpleasant for my sister.

"Vera remained silent throughout the journey, no matter how much I tried to entertain her. When we arrived, it was already night; she was tired. We stopped in a hotel, and the following day I took her to the hospital. Not just one, but three doctors examined her. They questioned her; she was silent. She was so stubborn in her silence that even I was surprised. However little it had been, she had spoken with me in the morning. They began to question me—but what could I tell them? I told them only that she had complained of a nervous disorder. Then they began to examine her. She started to scream, but didn't say a word.

"One of the doctors took me into another room and asked me again if there had been fits. What kind of fits? No, there weren't any, I answered.

"'Why, then, did you bring her here?'

"'I have brought her because she herself wanted it.'

"Again they began to ask me various questions. You know, I'm not an eloquent man in the first place, but then I became simply tongue-tied. As soon as I would begin to speak, I would see that I was babbling some kind of nonsense, that I was unable to explain what kind of illness it was, its cause, how it had begun, or even its manifestations. After all, I couldn't tell them all about our daily life as I'm telling you now! Moreover, from their scientific point of view, that would have been perhaps unsatisfactory.

"They called me back into the first room. Vera was standing by the window, without her hat and with her back to me. The doctor who had been with her said to me in an extremely gentle voice:

"'Vera Ivanovna has agreed to live here and undergo some treatment. Isn't that so?'

"Vera answered, without turning: 'Yes, I will stay here.'

"I stood with my mouth agape, but they immediately took me away.

"'Don't irritate the patient,' they said. 'Everything has gone so well.'

"I hastened to ask them questions—they told me a muddle of things, namely, that this was obvious, that that was definite, and that she was sensitive; they even spoke about fits . . . I simply lost my head and became completely confused. I asked them when she would recover. But they again began telling me various things—that her pupils had dilated and that something else was abnormal . . . For the time being, they continued, nothing could be determined; they would be able to say more later, and an improvement could come either quickly or more slowly.

"I simply can't remember how I managed to make arrangements for a room for her and all the rest of it. I must admit that all of this was a great surprise to me. The doctors thought that I was merely grief stricken. Of course, how could they guess that, while taking her to the psychiatric hospital, I had never expected that they would keep her there? They were very sympathetic toward me and gave me some hope. They even congratulated me on the fact that everything had proceeded so well. They were very polite.

"I wanted to say good-bye to her, but they didn't allow it.

"Yes, sir, that's how I left her there. As I was going home from the provincial capital, I regained my senses a little, came to myself. Of course, I'm not a doctor, and Vera had been so close to me all the time—it was difficult for me to see how her illness had originated and how it had been developing. But the eye of the specialist sees all the symptoms at once. The treatment, even a certain regimen, would bring nothing but good to a shattered, sick organism . . ."

Ivan Vasilyevich fell silent for a moment. I looked at him and asked: "Well, do you see her often?"

"I? How should I answer your question? I go there often—sometimes as much as twice a month. But since that day I have actually seen her only once, shortly after I had taken her to the hospital. She came out to a private reception room to see me. (The doctors are such nice people! And the hospital is beautiful and clean!) She came out, emaciated, small, limping as usual, dressed in a gray robe, her hair cut short. She was very pale except for her black eyebrows. Her gaze—and here even I noticed it—was abnormal. She was looking straight at me, yet as if she didn't see me at all.

"She sat down and folded her hands.

"'Vera,' I said to her, 'do you want to go home?'

"She answered quietly and in a low voice: 'No, Ivan Vasilyevich, I will not go. I am all right here.'

"'What's good about this place? You'll feel better at home. Let's go.'

"I was thinking: 'If the doctors allow me to take her home, I will try to take her. What will happen then?'

"She said once more: 'No, I will not go home. It is more peaceful here.'

"I even became angry.

"'With the insane people?'

"To that she answered: 'Isn't it all the same? It's more peaceful for me to be with them. Don't disturb me or yourself, and don't come to see me. I won't recover soon. They won't let me go home—and why should you want me home? It's true that you have to pay for me here . . . But at home I would also cost you something.'

"'Vera,' I retorted, 'you don't even ask about Andryusha!'

"She stood up.

"'What is there to say about that? Good-bye, Ivan Vasilyevich. Don't disturb me. Indeed, I feel fine here.'

"She left. I wanted to see the doctor, but he wasn't in. I asked the nurses about her, but they would only say: 'She is all right and quiet.'

"Imagine, from that time onward she didn't want to see me even once. She would send me a message through the nurse, saying that I shouldn't worry her and that she felt fine and at peace with herself. The doctors also said the same: 'Don't trouble her if she doesn't want to see you.' I asked them if there was any improvement. Sometimes they would answer that there was some improvement; sometimes they would say that there had been an improvement, but that at present she had taken a turn for the worse. Once I asked them to let me see her through the glass door. There were several inconspicuous patients there. Vera was quietly sitting in an armchair with her hands folded on her lap. Her profile had become very sharp and her complexion was yellow, as if she were dead. Illness never adorns anyone.

"I haven't seen her since. I go there often, but I never dare to ask for a meeting with her. You know, one gets used to any grief. And already Andryusha recalls her only rarely. Although he is sickly, he is nevertheless growing up, becoming a melancholy child. I don't speak with him about Vera; I don't speak with anybody about her—only with you have I indulged in chatting . . . Of course, there are some moments when one recalls everything as it once was, and one begins to think . . ."

Suddenly he turned to me. In the approaching darkness I could hardly see his wide, pale face and his blinking eyes.

"One begins to think, and then many things again become incomprehensible. I have told you everything from the very beginning; I have tried to portray Verochka for you . . . Also the circumstances of life under which her illness developed. Perhaps it will be easier for you, an impartial listener, to form a true opinion . . . The judgment of a stranger has great value. Please tell me, how does it all appear to you? . . . What would you say? For, indeed, there are some symptoms . . . that is, is she not a mad woman?"

I looked once more at Ivan Vasilyevich's troubled and pitiful face, and I understood that he again had encountered those moments of "weakness and doubt" which he had mentioned at the outset of his story. He was expecting some words from me. I thought about how human words are sometimes needed, but how in reality their truth is unnecessary and even harmful, and I said:

"Well . . . the specialists will find out . . . Even you yourself had noticed signs of insanity in her. Anything is possible . . ."

We drove out of the forest. The hooves of the horses echoed down the even road; the bells trembled and began to ring; it grew light all around us. There remained half a *verst* to the station.