# The Kreutzer Sonata

## LEV NIKOLAEVICH TOLSTOY

But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.
(MATTHEW 5:28)

His disciples say unto him, if the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, all men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.
(MATTHEW 19:10–12)

### 1

IT WAS EARLY SPRING. We had been traveling for two days. Passengers going short distances kept entering and leaving the train, but three people, like myself, were going the whole way: an unattractive woman, a smoker, no longer young, with a weary expression, wearing a mannish overcoat and cap; her acquaintance, a talkative man about forty years old whose things were neat and new; and a gentleman of medium height with brusque gestures who kept to himself; he was not yet old, but his curly hair had obviously turned gray

prematurely and his unusually glittering eyes darted quickly from object to object. He was wearing an old overcoat made by an expensive tailor: it had an astrakhan collar and he wore a tall astrakhan hat.[1] Under his coat, when he unbuttoned it, he had on a tight-fitting jacket and an embroidered Russian shirt. Another peculiarity of this man consisted in the fact that from time to time he emitted strange sounds, similar to clearing his throat or to a laugh begun and then broken off.

During the entire journey, this gentleman assiduously avoided making the acquaintance of other passengers. In response to his neighbors' overtures at conversation, he replied curtly and abruptly, or else he read; or, staring out the window, after first taking out some food from his old bag, he smoked, or drank tea, or ate a snack.

He seemed oppressed by his loneliness; several times I wanted to engage him in conversation, but each time our eyes met, which happened frequently since we were sitting opposite each other, he turned away and either picked up his book or looked out the window.

Toward evening of the second day, when the train had stopped at a large station, this nervous gentleman went to fetch some hot water to make himself tea. The fellow with the neat new things, a lawyer, as I subsequently discovered, went to have tea in the station with his neighbor, the lady in the mannish overcoat, the smoker.

During the absence of the gentleman and the lady, several new passengers entered the car, including a tall, clean-shaven, wrinkled old man, obviously a merchant, wearing a coat of mink fur and a cloth cap with a large peak. He sat opposite the lady and the lawyer, and immediately entered into conversation with another young man, apparently a merchant's clerk, who had also boarded at this station.

I was sitting diagonally across from him and, since the train was standing still, during those moments when no one was passing through the car, I could overhear snatches of their conversation. The merchant first announced that he was traveling to his estate only one stop further; then, as usual, they began talking about prices and trade; they spoke, as always, about how business was in Moscow these days, and then started chatting about the trade fair in Nizhny Novgorod.[2] The clerk began telling a story about the drink-

1. Made from the tightly curled wool of very young lambs from Astrakhan, a city on the Volga.

2. A major urban center along the Volga River where an important trade fair was held every summer.

ing bouts of some wealthy merchant with whom they were both acquainted, but the old man didn't let him finish; instead, he began describing his own past binges at Kunavino.[3] Obviously he was proud of his participation and described with obvious delight how once, together with this same rich merchant, he had gotten drunk and played some prank that could be talked about only in a whisper; the clerk burst into laughter that filled the entire train car; then the old man started laughing, too, exposing two yellow teeth.

Not expecting to hear anything interesting, I stood up to walk along the platform until the train departed. At the door I met the lawyer and the lady, who were talking about something excitedly as they approached.

"You won't have time," the sociable lawyer said to me. "The second bell's about to ring."

And sure enough, hardly had I managed to reach the end of the train when the bell rang. When I returned, the lawyer and the lady were still engaged in lively conversation. The old merchant was sitting opposite, staring ahead sternly, from time to time chewing his lips in disapproval.

"Then she plainly informed her husband," the lawyer was saying with a smile just as I passed, "that she was both unable and unwilling to live with him, since . . ."

He continued, saying something else that I couldn't hear. Two more passengers came on after me; then the conductor went through, a porter rushed in, and there was so much noise that I couldn't make out their conversation. When everything had quieted down and I could hear the lawyer's voice again, the conversation, obviously, had moved on from a particular case to more general considerations.

The lawyer was saying that the question of divorce was now occupying public opinion in Europe and that similar cases were occurring more and more frequently in Russia. Having noticed that his voice was the only one audible, the lawyer stopped speaking and turned to the old man.

"Those things didn't happen in the old days, did they?" he said, smiling pleasantly.

The old man wanted to make some reply, but at that moment the train began moving and the old man took off his cap and started crossing himself, whispering a prayer. The lawyer looked away and waited politely. After finishing his prayers and crossing himself three times, the old man put his cap back on, pulled it down low, settled into his seat, and began speaking.

3. A small town north of Nizhny Novgorod.

"They did happen, sir, but less often," he said. "Nowadays it can't help from happening. People have become so educated."

The train, gaining speed, rattled over the rail joints; it became hard for me to hear, but I was interested, so I moved closer. My neighbor, the nervous man with glittering eyes, apparently also took an interest; without getting up from his place, he, too, began listening.

"What's wrong with education?" the lady asked with a slight smile. "Would it really be better to marry as in the old days, when the bride and groom had never seen each other?" she continued. She was replying, as is the habit of many women, not to her interlocutor's actual words, but to those she thought he would say. "They didn't know if they loved each other or could love each other; they married whoever happened along and suffered all their lives. Do you think that's better?" she asked, evidently addressing me and the lawyer primarily, least of all the old man with whom she was talking.

"People have become so educated," repeated the merchant, looking with contempt at the lady, leaving her question unanswered.

"It'd be interesting to know how you explain the connection between education and marital discord," the lawyer said with a slight smile.

The merchant wanted to say something, but the lady interrupted him.

"No, those days have passed," she said. But the lawyer stopped her.

"No, allow him to express his thought."

"Foolishness results from education," the old man replied authoritatively.

"Marriages are arranged between people who don't love one another, and then everyone's surprised when they don't get along," the lady hastened to add, looking at the lawyer and at me, and even at the clerk, who rose from his place. Leaning against the seat, he was listening to the conversation with a smile. "It's only animals that can be paired up as the owner wishes; people have their own inclinations and attachments," she said, obviously wishing to irritate the merchant.

"There's no reason to talk like that, madam," said the old man. "Animals are beasts, but man has been given law."

"But how can one live with a man when there's no love?" the lady hastened to express her views, which she probably thought were original.

"People used not to talk about such things," the old man said in an emphatic tone of voice. "That only happens nowadays. Something occurs and right away the wife says, 'I'm leaving you.' This fashion's caught on even among our peasants. 'Here,' she says, 'take your shirts and trousers. I'm run-

ning away with Vanka. His hair's curlier than yours.' What can you say? The first thing a woman should have is fear."[4]

The clerk glanced at the lawyer, the lady, and at me, obviously suppressing a smile, prepared to deride or approve the merchant's words, depending on how they were received.

"What sort of fear?" the lady asked.

"Why this: she should fear her hus-s-s-band! That sort of fear."

"Well, my dear man, that time has passed," the lady said with a measure of anger.

"No, madam, that time cannot pass. Just as Eve, a woman, was created from man's rib, so she'll remain until the end of time," said the old man, tossing his head so sternly and triumphantly that the clerk immediately concluded that victory belonged to the merchant and he laughed loudly.

"That's the way you men think," the lady said, refusing to yield and glancing at us. "You've given yourselves freedom, but you want to lock women away in a tower. Then I suppose you'll permit yourselves everything."

"No one has to grant permission; it's just that a man doesn't bring any offspring home after his exploits, while a woman is a frail vessel," the merchant continued to insist.

His impressive tone, obviously, vanquished his listeners; even the lady felt crushed, but still didn't give up.

"Yes, but I think you'll agree that a woman is a person and has feelings just like a man. So what should she do if she doesn't love her husband?"

"Doesn't love him!" the merchant repeated loudly, knitting his brows and pursing his lips. "She'll love him, she will!"

The clerk in particular liked this unexpected opinion and produced a sound of approval.

"Oh, no, she won't," said the lady. "And if there's no love, it can't possibly be forced."

"Well, and what if a wife betrays her husband, then what?" asked the lawyer.

"That's not supposed to happen," said the old man. "You have to be on the lookout."

"And if it does, then what? You know, it happens."

4. Tolstoy uses the Russian word *strakh* (fear, terror, awe). Saint Paul, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, which is read at Orthodox marriage services, urges that "the wife fear (*boitsya*) her husband" (5:33). The King James Bible has: "see that she reverence her husband."

"It happens to some, but not people like us," said the old man.

Everyone fell silent. The clerk stirred, moved even closer, and, apparently not wishing to be left behind, said with a smile:

"Yes, sir, there was quite a scandal with one of our young men. It's also very hard to resolve. It involved a loose woman. She began acting like a devil. The young husband was steady and mature. At first she went after an office clerk. The husband tried kindness. She wouldn't stop. She did all sorts of nasty things. She began stealing his money. And he beat her. But she just got worse. She even carried on with an unbaptized Jew, if I may say so. Well, what could he do? So he threw her out. Now he lives like a bachelor while she walks the streets."

"Because he's a fool," said the old man. "If he'd given her less leeway right from the start, if he'd disciplined her as he should've, she'd still be with him, she would. You can't give 'em freedom at the outset. 'Don't trust your horse in the field or your wife in the house.'"

Just then the conductor came in to collect tickets for the next station. The old man handed his over.

"Yes, sir, you have to rein in the female sex, or else all's lost."

"Well, weren't you just saying how married men misbehave at the fair in Kunavino?" I asked, unable to restrain myself.

"That's a different story," said the merchant and sank into silence.

When the whistle sounded, the merchant stood up, took his sack from under the seat, buttoned his coat, doffed his cap, and left the carriage.

2

As soon as the old man left, several voices rose in conversation.

"A papa right out of the Old Testament," said the clerk.

"He's a walking Domostroi," said the lady.[5] "What a strange idea he has of women and marriage!"

"Yes, indeed. We Russians are far from sharing the European view of marriage," said the lawyer.

"The main thing that such people don't understand," said the lady, "is that marriage without love isn't really marriage, that only love sanctifies marriage, and the only true marriage is one sanctified by love."

The clerk listened and smiled, wishing to commit to memory for future use as much as he could from this clever conversation.

5. The Domostroi was a sixteenth-century Russian set of household rules based on very conservative principles.

In the midst of the lady's remarks we heard behind me something like the sound of broken laughter or sobbing; turning around, we saw my neighbor, the lonely gray-haired man with glittering eyes, who, during the conversation, which obviously interested him, had moved closer to us unnoticed. He stood, resting his arms on the back of the seat, evidently in great agitation: his face was flushed and one of his cheek muscles was twitching.

"What kind of love . . . love . . . love . . . sanctifies marriage?" he asked, stammering.

Seeing the agitated state of her interlocutor, the lady tried to respond as gently and fully as possible.

"True love. . . . Only if this love is present between a man and a woman, is marriage possible," said the lady.

"Yes, ma'am, but what do you mean by true love?" asked the man with glittering eyes, timidly and with an awkward smile.

"Everyone knows what love is," said the lady, obviously wishing to end the conversation with him.

"But I don't," said the gentleman. "You must define what you mean . . ."

"What? It's very simple," said the lady, but stopped to think. "Love? Love is the exclusive preference for one man or one woman over everyone else," she said.

"Preference for how long? A month? Two days? Half an hour?" asked the gray-haired man and then laughed.

"No, excuse me. You're obviously talking about something else."

"No, ma'am, I'm talking about the same thing."

"She means," the lawyer intervened, pointing to the lady, "that marriage must follow, in the first place, from attachment, or love, if you like, and if that exists, then only in that case does marriage constitute something sacred, so to speak. Thus any marriage lacking in this natural attachment—love, if you like—has nothing morally obligatory about it. Do I understand you correctly?" he asked, turning to the lady.

The lady indicated her approval of this explanation of her view with a nod of her head.

"Thereafter," continued the lawyer, but the nervous gentleman with eyes now burning as if on fire, obviously restraining himself with difficulty, didn't let him finish, and began again:

"No, I'm talking about that same preference of one man or one woman over everyone else, but I only ask: preference for how long?"

"How long? For a long time, sometimes one's whole life," said the lady, shrugging her shoulders.

"That only happens in novels, never in real life. In life this preference for one person over everyone else can last a year, which is very rare, more often only months, or even weeks, days, hours," he said, obviously knowing that he'd astonish everyone with his opinion and feeling pleased by that fact.

"What are you saying? No. Excuse me," all three replied in one voice. Even the clerk emitted some sound of disapproval.

"Yes, ma'am, I know," the gray-haired man outshouted us, "you're talking about how things are supposed to be, while I'm talking about how things really are. Every man experiences what you call love for every single beautiful woman."

"Oh, what you're saying is awful; isn't there among people a feeling called love that lasts not just for months or years, but for one's entire life?"

"No, not at all. Even if we grant that a man prefers a certain woman for his entire life, then the woman, in all likelihood, will come to prefer another man; that's how it's always been on earth and how it really is," he said. He reached for his cigarette case and began to light up.

"But it may be mutual," said the lawyer.

"No, sir, it can't be," he objected, "just as in a cartload of peas two identically marked peas can't possibly lie next to one another. Besides, not only is it a matter of improbability, but also most likely a question of satiety. To love one woman or one man for one's entire life—is the same as saying that one candle will last a whole lifetime," he said, inhaling the smoke greedily.

"But you're talking only about physical love. Don't you grant the possibility of love based on the identity of ideals, on spiritual affinity?" asked the lady.

"Spiritual affinity! The identity of ideals!" he repeated, emitting his sound. "In that case there's no reason to sleep together (excuse my rudeness). Or is it that people go to bed together as a result of this spiritual affinity?" he asked and laughed nervously.

"Allow me," said the lawyer. "Facts contradict what you're saying. We see that matrimony does exist, that all people, or the majority of them, live in wedlock, and many of them live a long married life honorably."

The gray-haired man laughed again.

"First you say that marriage is based on love, while I express doubt in the existence of love other than sensual; then you prove the existence of love by the fact that marriages exist. Marriage these days is pure deception."

"No, sir, allow me," said the lawyer. "I'm merely saying that marriages have existed and do exist."

"They do exist. But why do they? They have existed and do exist among those people who see something mysterious in marriage, a sacrament that

binds them before God. Among some people marriages exist, but not among us. Here people get married without seeing anything in it other than copulation, and the result is either deception or coercion. If it's deception, then it's easier to bear. The husband and wife merely deceive people that they're in a monogamous relationship, while both engage in polygamy. It's vile, but it still works; but when, as happens most often, the husband and wife have accepted the external obligation to live together for their whole life, and have come to hate each other by the second month, and wish to divorce, but still live together, then this results in that terrible hell when people drink themselves to death, shoot themselves, kill, or poison themselves or the other person," he said, speaking faster and faster, without allowing anyone to insert a word, and getting more and more excited. Everyone was silent. It was very awkward.

"Yes, undoubtedly critical episodes occur in married life," said the lawyer, wishing to end this shockingly heated conversation.

"I see that you've discovered who I am," the gray-haired gentleman observed quietly, with apparent serenity.

"No, I haven't had the pleasure."

"It's no great pleasure. I'm Pozdnyshev, the one to whom that critical episode occurred to which you're referring, that episode in which a man killed his wife," he said, glancing quickly at each one of us.[6]

No one knew what to say and everyone remained silent.

"Well, never mind," he said, emitting his sound. "However, pardon me! Ah . . . I don't want to intrude."

"No, no, please," said the lawyer, not knowing himself what the "please" meant.

But Pozdnyshev, not listening to him, quickly turned aside and returned to his seat. The gentleman and the lady began whispering. I sat down next to Pozdnyshev and remained silent, unable to think of anything to say. It was too dark to read, so I closed my eyes and pretended that I wanted to snooze. We traveled in silence to the next station.

There the gentleman and the lady moved into another car, having arranged it with the conductor. The clerk made himself comfortable on the bench and fell asleep. Pozdnyshev kept smoking and drinking the tea he'd made himself at the last station.

When I opened my eyes and glanced at him, he suddenly addressed me resolutely and with irritation:

6. The surname Pozdnyshev comes from the Russian word *pozdno,* meaning "late."

"Perhaps you find it unpleasant to sit with me, now that you know who I am? If so, I'll leave."

"Oh, no, please."

"Well then, would you like some tea? It's very strong." He poured me a glass.

"They talk. . . . And they always tell lies . . ." he said.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"Always about the same thing: this love of theirs and what it is. Do you want to sleep?"

"Not at all."

"If you like, I'll tell you how that love led to what happened to me."

"Yes, if it's not too painful for you."

"No, it's more painful to keep silent.[7] Drink some tea. Or is it too strong?"

The tea was really more like beer, but I drank a glass. Just then the conductor came through. Pozdnyshev followed him with his angry eyes and began speaking only once he'd gone.

3

"Well, then I'll tell you. . . . You really want me to?"

I repeated that I very much wanted him to. He was silent, rubbed his face with his hands, and began speaking:

"If I'm going to tell you, then I must begin at the very beginning, how and why I got married, and what I was like before then.

"Until my marriage I lived like everyone else, that is, those of our circle. I'm a landowner, a university graduate, and a marshal of the nobility.[8] Until my marriage I lived like everyone else, that is, in depravity; and, like everyone of our circle living a depraved life, I was certain that I was living just as I should. I thought of myself as a charming fellow and a completely moral man. I was not a seducer, had no unnatural appetites, and didn't make depravity the main goal of life, as many of my peers did; I practiced it moderately, decently, for my own health. I avoided those women who could burden me by giving birth to a child or becoming attached to me. However, there may well have been both children and attachments, but I acted as if there weren't. And I not only considered that moral: I was proud of it."

He paused and emitted his sound as he always did when some new idea occurred to him.

7. Cf. Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner": "Since then, at an uncertain hour,/That agony returns: /And till my ghastly tale is told, /This heart within me burns."

8. A noble elected to manage the affairs and represent the interests of the gentry.

"And there lies the central abomination," he exclaimed. "Depravity doesn't reside in anything physical; no physical outrage constitutes depravity. Depravity, genuine depravity, consists precisely in freeing yourself from any moral relations to a woman with whom you've engaged in physical intimacy. And I gave myself credit for this freedom. I remember how upset I was when I didn't succeed in paying a woman who'd given herself to me after probably falling in love with me. I calmed down only after I'd sent her some money, having shown her that I didn't consider myself morally obligated to her in any way. Don't nod as if you agree with me," he suddenly shouted at me. "I know what you're doing. All of you, and you, too, in the best case, if you're not the rare exception, you hold the same views as I used to. Well, never mind, forgive me," he continued. "The point is, it's terrible, terrible, terrible!"

"What's terrible?" I asked.

"That abyss of delusion we live in concerning women and our relations to them. Yes, sir, I can't talk about it calmly, not because this 'episode,' as that fellow put it, happened to me, but because since this episode occurred, my eyes have been opened and I've come to see everything in a different light. Everything's upside down, upside down!"

He lit a cigarette; resting his elbows on his knees, he continued speaking.

I couldn't see his face in the darkness; but above the rattling of the train, I could hear only his impressive and pleasant voice.

4

"Yes, sir, only after suffering what I've suffered, only thanks to that did I realize where the root of the whole matter lies; I understood what's supposed to be and therefore, I perceive all the horror of what really is.

"So, now hear how and when everything began that led to my 'episode.' It all started when I was not quite sixteen. I was still a student in secondary school, and my older brother was a university student in his first year. I'd not yet known any women, but like all unfortunate children of our circle, I'd already lost my innocence: other boys had corrupted me two years earlier. By that time women, not any one in particular, but women as something sweet, women, every woman, their nudity tormented me. My periods of solitude were impure. I was tormented just as ninety-nine percent of our boys are. I was horrified, I suffered, I prayed, and I fell. I was already corrupted in my imagination and in reality, but I still hadn't taken the last step. I was languishing alone, but had yet to lay hands on another human being. Then my brother's comrade, a student, a lively fellow, a so-called nice lad—that is, the worst sort of scoundrel—after teaching us how to drink and play cards, persuaded

us after a binge to go there.[9] We went. My brother was also still innocent, and that night he, too, fell. And I, a fifteen-year-old boy, defiled myself and took part in defiling a woman, without really understanding what I was doing. I'd never heard from any of my elders that what I was doing was wrong. Nor will anyone hear that now. True, it's in the Commandments, but the Commandments are necessary only for answering the priest's examination, and even then, not really, not nearly as necessary as the commandment for using the Latin conjunction *ut* in conditional sentences.

"So I never heard from those elders whose opinions I respected that it was a bad thing. On the contrary, I heard from those I respected that it was a good thing. I heard that my struggles and suffering would be eased afterward; I heard it and read it; I heard from older people that it would be good for my health; from my comrades I heard that there was some merit in it, some daring. So, in general, I could see nothing but good in it. The danger of diseases? Even that was foreseen. The solicitous government was taking care of that. It oversees the correct operation of houses of ill repute and ensures depravity for its schoolboys. And doctors receive a salary to supervise it. It's all just as it should be. They maintain that depravity is good for one's health, so they organize proper, efficient depravity. I know mothers who worry about their son's health on this count. Medical science also sends them to brothels."

"Why science?" I asked.

"Well, what are doctors? They're the high priests of science. Who is it that depraves young men by telling them it's necessary for their health? They do. And then they treat syphilis with tremendous self-importance."

"Why shouldn't they treat syphilis?"

"Because if only one percent of the efforts directed at curing syphilis were directed at the eradication of debauchery, there would long since have been no trace of the disease left. Yet those efforts are directed not at the eradication of syphilis but at encouraging it and guaranteeing the safety of debauchery. Still, that's not the point. The point is that with me, as with ninety percent, if not more, not only of our class but all classes, even the peasants, the terrible thing is that I fell not because I succumbed to the natural temptation of a particular woman's charms. No, no single woman tempted me; I fell because people in my milieu regarded a fall as a most legitimate and salutary act for the sake of one's health, while others saw it as a most natural, not only excusable, but even innocent amusement for a young man. I didn't even understand that it was a fall; I simply began to indulge in those half-pleasures and

9. That is, to a brothel.

half-needs suggested to me as appropriate for my age. I indulged in debauchery just as I began to drink and smoke. Still there was something particular and poignant in my first fall. I remember how at that moment, in that very place, before I'd even left the room, I felt sad, so sad that I wanted to cry, to cry about the loss of my innocence, about my relationship to women that had been destroyed forever. Yes, sir, a natural, simple relationship to women had been destroyed forever. Since then I've not had and could never have a pure relationship with a woman. I became what's known as a fornicator. To be a fornicator is a physical condition, similar to that of a morphine addict, a drunkard, or a smoker. Just as a morphine addict, a drunkard, or a smoker is no longer a normal person, a man who's known several women for his own pleasure is also not a normal man, but one who's been spoiled forever—a fornicator. Just as one can recognize a drunkard or a drug addict immediately by his face or his manner, so it is with a fornicator. A fornicator can restrain himself or he can struggle; but he'll never have simple, clear, pure relations with a woman, brotherly relations. You can recognize a fornicator at once just by the way he observes and examines a young woman. And I became a fornicator and have remained one, and that's what brought me to ruin."

5

"Yes, sir, that's how it was. And it got worse and worse. There were all sorts of aberrations. My God! I'm horrified when I recall all my filthy acts in that regard! That's how I remember myself, a person mocked by my comrades for my so-called innocence. You hear so much about gilded youth, officers, or Parisians! When all these gentlemen, and me, too, we thirty-year-old debauchers, with hundreds of the most diverse and horrible crimes against women on our souls, when we, we thirty-year-old debauchers, are scrubbed clean, closely shaven, perfumed, when we enter a drawing room or go to a ball wearing clean linen, evening dress, or a uniform—then we're seen as the emblem of purity—how charming!

"Just think about how things should be and how they really are. It should be that when such a gentleman approaches my sister or my daughter in society, I, knowing his life, should go up to him, call him aside, and say to him quietly: 'My dear fellow, I know how you've been living, how you spend your nights, and with whom. This is no place for you. These young women are pure and innocent. Go away!' That's what should happen; but what really happens is that when such a gentleman appears and dances with my sister or my daughter, embracing her, we rejoice if he's wealthy and well connected. Maybe after sleeping with Rigulboche, he'll honor my

daughter.[10] Even if he has symptoms or some disease—no matter. Nowadays there's a cure. Why, I know parents of several young women in high society who've enthusiastically given their daughters away in marriage to men suffering from syphilis. Oh, how disgusting! May there come a time when this outrage and deception will be exposed!"

He emitted his strange sound several times and drank some tea. The tea was terribly strong and there was no water to dilute it. I felt especially stimulated by the two glasses I'd had. The tea must also have had an effect on him because he'd become more and more excited. His voice became more melodious and expressive. He kept shifting his position, first taking off his hat, then putting it on again, and his face kept changing in the semidarkness in which we were sitting.

"Well, that's how I lived until I was thirty, never for a moment abandoning my intention to marry and establish the most sublime and pure family life. With that goal in mind I inspected every suitable young woman," he continued. "I wallowed in the filth of debauchery, while scrutinizing young women pure enough to be worthy of me. I rejected many of them precisely because they weren't pure enough; at last I found one I considered worthy. She was one of two daughters of a landowner from the Penza province who'd once been very wealthy, but who'd fallen on hard times.[11]

"One evening, after we'd gone for a boat ride and were returning late at night in the moonlight, I was sitting next to her, admiring her shapely figure, her tight-fitting sweater, and her curls; I suddenly decided that she was the one. That evening it seemed to me that she understood everything, everything that I was feeling and thinking, and that I was feeling and thinking the most sublime things. In fact, it was only that her sweater suited her so well, as did her curls, and after a day spent so close to her, I wanted to get even closer.

"The astonishing thing is how complete is the illusion that beauty equals goodness. A beautiful woman says stupid things: you listen and don't see the stupidity, only the cleverness. She says and does nasty things: you see only nice things. When she doesn't say anything stupid or nasty, and is a beautiful woman, you immediately convince yourself that she's a jewel of intelligence and virtue.

"I returned home in ecstasy and decided that she was the height of moral perfection and therefore worthy of being my wife; I proposed to her the next day.

10. Rigulboche was the stage name of Marguerite Bodel, a French dancer and cabaret singer who was popular in nineteenth-century Paris.

11. The Penza province is an area about four hundred miles southeast of Moscow.

"What a mess it is! Of a thousand married men not only in our class, but unfortunately, even among the peasants, there's hardly one who hasn't been 'married' ten times, even a hundred, or a thousand times before his marriage, like Don Juan. (True, I've heard and seen that now there are pure young people who feel and know that purity is no joke, but is a great accomplishment. God help them!) Everyone knows this, yet pretends not to know. In all novels the heroes' feelings are described in detail, as well as the ponds and bushes they stroll past; but in describing their great love for some young woman, no mention is ever made of what's happened to the interesting hero before: not a word about his visits to those houses, or about the maids, the cooks, and other men's wives.[12] If such indecent novels exist, they're never given to those who need them most, to young women. At first they pretend to those young women that the profligacy filling half our towns and even our villages doesn't really exist at all. Then they get so used to this pretense that like the English they finally come to believe sincerely that we're all moral people and that we live in a moral world. The young women, poor things, believe it in all seriousness. My unfortunate wife also believed this. I remember how, once we were already engaged, I showed her my diary in which she could find out a bit about my past life, primarily about the last liaison I'd had, about which she might hear from others, and about which for some reason I felt obliged to inform her.[13] I recall her horror, despair, and bewilderment when she learned and understood. I saw that she wanted to leave me then. Why didn't she?"

He emitted his sound, fell silent, and took another sip of tea.

## 6

"No, anyway, it's better like this!" he cried. "It serves me right! But that's not the point. I wanted to say that it's only unfortunate young women who're deceived here. Their mothers know this, especially those who've been schooled by their own husbands; mothers know it perfectly well. Pretending to believe in the purity of men, in fact they act quite differently. They know what bait to use to catch men for themselves and for their daughters.

"You see, it's only the men who don't know, and we don't because we don't want to know; women know very well that the most sublime, poetic love, as

12. The hero of Tolstoy's *War and Peace,* Pierre Bezukhov, exemplifies this behavior with his early visits to brothels and his later marriage to the virginal Natasha Rostova.

13. An autobiographical detail from Tolstoy's own courtship: he showed his diary to his fiancée, Sofiya Andreevna Behrs, who was horrified. A similar scene occurs in Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* when Levin shows his diary to Kitty.

we call it, depends not on moral qualities, but on physical proximity, hairstyle, the color and cut of a dress. Ask any experienced coquette who's given herself the task of captivating a man which she would rather risk: to be convicted of lying, cruelty, even dissoluteness in the presence of the man she's trying to charm, or to appear before him in a poorly made, unattractive dress—she'll always prefer the former. She knows that we all lie constantly about our lofty feelings—we really need only her body; therefore we forgive all sorts of abominations, but we won't forgive an ugly, tasteless, or unfashionable dress. The coquette knows this consciously, but every innocent young woman knows it unconsciously, just as animals do.

"That's why those vile sweaters exist, those bustles worn on their behinds, those bare shoulders, arms, and almost bare breasts. Women, especially those schooled by men, know very well that talk about lofty matters—is just that, all talk, and that a man needs a woman's body and everything that shows it off in the most alluring light; that's precisely what happens. Why, if we could only discard this outrageous habit that's become second nature to us, and see the life of our upper classes as it really is, in all its shamelessness, it's simply one unceasing brothel. Don't you agree? Allow me and I'll prove it," he said, interrupting me. "You say that women in our society have interests in life unlike those who live in a brothel, but I say that isn't true and I'll prove it. If people differed in their aims, in the inner content of their lives, then this difference would undoubtedly be reflected in their external appearance, and that would be obvious. But just look at those unfortunate, despised creatures, and at women in highest society: they wear the same outfits, the same fashions, prefer the same perfumes, have the same bare arms, shoulders, breasts, and tight-fitting dresses covering their prominent behinds, the same passion for jewels, for expensive, glittering trinkets, the same amusements, dances, music, and songs. As the former use every means to entice men, so do the latter. There's no difference at all. To define it precisely, one need only say that short-term prostitutes are usually despised, whereas long-term prostitutes are well respected."

## 7

"Yes, so that's how these sweaters, curls, and bustles caught me. It was easy to do so because I was brought up under conditions where amorous young people are forced to grow like cucumbers in a greenhouse. And our stimulating, excessive food combined with our total physical idleness constitutes nothing other than a systematic excitement of lust. Whether this surprises you or not, it's true. Why, until recently I myself hadn't seen it at all. But now

I have. That's why it torments me that no one knows about it; people say such stupid things, like that lady.

"Yes, sir, just this spring some peasants were working near me on a railway embankment. The usual food for a young peasant lad is bread, kvass, and onion; he's lively, vigorous, healthy, and does light fieldwork.[14] When he goes to work on the railway, his food consists of kasha and one pound of meat.[15] But he works off that meat toiling sixteen hours, wheeling barrow-loads weighing thirty poods each.[16] So it's just right for him. Well, we each consume two pounds of meat, game, and all kinds of strong food and drink every day—and where does it go? Into excesses of sensuality. If it does go there and the safety valve's open, everything's all right; but close that valve, as I did temporarily, and at once it produces a stimulus that, passing through the prism of our artificial life, is expressed in infatuation of the purest kind, sometimes even platonic. So I fell in love, as everyone else does. And it was all there: raptures, tenderness, and poetry. In fact, on the one hand, this love of mine was the product of the activity of mothers and dressmakers, on the other, of the excess food I consumed leading my idle life. If it hadn't been for that boat ride, on the one hand, the dressmakers with their slender waists, and so forth, if my wife had been dressed in a shapeless housecoat and was sitting at home, and if I, on the other hand, had been living under normal human circumstances, consuming only as much food as I needed for my work, and if the safety valve had been open—since it happened to have been closed at the time—then I wouldn't have fallen in love and none of this would've happened."

## 8

"Well, this time it all worked out: my condition, her pretty dress, and the nice boat ride. Twenty times it hadn't worked, but this time it did. Just like a trap. I'm not laughing. Why, marriages are arranged that way now, just like traps. Isn't that natural? The young woman's matured, so she must be married off. It seems so simple when she's not ugly and there are men who want to get married. That's the way it was done in the old days. The young woman comes of age and the parents arrange a match. So it was done, and so it still is for all mankind—among the Chinese, Hindus, Moslems, and our own peasants;

14. Kvass is a traditional Russian beverage prepared from flour or dark rye bread soaked in water and malt.

15. Kasha is porridge or cooked cereal.

16. The pood is a Russian measure of weight equal to approximately 36 pounds, so thirty poods equals about 1,080 pounds.

that's how it's done among some ninety-nine percent of the human race. It's only among one percent, or even less, of us lechers that we decided this old way was no good and came up with something new. What was that? The new way is that young women sit around and men come in to choose, just like at a bazaar. The young women wait there and think, but dare not speak: 'Take me! No, me! Not her, take me: look at my shoulders and all the rest.' And we men, we stroll around, look them over, and feel very pleased. 'I know, but I won't get caught.' The men stroll around, look them over, and feel very pleased that all this has been arranged for them. Watch out, if you don't take care—bang, and that's that!"

"How should it be done?" I asked. "Should the women propose?"

"I don't really know; but if there's to be equality, then let there really be real equality. If they've decided that matchmaking is demeaning, this new way is a thousand times worse. Then the rights and chances were equal, but now a woman's either a slave at a bazaar or she's bait in a trap. Try telling the truth to some mother or young woman, that all she's doing is trying to snare a husband. My God, what an insult! But that's really what they're all about; they have nothing else to do. And what's so awful is sometimes to see completely innocent, poor young women engaged in this activity. Again, if it were done openly, but it's all deception. 'Ah, the origin of species, how fascinating! Ah, Liza's very interested in painting! Will you be at the exhibit? How instructive! And the troika rides, the play, the symphony? Ah, how splendid! My Liza's mad about music! Why don't you share these convictions? Ah, a boat ride!' But the idea's one and the same: 'Take me, take me, my Liza! No, me! Well, just try!' What an outrage! What lies!" he concluded and, finishing the rest of his tea, began clearing away the cups and dishes.

## 9

"You know," he began again, packing the tea and sugar away in his bag, "the domination of women from which the world suffers, all stems from this."

"What domination of women?" I asked. "The truth is that advantages in rights are all on the side of men."

"Yes, yes, that's just it," he interrupted me. "That's just what I want to tell you: that's what explains the unusual phenomenon that, on the one hand, it's completely fair that women are reduced to the lowest level of humiliation, while on the other, they dominate. It's like the Jews, just as they pay us back for our oppression of them by their financial power, so it is with women. 'Ah, you allow us only to be merchants. Fine, then we merchants will own you,' say the Jews. 'Ah, you want us only to be objects of sensuality. Fine, then we

objects will enslave you,' say the women. A woman's lack of rights arises not from the fact that she can't vote or become a judge—to be occupied with such matters constitutes no rights—but to be equal to a man in sexual intercourse, to have the right to use him or abstain as she desires, to choose a man she desires, and not be chosen. You say this is disgraceful. Fine. Then a man shouldn't have these rights either. But now women are deprived of rights that men have. And, to make up for this lack of rights, a woman acts on man's sensuality, and by so doing, subjugates him in such a way that he only chooses formally, while in fact she's the one who's making the choice. And once she possesses these means, she misuses them and acquires enormous power over people."

"But where is this special power?" I asked.

"Where? Why, it's everywhere, in everything. Stroll around the shops in any large town. There are millions, you can't even estimate the amount of human labor invested, but see if you can find anything in ninety percent of them for a man's use? All of life's luxuries are required and maintained by women. Consider all the factories. An enormous proportion of them produces useless adornments, carriages, furniture, and trinkets for women. Millions of people, generations of slaves perish doing this hard labor merely to satisfy women's whims. Like queens, they command ninety percent of humankind and keep them in bondage and hard labor. And all this because women have been humiliated, deprived of equal rights with men. And so, they take revenge by acting on our sensuality, by ensnaring us in their traps. Yes, it's all because of this. Women have made themselves such instruments for affecting our sensuality that men can't even treat them serenely. As soon as a man approaches a woman, he goes into a trance and loses his head. I used to feel awkward and uneasy when I saw a woman dressed up in a ball gown, but now I'm simply terrified; I see something dangerous to people, something illicit, and I want to call the police, to muster some protection against the peril, to demand that the dangerous object be taken away, removed forthwith.[17]

"Yes, you may laugh!" he shouted at me, "but this is no joke at all. I'm sure the time will come, perhaps very soon, when people will understand all this and will be surprised that any society could exist that tolerated such actions threatening social stability, such as the bodily adornments that openly arouse sensuality allowed women in our society. Why, it's like setting all sorts of

17. This passage was the subject of a famous cartoon; see Yu. Bitovt, *Count L. N. Tolstoy in Caricatures and Anecdotes* (Moscow: 1908).

traps along paths and promenades—it's even worse! Why is it that we forbid gambling, but allow women to dress like prostitutes to arouse sensuality? They're a thousand times more dangerous!"

10

"Well, that's how I was caught. I was 'in love,' as it's called. Not only did I imagine her as the peak of perfection, but during the period of our engagement I also imagined myself as the peak of perfection. There's no scoundrel who, if he searches, can't find other scoundrels even worse in some respect, and therefore can always find some reason to be satisfied with himself. So it was with me: I married not for money—profit was not an issue, the way it was for the majority of my acquaintances who married either for money or connections. I was rich and she was poor. That's the first thing. The second thing I was proud of was that others got married with the intention of continuing to live in the same polygamous manner as they did before their marriage; while I, on the other hand, had the firm intention of being monogamous after the wedding, and there was no limit to my pride regarding that fact. Yes, I was a terrible swine and imagined myself to be an angel.

"The time of our engagement didn't last long. I can't recall it without shame! What an abomination! It's supposed to be a period of spiritual, not sensual love. Well, if it's spiritual love, spiritual communion, then it should be expressed in words, conversation, and intimate chats. There was nothing of the sort. It was terribly difficult to talk when we were left alone. It was like the labor of Sisyphus. As soon as I thought of something and said it, we'd fall silent again and I'd have to think of something else to say. There was nothing to talk about. Everything that could be said about the life that awaited us, all the arrangements and plans, had already been said, so what else was there? Why, if we'd been animals, we'd have known that we weren't supposed to talk; with us, on the contrary, it was necessary to speak, but there was nothing to say because we were occupied by something that couldn't be resolved by talking. Besides, there was that hideous habit of eating candy, consuming a crude excess of sweets, and all those ghastly preparations for the wedding: talk about the apartment, the bedroom, linens, housecoats, bathrobes, underwear, clothes. You must understand that if people get married in accordance with the Domostroi, as that old man was saying, then featherbeds, dowry, linens—all this is merely detail necessary to accompany the sacrament. But among us, when only one out of ten men who marry not only doesn't believe in the sacrament but doesn't even believe that what he's doing constitutes some sort of obligation; and when out of a hundred men there's scarcely one who's

not been 'married' before, and who hasn't prepared in advance to betray his wife at every convenient opportunity, and when the majority regard a visit to the church merely as the particular condition for possessing a certain woman—just think about the awful significance of all these details. That's what it's all about. It becomes like a sale. An innocent girl is sold off to a debauchee and the purchase is surrounded by certain formalities."

II

"That's how everyone marries and how I got married, and then the much praised honeymoon begins. Why, even its name is so vile!" he hissed spitefully. "Once when I was strolling around Paris seeing the sights, I dropped in to have a look at what was advertised as a bearded lady and a water-dog. It turned out to be nothing more than a man wearing a woman's low-cut dress and a dog stuffed into walrus skin swimming around in a tub of water. It was of very little interest; as I was leaving, the showman politely escorted me out; addressing the public standing at the entrance, he pointed at me and said: 'Ask this gent if it's worth seeing. Come in, do come in, only one franc per person!' I felt ashamed to say that it wasn't worth seeing, and the showman had obviously been counting on that. So, it's probably the same thing with those who've experienced the horror of a honeymoon and don't want to disillusion others. I didn't disillusion anyone either, but I don't see why I can't tell the truth now. I even consider it necessary to do so. It's awkward, shameful, vile, pitiful, and, the main thing, it's boring, unbelievably boring! It's something like what I experienced when I was learning how to smoke: I felt nauseous and my saliva was flowing, but I kept swallowing and pretending it was very nice. The pleasure from smoking comes later, if it comes at all, just as it does from that: the spouses must school themselves in vice in order to receive any pleasure from it."

"Why say vice?" I asked. "Aren't you talking about the most natural human function?"

"Natural?" he asked. "Natural? No, on the contrary I'd say that I've come to the conclusion that it isn't . . . natural at all. No, it's completely unnatural. Ask any child, any uncorrupted young woman. My sister married very young a man twice her age and a debauchee. I recall how surprised we were on her wedding night when, terribly pale and in tears, she ran away from him, her whole body shaking, claiming she could never tell us what he'd asked her to do.

"You say, it's natural! It's natural to eat. And it's enjoyable, easy, pleasant, and not at all shameful, from the very beginning; but this is vile, shameful,

and painful. No, it's not natural! And, I'm convinced, an uncorrupted young woman always hates it."

"But how then," I asked, "would the human race continue?"

"Ah, yes, as long as the human race won't perish!" he said with malicious irony, as if anticipating this familiar and unprincipled objection. "Preach abstinence from childbearing in the name of allowing English lords to continue their gluttony as long as they wish—that's all right. Preach abstinence from childbearing in the name of greater pleasure—that's all right; but just breathe one word about abstinence from childbearing in the name of morality—good Lord, what an outcry! It's as if the human race might perish because a dozen or so people want to stop acting like swine. Forgive me, this light's annoying me; may I shade it?" he asked, pointing to the lamp.

I said that I didn't mind, and then, as he did everything, he hastily stood up on the seat and pulled a woolen shade over the lamp.

"Nevertheless," I said, "if everyone acknowledged this as their law, then the human race would come to an end."

He didn't reply at once.

"You ask how the human race would continue," he said, sitting down opposite me again, spreading his legs far apart, and resting his elbows on his knees. "Why should it continue, this human race of ours?" he asked.

"What do you mean, 'Why?' If not, we wouldn't exist."

"And why should we?"

"'Why?' In order to live."

"But why? If there's no goal, if life's given us merely to live, then there's no reason for it. And if that's so, then the Schopenhauers and Hartmanns, and all the Buddhists are absolutely correct.[18] Well, and if there's a goal to life, then it's clear that life must end when that goal's been achieved. That's how it turns out," he said with evident agitation, obviously valuing his own thought highly. "That's how it turns out. Just note: if the goal of humanity is happiness, goodness, love, just as you like; if the goal of humanity is what's written in the prophecies, that all people will join together as one in love, their spears will be beaten into pruning hooks, and so forth, then what is it that impedes the accomplishment of this goal? The passions impede it. Of the passions, the strongest, most evil, and most stubborn is

18. The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) emphasizes the role of the will as a blind, irrational force, a stance that led him to a rejection of Enlightenment values and to pessimism. Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906) was a German metaphysical philosopher, a follower of Schopenhauer, who sought to reconcile two conflicting schools of thought, rationalism and irrationalism, emphasizing the role of the unconscious mind.

sexual, physical love; therefore, if the passions were to be demolished, including the last and strongest of all, sexual, physical love, the prophecy would be fulfilled, people would join together as one, the goal of humanity will have been achieved, and there'd be no further reason to live. As long as humanity exists, an ideal stands before it, and that ideal, of course, is not the same as for rabbits or pigs, to multiply abundantly, and not the same as for monkeys or Parisians, to enjoy the pleasures of sexual passion in the most refined manner, but the ideal of goodness, attainable through abstinence and purity. People have always strived for it and will continue to do so. And look how it turns out.

"It turns out that physical love is a safety valve. If the current generation of humanity has not achieved its goal, then the sole reason it hasn't is because of its passions, and the strongest of those is sexual. But if there is sexual passion, and there is a new generation, then the possibility exists for reaching this goal in the next generation. And if the next one doesn't achieve it, then the one after that will, and so on and so forth, until the goal's been reached, until the prophecy's been fulfilled, until people come together as one. Or else, how would it turn out? If one acknowledges that God created people for the achievement of a certain goal, He would have created them either as mortal without sexual passion or as immortal. If they were mortal but without sexual passion, then how would it turn out? They would've lived and, without achieving their goal, would've died; but to achieve His goal, God would've had to create new people. If, however, they were immortal, then let's suppose (although it'd be more difficult for these same people to correct their mistakes and approach perfection than it would be for new generations), let's suppose they would've achieved their goal after many thousands of years; but what use would they be then? What could He do with them? So, things are best just as they are now. . . . You may not like this form of expression; perhaps you believe in evolution? Even then it turns out the same way. The highest order of animals, the human race, to survive in its struggle with other animals, should join together as one, like a swarm of bees, and not multiply endlessly; it should, also like the bees, produce sexless worker bees—that is, again it should strive for abstinence, rather than for inflaming lust, toward which our entire life is now directed." He fell silent. "Will the human race come to an end? Can anyone, however he regards the world, doubt that? Why, that's as indubitable as death itself. According to all church teaching the end of the world will come, and according to all scientific teaching, the same end is inevitable. What's so strange that according to moral teaching it turns out the same way?"

After he said this he remained silent for a long time, drank some more tea, and finished his cigarette; after taking out some others from his bag, he placed them in his old soiled cigarette case.

"I understand your thinking," I said. "The Shakers espouse something similar."[19]

"Yes, yes, and they're right," he said. "Sexual passion, no matter how it's arranged is evil, a terrible evil against which one must struggle, and it mustn't be encouraged as it is here with us. The words of the Gospel that whosoever looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery relates not only to other men's wives, but precisely—and above all—to one's own wife."

12

"In our world everything seems to be the reverse: if a man thinks about abstinence while still a bachelor, then after he's married, everyone considers abstinence no longer necessary. These trips after a wedding, the seclusion to which a young couple repairs with their parents' permission—why, it's nothing more than for debauchery. But moral law avenges itself once it's been violated. No matter how I tried to arrange our honeymoon, nothing came of it. It was vile, shameful, and boring the entire time. But very soon it even became painfully difficult. That started very early. By the third or fourth day I found my wife bored and began asking her why; I started to embrace her, which, in my opinion, was all she could wish for, but she pushed my arms away and burst into tears. What about? She couldn't say. She felt sad and oppressed. Her nervous exhaustion had probably intimated the truth about the depravity of our relations; but she couldn't express it. I began interrogating her; she said something about feeling sad without her mother. I didn't think that was true. I began trying to reassure her, without saying a word about her mother. I didn't realize that she was merely feeling oppressed, and that her mother was only an excuse. But she was immediately offended that I hadn't even mentioned her mother, as if I hadn't believed her. She said that I didn't really love her. I reproached her for being capricious; all of a sudden her face changed completely. Instead of sadness, it expressed irritation, and she began reproaching me in the most venomous terms for my egoism and cruelty. I looked at her. Her face expressed utmost coldness and hostility, almost

19. A religious sect that developed in eighteenth-century England and became popular in nineteenth-century New England. The Shakers observed a doctrine of common property, communal living, and sexual abstinence. Tolstoy was in correspondence with several members of the group.

hatred of me. I recall how horrified I was when I saw it. 'How? What?' I wondered. 'Love—that union of souls, and this is what I get instead! This can't be! This isn't her!' I kept trying to soothe her, but encountered such an insurmountable wall of cold, venomous hostility that I hadn't even managed to look away before irritation seized me as well, and we said a great many unpleasant things to each other. The impression left by this first quarrel was awful. I call it a quarrel, but it wasn't really that: it was merely the uncovering of the abyss actually existing between us. Our amorousness had been exhausted by the satisfaction of our sensuality, and we were left confronting each other in our true relationship, that is, two totally alien egoists, each wishing to receive as much pleasure from the other as possible. I call what happened between us a quarrel, but it wasn't really a quarrel; it was merely the result of the cessation of sensuality revealing our true relationship to one another. I didn't understand that this cold, hostile relationship was our normal state, and I didn't understand it because at first this hostile relationship was once again concealed from us by the reappearance of concentrated sensuality, that is, lovemaking.

"I thought we'd quarreled and made up and that it wouldn't happen again. But during that first month of our honeymoon, a state of satiety soon returned; once again we ceased being needed by the other person and another quarrel ensued. The second one struck me even more painfully than the first. It must have been that the first one was not accidental, but how things were supposed to be and how they would continue, I thought. The second quarrel struck me more in that it arose from the most improbable pretext. Something having to do with money, which I'd never spared and would never spare with my wife. I remember only that she twisted the matter in such a way that some remark of mine turned out to be an expression of my desire to use money to dominate her, thus affirming my exclusive right—something inconceivable, stupid, vile, and unnatural both for me and for her. I grew angry, began reproaching her for insensitivity, as she did me, and off we went again. Both in her words and in the expression of her face and eyes I saw once more that same cold, cruel hostility that had struck me earlier. I recalled previous quarrels with my brother, my acquaintances, my father, but never did we feel that particular, noxious malice between us that was present here. But some time passed, and once again this mutual contempt was concealed beneath amorousness, that is, sensuality, and I was consoled by the thought that these quarrels were only mistakes that could be corrected. But then there was a third quarrel, and a fourth, and I came to realize that it was no accident; it was how things were supposed to be and how they would continue, and I was horrified by the

prospect that faced me. In addition, I was tormented by the awful thought that I was the only one who got along so badly with his wife, so different from what I'd expected, while nothing of the sort was true in other people's marriages. I didn't know at that time that this was the general situation, and that everyone, just like me, imagines it to be their exclusive misfortune, and they conceal their exclusive, shameful misfortune not only from others, but even from themselves, and don't ever acknowledge it.

"It began during those first days and continued all the time, getting stronger and nastier. From those first weeks I felt in the depths of my soul that I'd been *caught,* that this wasn't at all what I'd expected, that marriage not only was not happiness but was something very onerous; but like everyone else, I didn't want to admit it (I wouldn't admit it to myself even now, if it weren't for how things turned out); I concealed it not only from others but from myself. Now I'm surprised that I didn't understand my situation as it really was. It could have been seen from the fact that our quarrels began with pretexts impossible to recall once the quarrel had ended. Our reason didn't have time to devise sufficient pretexts for the constant hostility that existed between us. But even more striking was the insufficiency of pretexts for our reconciliations. Sometimes there were words, explanations, even tears, but sometimes . . . oh! It's vile to recall even now—after the cruelest words exchanged, all of sudden—the silent glances, smiles, kisses, and embraces. . . . Ugh! Despicable! How is it that I didn't see all that vileness back then?"

## 13

Two new passengers entered and began to settle on the seats farthest from us. Pozdnyshev remained silent until after they were seated, but as soon as they had quieted down, he continued, obviously not losing his train of thought even for a moment.

"What is filthiest of all," he began, "is that in theory love's supposed to be something ideal, exalted; but in practice, love is something despicable, swinish, which it's even repulsive and shameful to mention or remember. It's not for nothing that nature made it that way. And if it's repulsive and shameful, then one must understand it as such. But here, on the contrary, people pretend that something repulsive and shameful is beautiful and exalted. What were the first signs of my love? I yielded to animal excesses, not only without feeling ashamed, but for some reason taking pride in the possibility of these physical excesses, without considering in the least either her spiritual life or even her physical life. I wondered where our mutual hostility had come from, but the matter was absolutely clear: this hostility was nothing other

than the protest of our human nature against the animal nature that was overpowering it.

"I was surprised by our mutual hostility. But it couldn't be any other way. That hatred was nothing other than the mutual hatred of accomplices in crime—both for the instigation and participation in a criminal act. How could it not be a crime when she, poor thing, became pregnant during the first month, yet our swinish sexual contact continued? You think I'm digressing from my tale? Not in the least! I'm telling you the whole story of how I killed my wife. During the trial I was asked how and with what I killed her. Fools! They thought I'd killed my wife then, with a knife, on the fifth of October. I didn't kill her then, but much earlier. Just as they're all now killing, everyone, all of them . . ."

"But with what?" I asked.

"That's just what's so surprising: no one wants to know something that's so clear and obvious, what doctors should know and preach, yet they keep silent. Why, the matter's terribly simple. Man and woman are created like animals, so pregnancy begins after carnal love, then nursing—conditions during which carnal love is harmful both for the woman and for her child. There's an equal number of men and women. What follows from this? It seems clear. No great amount of wisdom is needed to arrive at the conclusion that animals reach, that is abstinence. But, no. Science has managed to discover some sort of leucocytes that course through the blood and all sorts of other stupidities, but this one fact it's been unable to understand.[20] At least one doesn't hear it said.

"So there are only two choices for a woman: one is to make a monster of herself, destroy in herself or, as need be, keep trying to destroy the capacity to be a woman, that is, a mother, in order that a man may calmly and continually enjoy himself; or, there's the other way out, not even a way out, but a simple, crude, outright violation of the laws of nature, practiced in all so-called respectable families. It's that the woman, contrary to her nature, must at the very same time be pregnant, and nursing, and a lover; she must be something that no animal stoops to. And she may not have enough strength. That's why in our family life we have hysterics and frayed nerves, and among peasants—shriekers.[21] Note that among young women, pure ones, there aren't

20. Leucocytes are white blood cells, small, colorless corpuscles in the blood, lymph, or tissues that destroy organisms that cause disease.

21. Women subject to so-called fits of hysterics, often thought, even as late as the nineteenth century, to be possessed by the devil.

any shriekers; it's only among peasant women, and only those who live together with their husbands. So it is here with us. And it's exactly the same in Europe. All the hospitals for hysterics are filled with women who've been violating the laws of nature. But shriekers and Charcot's patients are completely incapacitated, while the world is full of half-crippled women.[22] Why, just think what a great thing's being accomplished in a woman after she's conceived or when she's nursing a newborn infant. Someone that will continue on and replace us is growing inside her. And this sacred task is destroyed—by what? It's dreadful to contemplate! People talk about freedom, women's rights. It's as if cannibals fattened up their captives before eating them, all the while assuring them that they were concerned about their rights and their freedom."

All this was new to me and startling.

"Well then? If it's like that," I said, "a man can make love to his wife only once every two years; but for a man . . ."

"It's essential for a man," he interrupted me. "Once again our dear high priests of science have convinced us all. I'd order those magicians to meet the obligations of those women who, in their opinion, are so necessary to men. What would they say then? Convince a man that he needs vodka, tobacco, or opium, and then all that becomes necessary. It turns out that God didn't understand what was needed; therefore He didn't ask magicians and arranged things badly. Don't you see, it just doesn't add up. A man wants and needs to satisfy his lust, so they've concluded; therefore, childbearing and nursing interfere, hindering the satisfaction of that need. What's to be done? Turn to the magicians; they'll arrange it. And so they did. Oh, when will these magicians with their deceptions be dethroned? It's high time! It's already reached the point that men lose their minds and go off to shoot themselves, all because of this. How can it be otherwise? Animals seem to know that their progeny continues their kind, and they adhere to a certain law in this respect. Only man doesn't know this and doesn't want to know it. He's concerned only with having as much pleasure as possible. And who is he? Man, lord of nature. Note that animals mate only when they can produce offspring, while that filthy lord of nature does it all the time, just for the sheer pleasure. And, what's more, he exalts this apelike pursuit into the pearl of creation—love. In the name of this love, that is, filth, he destroys—what? Half the human race. Of all women who should be helpmates in humanity's progress toward truth

22. Jean Martin Charcot (1825–93) was a French neurologist who founded a clinic for diseases of the nervous system, including "hysterics."

and goodness, man, for the sake of his own pleasure, makes of them not helpmates but enemies. Look, what is it that impedes the forward movement of mankind everywhere? Women. And why are they like that? Only because of this. Yes, sir; yes, sir," he repeated several times and began to stir, getting out his cigarettes and lighting up, obviously trying to calm down a bit.

## 14

"That's the sort of swine I was," he continued again, in his previous tone of voice. "And worst of all was that while I was living this swinish life, I imagined that because I wasn't seducing other women, I must therefore be living an honest family life, that I was a moral man, and not guilty in any respect, and that if we had any quarrels, my wife was to blame for them: it was a question of her character.

"Of course, she was not to blame. She was just like the rest of them, the majority of women. She was brought up in accordance with the demands of the position of women in our society, therefore as all women are brought up without exception in our well-off classes, and just as they have to be. They're talking now about some sort of new education for women. It's all empty words: the education of women is exactly as it should be, given the existence of our general view of women, our genuine view, not the one we fake.

"And the education of women will always correspond to men's view of them. Why, we all know how men regard women: '*Wein, Weiber und Gesang*,' and how the poets describe them.[23] Take all poetry, painting, sculpture, beginning with love poetry and naked Venuses and Phrynes, and you'll see that woman is an instrument for man's enjoyment; and so she is on the Truba or on Grachevka, and at a court ball.[24] Just note the devil's cunning: so, if she's there for enjoyment, pleasure, then let it be known as such, that woman is a tasty morsel. But no, at first the knights declare that they idolize women—idolize them, but still regard them as a means of enjoyment. And now they maintain they respect women. Some yield their places to them, pick up their handkerchiefs; others acknowledge their rights to occupy all positions and participate in government, and so on. They do all these things, but their view of women remains the same. Her body is an instrument of enjoyment. And she knows this. It's the same as slavery. Why, slavery's nothing other than the

23. The German phrase means "wine, women, and song."

24. Phryne was a famously beautiful courtesan in ancient Greece (fourth century B.C.) who served as the model for several statues. Truba and Grachevka were streets in Moscow where numerous brothels were located.

use by a few of the unwilling labor of the many. Therefore, so that slavery would cease, it's necessary for people to stop wanting to make use of the unwilling labor of others, and to consider it a sin or a shame. Meanwhile, people abolish the external forms of slavery, arrange it so that it's no longer possible to buy slaves, and imagine and convince themselves that slavery no longer exists; they don't see and don't want to see that slavery continues to exist because people still like to use the labor of others and still consider it right and proper. As long as they consider it a good thing, there'll always be people who're stronger and smarter than others and who know how to arrange things. It's the same with the emancipation of women. The slavery of women consists only in the fact that men wish to use them as instruments of enjoyment and consider that a very good thing. So they emancipate women, give them rights equal to men's, but continue to regard them as instruments of enjoyment; that's how they educate women in childhood and how they're regarded by social opinion. So there she is, the same humiliated, depraved slave, while man is the same depraved slaveowner.

"They emancipate women in schools and in courts of law, but regard her as if she were an object of enjoyment. If you teach a woman as she's taught here among us, to regard herself thus, she'll always remain an inferior being. Either she'll prevent the conception of offspring with the help of those scoundrel doctors—that is, she'll be an outright prostitute who's lowered herself not to the level of an animal but to the level of a thing—or else she'll become what she is in a majority of cases: mentally ill, hysterical, unhappy, just as they are now, lacking any possibility for spiritual development.

"Schools and women's colleges can't alter this. The only thing that can is a change in the way men view women and the way women view themselves. This will happen only when women regard the state of virginity as the highest state, and not as they do now, when the highest state of a human being is shame and disgrace. Until this occurs, the ideal of every young woman, no matter what her education, will still be to attract as many men as possible, as many males as she can, in order to have the possibility of choice.

"And the fact that one of them knows more mathematics, while another can play the harp—that won't change a thing. A woman's happy and attains everything she can wish for when she captivates a man. Therefore a woman's main task is to know how to captivate him. That's how it's been and how it will be. That's how it is during an unmarried girl's life in our society, and how it continues in her married life. During her unmarried life it's necessary so she can have choice; in her married life it's necessary so she can dominate her husband.

"One thing that curtails, or at least temporarily suppresses, this is children—and then, only if the woman's not a monster and nurses them herself. But here again, come the doctors.

"My wife, who wanted to nurse, and did in fact nurse her next five children, happened to fall ill after the birth of her first child. These doctors who cynically undressed her and palpated her everywhere, for which I had to thank them and pay them money—these nice doctors concluded that she shouldn't nurse; thus at first she was deprived of the only means that could've spared her from coquetry. A wet nurse fed the infant—that is, we took advantage of another woman's poverty, need, and ignorance, and lured her away from her own child to ours; in exchange, we gave her a fine headdress adorned with lace. But that's not the point. The point is that during the time my wife was free from pregnancy and nursing, this female coquetry that had previously been dormant in her arose with special force. Correspondingly, there arose in me with special force such pangs of jealousy that have continued to torment me throughout my married life, as they must torment all husbands who live with wives as I did, that is, immorally."

## 15

"During the entire course of my married life I never ceased being tormented by jealousy. But there were certain periods when I suffered from it especially severely. One of those was after the birth of our first child, when the doctors prohibited my wife from nursing. I was especially jealous at the time, in the first place, because my wife experienced a mother's typical restlessness that must be prompted by the groundless disruption in the normal course of life; in the second place, because, seeing how easily she'd shed a mother's moral obligation, I concluded, rightly although unconsciously, that it would be just as easy for her to shed her spousal obligation, all the more so since she was in perfect health and, in spite of the good doctors' prohibition, she managed to nurse her subsequent children herself and did a fine job of it."

"I see you really don't like doctors," I said, noting his particularly spiteful tone of voice every time he made mention of them.

"It's not a matter of likes or dislikes. They destroyed my life, just as they've destroyed and go on destroying the lives of thousands of people, hundreds of thousands, and I can't help connecting the effect with the cause. I understand that they want to earn money, just like lawyers and others, and I'd gladly give them half my income; everyone, if they understood what they're doing, would gladly give them half their property, as long as they'd refrain from interfering in our family life and would never come anywhere near us. I haven't

assembled the evidence, but I know dozens of cases—there's no end to them—in which they've killed a baby in the mother's womb, insisting that she'd be unable to deliver, and later the woman gives birth perfectly well, or else they've killed a mother while performing some sort of operation. No one considers these murders, just as they didn't consider murders committed during the Inquisition, because they were supposed to be done for the benefit of mankind. It's impossible to count the crimes they've committed. But all these crimes are nothing in comparison to the moral corruption of materialism they introduce into the world, especially through women. I'm not even talking about the fact that in following their instructions, thanks to infections everywhere and in everything, people must be moving not toward unity but toward disunity: according to their teaching, everyone should sit apart and leave an atomizer with carbolic acid in their mouths (though they've discovered that does no good either).[25] But that's no matter. The main poison is the corruption of people, woman in particular.

"Today one can no longer say, 'You live badly: live better.' One can say this neither to oneself nor to others. If you're living badly, it's because of some abnormality in nervous functions, and so on. So you must go to doctors, and they'll prescribe some medicine for thirty-five kopecks at the pharmacy, and you take it. You get even worse; then there's more medicine and more doctors. A splendid trick!

"But that's not the point. I just told you that she nursed the children perfectly well herself, and that it was only her bearing and nursing the children that saved me from the torments of jealousy. If it hadn't been for that, everything would've happened earlier. The children saved both me and her. During those eight years, she gave birth to five children. And she nursed them all herself."

"Where are your children now?" I asked.

"My children?" he repeated anxiously.

"Excuse me, perhaps it's painful for you to be reminded of them."

"No, never mind. My sister-in-law and her brother took them. They wouldn't let me have them. I provided for them but they wouldn't let me have them. I'm something of a madman. I've just left them now. I've seen them, but they won't let me have them. Or else I'd raise them so they wouldn't be anything like their parents. But they're supposed to be like them. Well, what's to be done? It's clear they won't let me have them and they don't trust

25. Carbolic acid, distilled from coal or coal tar, was used in weak solution as an antiseptic or disinfectant.

me. I don't even know myself whether I'd be able to raise them. I think not. I'm a wreck, a cripple. I have only one thing. I know. Yes, it's true; I know something that everyone else won't discover for a while.

"Yes, my children are living and growing up to be the same savages as everyone else around them. I saw them, three times even. I can't do anything for them. Nothing. I'm going to my place in the south. I have a small house and a garden there.

"Yes, it'll be a while before people discover what I know. How much iron and what other sort of metals there are on the sun and stars—that may soon be found out; but anything that exposes our swinishness—that's difficult, terribly difficult . . .

"But at least you listen, and I'm grateful for that."

## 16

"You just mentioned children. Again what terrible lies are told about them. Children are a blessing from God. Children are a joy. It's all lies. It was all true at one time, but now it's nothing like that. Children are a torment and nothing more. The majority of mothers frankly feel this way, and sometimes they even say it openly. Ask the majority of mothers in our well-to-do circle and they'll tell you that they don't want to have any children out of fear that their children might fall ill and die; and if they have given birth, they don't want to nurse them because they don't want to become so attached and don't want to suffer. The enjoyment that a child provides by its charm, those little hands and feet, its whole little body, the enjoyment afforded by a child—is less than the suffering they experience—less than even the fear alone of the possibility of a child's illness or death, not to mention actual illness or the loss of a child. Weighing the advantages and disadvantages, it turns out that it's disadvantageous, and therefore undesirable to have children. The mothers say this openly, boldly, imagining that their feelings arise from love of their children, a good and praiseworthy feeling of which they're proud. They don't notice that by this reasoning they flatly reject love and only confirm their own egoism. They receive less pleasure from a child's charms than suffering from the fear it occasions, and therefore they don't want to bear a child they'd come to love. They won't sacrifice themselves for a beloved being; instead, they sacrifice a being they could love for their own sake.

It's clear this isn't love but egoism. But one can't condemn them, these mothers of well-to-do families, for their egoism; one can't raise a hand against them when you recall all that they suffer owing to their children's health, thanks again to those same doctors who meddle in our affluent life. When I

remember, even now, my wife's life and her condition during the time we had three or four young children and she was so absorbed by them—it's awful. We had no life of our own. We were in a state of constant danger, escape from it, then imminent danger again, once more desperate efforts and escape again—such was our constant situation, as if we were on a sinking ship. Sometimes it seemed to me that all this was happening on purpose, that she was feigning concern for the children in order to subjugate me. It was all so enticing and very simply resolved all questions in her favor. It sometimes seemed that everything she said and did in these cases, she said and did intentionally. But no, she herself suffered terribly and blamed herself constantly for the children, their health or illnesses. It was a torment for her and for me, too. And she couldn't refrain from suffering. After all, attachment to one's children, the animal need to nurse them, cuddle them, protect them—was present, as it is with the majority of women, but that which animals possess—a lack of imagination and reason—was absent. A mother hen isn't afraid of what might happen to her chicks; she doesn't know all the illnesses that might befall them; she doesn't know all the remedies that people devise to save them from illness and death. And for a mother hen, her young aren't a source of torment. She does for her chicks what's appropriate and agreeable; her young are a joy for her. When a baby chick starts to fall ill, her anxieties are well defined: she warms it and feeds it. And, in so doing, she knows she's doing all that's necessary. If the chick dies, she doesn't ask herself why it's dead or where it's gone; she clucks a little, then stops and resumes her life as before. But for our unfortunate women and for my wife, this was not the case. Not to mention illnesses or how to cure them, she heard from all sides and read endlessly diverse and constantly changing rules about how to raise and educate children. This is how to feed them; no, not like that at all, but like this; how to dress them, what they should drink, how to bathe them, how to put them to bed, take them for walks, give them fresh air—about all this we, especially she, discovered new rules every week. It's as if we'd only begun having children only yesterday. And if a child hadn't been properly fed or bathed, or not at the right time, and that child fell ill, it turned out that my wife was to blame, and hadn't done what was really necessary.

"And that's when they're healthy. It was a torment even then. But if one fell ill, it was all over. Complete hell. It's supposed that illness can be cured and there's such a thing as science and people who're doctors, and that they know what to do. Not all of them, but the very best ones do. So a child falls ill and one must find the very best doctor, the one who can save them, and then the child is saved; but if you can't find that doctor, or if you don't live in

the same place that he does, then the child is lost. And this is not only my wife's belief but that of all women in her circle, and she hears the same view repeated on all sides: Yekaterina Semenovna lost two of her children because she didn't summon Ivan Zakharych in time, but he managed to save Marya Ivanovna's elder daughter; the Petrovs followed the doctor's advice and dispersed their children to different hotels just in time and they all survived, but if they hadn't, the children would've died. And someone else who had a weak child followed the doctor's advice and moved to the south and thus saved her child. How can my wife keep from being tormented and agitated all the time when the lives of her children, with whom she has an animal attachment, depend on her finding what Ivan Zakharych will say. But no one knows what he'll say, least of all, Ivan Zakharych, because he himself knows all too well that he doesn't know anything and he can't help in any way, so he merely hedges his bets so people won't stop thinking that he knows something. Why, if she were really an animal, she wouldn't have suffered so much; and if she were really a human being, she would've had faith in God, and would've said and thought the same thing that believing peasant women do: 'God gives, God takes, there's no escaping God.' She'd have concluded that the matter of everyone's life and death, not only her children's, lies outside the power of people, and only in God's hands, and then she wouldn't have been so tormented, thinking it was within her own control to prevent the illness and death of her children, and she wouldn't have tried so hard. But for her the situation was this: she was given these very fragile, weak creatures, subject to countless calamities. She felt a passionate, animal attachment to them. Besides, these creatures were entrusted to her, while at the same time the means for preserving them were hidden from us and revealed only to total strangers, whose services and advice could be procured only by paying large sums of money, and even then, not always.

"Our whole life with children was not a joy but a torment, both for my wife and therefore for me, too. How could it be otherwise? She was constantly tormented. There were times when we'd just calmed down after a jealous scene or a simple quarrel and we thought we could live, read, and think; we'd start doing something, and suddenly we'd receive news that Vasya was throwing up, or Masha had blood in her stool, or Andryusha had a rash: well, then of course there was no peace. Where should we run? Summon which doctors? How isolate the child? So the enemas, temperatures, medicines, and doctors would start to appear. Before that episode was over, something else would happen. We had no regular, settled family life. There was only, as I've said, constant escape from imaginary and real dangers. This is how it is in a majority of

families now. In my own family it was particularly intense. My wife loved her children and was very gullible.

"Thus the presence of children not only failed to improve our life but poisoned it. Besides that, children were another reason for discord. From the time we had children, and even more as they grew, they themselves became the means and object of discord. Not only the object, but the children were the instrument of our struggle; we used them to fight one another. Each of us had our favorite child—our chosen weapon for fighting. I used the eldest, Vasya, and she used Liza. Besides, when the children grew older and their characters became more defined, they became allies whom we enlisted on our own sides. They suffered terribly as a result, the poor things, but in our constant warfare, we didn't stop to think about them. The little girl was my supporter; the elder boy, who resembled my wife and was her favorite, was often hateful to me."

17

"Well, sir, that's how we lived. Our relationship grew more and more hostile. Things finally reached the point when it wasn't the discord that caused the hostility, but the hostility that caused the discord: whatever she said, I disagreed in advance, and it was the same with her.

"During the fourth year of our marriage it was somehow decided by both sides that we could neither understand each other nor agree. We ceased trying to reach any accord. We each stuck to our own opinions about the simplest things, especially regarding the children. As I recall now, the opinions I defended weren't so dear to me that I couldn't give them up; but she held the opposite opinion, so yielding meant yielding to her. I couldn't do that. Nor could she yield to me. She probably always considered herself completely in the right before me, and in my eyes I was always a saint before her. When we were together we were almost condemned to silence or to such conversations as, I'm sure, animals engage in among themselves: 'What time is it?' 'Time for bed.' 'What's for dinner today?' 'Where shall we go?' 'What's in the paper?' 'Send for the doctor.' 'Masha has a sore throat.' We needed only to take one or two steps outside this impossibly narrow circle of conversation topics for irritation to flare up. There were confrontations and expressions of contempt over coffee, the tablecloth, the carriage, or a lead in vint—all things that couldn't possibly be of any importance to either of us.[26] In me, at least, there often seethed a terrible hatred for her! Sometimes I'd watch how she'd

26. Lead in vint is a Russian card game similar to bridge and whist.

pour out the tea, swing her foot, or raise her spoon to her mouth, slurping, drawing in the liquid, and I hated her precisely for that, as if for the worst of deeds. At the time I didn't notice that these periods of anger in me corresponded quite correctly and regularly to those periods we called love. A period of love—then one of anger; an energetic period of love—then a longer period of anger; a weaker manifestation of love—then a shorter one of anger. At the time we didn't understand that our love and hatred were one and the same animal emotion, only from different ends. It would've been impossible to live that way if we'd understood our situation; but we didn't understand it and couldn't see it. Both the salvation of man and his punishment lie in the fact that when he isn't living in the right way, he can stupefy himself so as not to see the misery of his own situation. That's just what we did. My wife tried to lose herself in intense, always urgent household concerns, the furniture, her outfits, and the children's clothes, as well as their education and health. I had my own intoxication—the intoxication of work, hunting, and cards. We were both constantly busy. We both felt that the busier we kept, the angrier we could be toward each other. 'It's fine for you to make faces,' I thought about her, 'but you tormented me all night with your scenes, and I have a meeting today.' 'It's fine for you,' she not only thought, but even said, 'but I didn't get any sleep last night because of the baby.'

"That's how we lived, not seeing through our perpetual fog the actual situation. If the thing that happened had never happened, I'd have lived to a ripe old age that same way, and I'd have thought, as I lay dying, that I'd lived a good life, not an especially good one, but not a bad one either, a life just like everyone else; I'd never have understood the abyss of unhappiness and the foul lie in which I was wallowing.

"We were like two convicts, hating each other, but bound by a chain, poisoning each other's life and trying not to see it. I didn't know at the time that ninety-nine percent of married people live in the same hell as I did, and that it can't be otherwise. At the time I didn't know this about other people or about myself.

"It's astonishing what coincidences occur in a regular and even an irregular life! Just when the parents' life with each other becomes unbearable, it's necessary to provide the children with a city setting for their education. So the need arises to move to the city."

He fell silent and emitted his strange sounds a few times, which now sounded very much like suppressed sobs. We were approaching a station.

"What time is it?" he asked.

I glanced at my watch: it was two o'clock.

"Aren't you tired?" he asked.

"No, but you are."

"I'm suffocating. Excuse me, I'll take a little walk and get some water."

He made his way unsteadily through the carriage. I sat alone, mulling over all that he'd said, and was so deep in thought that I didn't notice his return from the other door.

18

"Yes, I keep getting carried away," he began. "I've thought about things a great deal; I regard them differently and want to talk about all of it. So, we started living in town. Unhappy people live better in town. A man can live there a hundred years and never realize that he died a long time ago and that he's rotting. In town there's no time to size things up: you're always busy. Business affairs, social relations, health matters, the arts, the children's health, and their education. One moment you have to receive this or that person, or call on these or those people; or, you have to go see something, hear someone, or do something. In town at any given moment there are always one, two, or even three luminaries that cannot possibly be missed. Or else one must undergo some treatment, or arrange for someone else's; then there are the teachers, tutors, and governesses; meanwhile one's own life is as empty as can be. Well, that's how we lived and didn't feel the pain of our living together nearly as much. Besides, at first we had a splendid pastime—getting settled in a new town, a new apartment, and then another pastime—moving from town to the country, and then from the country back to town.

"We spent one whole winter in town, and during the second there occurred an event, unnoticed by anyone at the time, seemingly insignificant, but one that caused all that subsequently transpired. She was unwell, and those scoundrel-doctors ordered her not to bear any more children and they taught her how to avoid giving birth. I found this disgusting. I struggled against it, but she insisted with frivolous obstinacy on having her own way, and I submitted; the last pretext for our swinish life—children—was removed, and life became even more despicable.

"A peasant or a worker needs children, even though it's hard for him to feed them; but he needs them, and therefore his marital relations are justified. But people like us who already have children don't need any more; children involve extra care and expense, and are co-heirs; they're a burden. So we have no justification whatsoever for our swinish life. Either we avoid having children by artificial means, or we regard them as a misfortune, the consequence of carelessness, which is even more despicable. There's no justification. But we've

fallen so low morally, that we no longer see a need for justification. The majority of today's educated world engages in this depravity without the least remorse of conscience.

"There's no reason for remorse, because conscience doesn't exist in our way of life apart from, if one can call it that, the conscience of public opinion and criminal law. And here neither the one nor the other is violated: there's no reason to feel ashamed before society; *everyone* acts like that, both Marya Pavlovna and Ivan Zakharych.[27] So why breed paupers and deprive oneself of the possibility of social life? There's no reason to feel ashamed before criminal law or to be afraid of it. It's only outrageous hussies and soldiers' wives who toss their babies into ponds and wells; naturally, they have to be thrown into jail; but with us, it's all done in a neat and timely manner.

"Thus we lived for another two years. The means prescribed by those scoundrel-doctors, apparently, began to work; she put on weight and grew prettier, like the late beauty of summer. She herself felt this and paid more attention to her appearance. She developed a provocative sort of beauty, one that perturbed people. She was in the full vigor of a well-fed, stimulated woman of thirty, no longer bearing children. Her appearance disturbed people. When she passed among men, she attracted their glances. She was like a fresh, well-fed, harnessed filly whose bridle's been removed. There was no bridle whatsoever, as is the case with ninety-nine percent of our women. And I felt this and was afraid."

## 19

He suddenly stood up and moved closer to the window.

"Excuse me," he said and, staring at the window, fell silent for several minutes. Then he sighed deeply and sat down again opposite me. His face had become completely different, his eyes were sad, and some sort of strange expression, almost a smile, puckered his mouth. "I'm a little tired, but I'll keep talking. There's still plenty of time; it's not yet dawn. Yes, sir," he began again, after lighting a cigarette. "After she stopped having babies she put on weight; then this illness—endless suffering over the children—began to pass; it wasn't exactly that it passed, it was as if she'd recovered from a state of intoxication; she came to her senses and saw that there was an entire blessed world, with joys she'd forgotten all about, but a world in which she no longer knew how to live, an entire blessed world that she didn't understand at all. 'I mustn't miss it! Time's passing and it won't ever come back!' That's what I imagine she thought,

27. That is, both women and men.

or more likely, felt, and it was impossible for her to think or feel otherwise: she'd been brought up to think that there was only one thing worthy of attention in this world—love. She'd gotten married, received some of that love, but not only was it a long way from what she'd been promised, what she'd expected, she'd also undergone many disappointments and much suffering, and then, an unexpected torment—children! This torment had worn her out. At that point, thanks to the obliging doctors, she learned that she could avoid having children. She was delighted, tried it, and came back to life again for the one thing she knew—love. But love with a husband infected by jealousy and manifold anger wasn't the same thing. She began to imagine some other kind of love, pure and new, at least that's what I thought. So she began to look around her, as if expecting something. I saw this and couldn't help feeling alarmed. Time and again it would happen that while she was talking to me through other people as she always did, that is, speaking with outsiders, but addressing her words to me, she boldly declared, half-seriously, unaware that she'd expressed exactly the opposite view an hour before, that maternal care was a deception, and that it wasn't worth sacrificing one's life for one's children when one is young and can enjoy life. She spent less time with her children, with less anxiety than before, and she paid more and more attention to herself and to her appearance, though she concealed that fact, and to her own enjoyments, even her own self-improvement. She took up the piano again with enthusiasm, something she had completely abandoned before. And it all began with that."

He turned his weary gaze to the window again; evidently making a great effort, he continued immediately once more:

"Yes, sir, this man appeared." He hesitated and produced his peculiar sounds a few times through his nose.

I saw that it was terribly painful for him to name this man, to recall him, or talk about him. But he made an effort, and as if he'd shattered the obstacle hindering him, he continued decisively:

"He was a worthless little man in my view, in my estimation. And not because of the meaning he acquired in my life, but because he really was like that. However, the fact that he was so bad served as proof of how out of control she was. If it hadn't been him, it would've been someone else; it had to happen." He fell silent again. "Yes, sir; he was a musician, a violinist; not a professional, but semiprofessional, a semisociety man.

"His father was a landowner, my father's neighbor. He—the father—went broke, and the children—there were three boys—managed to get along somehow; only one, this youngest, was sent away to his godmother in Paris. There

he was enrolled in the conservatory because he had a talent for music; he left there a violinist and began giving concerts. As a man, he was . . ." Obviously wishing to say something bad about him, he refrained and said quickly: "Well, I really don't know how he lived there; I only know that he returned to Russia later that year and appeared in my house.

"He had almond-shaped, damp eyes, reddish smiling lips, a little waxed mustache, the latest, fashionable hairstyle, and a commonly pretty face, one that women call 'not bad looking'; his build was weak, though not unsightly, and he had particularly developed buttocks, like a woman's, or as Hottentots are said to possess.[28] They're also said to be musical. Insinuating himself as much as possible to the point of familiarity, he was sensitive and always ready to yield at the slightest resistance with an observance of external propriety; he wore high-buttoned shoes of that particular Parisian flavor, bright-colored neckties, and other fads that foreigners adopt in Paris, which, by their novelty, always have an impact on women. In his manners, there was an affected display of gaiety. He had, you know, a way of speaking about everything in hints and fragments, as if you knew it all, remembered it, and could complete his thought yourself.

"So he and his music were the cause of everything. At the trial the case was presented as if all that happened was a result of jealousy. It was nothing of the sort—that is, it wasn't that nothing happened, but it wasn't that. At the trial it was determined that I was a deceived husband and that I killed to defend my outraged honor (that's what it's called in their language). I was acquitted as a result. At the trial I tried to clarify the meaning of the affair, but they thought I was trying to rehabilitate my wife's honor.

"Her relations with this musician, such as they were, meant nothing at all to me, nor to her. What does have meaning is what I've told you, that is, my swinishness. Everything occurred because of the terrible abyss that existed between us, the one I've told you about, the awful tension of our mutual contempt for one another, in the face of which the first occasion was sufficient for precipitating the crisis. Lately the quarrels between us had become simply appalling; they were especially startling because they alternated with equally intense animal passion.

"If he hadn't appeared, it would've been someone else. If there hadn't been a pretext of jealousy, it would've been something else. I insist on the fact that all husbands living as I was either must lead dissolute lives or must separate,

28. Hottentot is a derogatory term used by Europeans to describe native people of southwestern Africa and to imitate the clicking sounds of their language.

kill themselves, or murder their wives, as I did. If this still hasn't happened to someone, it's a very rare exception. Before things ended as they did, I was on the verge of suicide several times, and she'd also tried to poison herself."

20

"Yes, that's how it was then, and not long before what happened.

"We were observing a sort of truce, and there was no reason to disrupt it; all of a sudden I began talking about some dog that received a medal at an exhibition. She says, 'Not a medal, but honorable mention.' An argument ensues. We begin jumping from one topic to another, with reproaches: 'Well, that's an old story, it's always like that: you said . . .' 'No, I didn't.' 'So, I must be lying!' You feel that any moment a dreadful quarrel will begin when you want either to kill yourself or murder her. You know it'll begin soon, and you fear it like fire; therefore, you'd like to restrain yourself, but wrath overtakes your entire being. She's in the same state, even worse, intentionally distorting your every word, giving it the wrong meaning; and her every word is loaded with venom; wherever she knows that I'm most vulnerable, that's where she attacks. The longer it goes on, the worse it gets. I shout: 'Shut up!' or something like that. She heads out of the room to run into the nursery. I try to restrain her so I can finish what I was saying and prove my point; I grab her arm. She pretends I've hurt her and yells, 'Children, your father's beating me!' I shout, 'Don't lie!' 'And it's not the first time!' she shouts, or something like that. The children rush to her. She calms them down. I say, 'Don't pretend!' She says, 'For you, it's all pretending; you'll kill someone and say he was pretending. Now I've understood you. That's what you want!' 'Oh, why don't you croak!' I shout. I recall how these terrible words horrified me. I never expected that I could utter such awful, crude words, and I'm astonished they could come out of my mouth. I shout these terrible words and run into my study, sit down, and smoke. I hear her go into the front hall and get ready to leave. I ask where she's going. She doesn't answer. 'Well, to hell with her.' I say to myself, returning to my study, lying down again, and smoking. Thousands of different plans enter my head about how to take vengeance, get rid of her, fix all this, and make it as if nothing had happened. I keep thinking and smoking, smoking, smoking. I think of running away from her, hiding, leaving for America. I reach the point when I start dreaming about how I'll get rid of her, and how splendid that will be; how I'll meet another woman, lovely, completely different. I'll get rid of her either by her dying or by getting a divorce, and I think about how to do it. I see that I'm getting confused and not thinking about what I should be thinking about; but, so as

not to see that I'm not thinking clearly about what's needed, I go right on smoking.

"Life in the house continues. The governess arrives and asks, 'Where's *madame*? When will she return?' The footman asks whether tea should be served. I go into the dining room; the children, especially the eldest, Liza, who already understands, regard me with a questioning and disapproving look. We drink tea in silence. My wife's not back yet. The whole evening goes by, but she's not there; two feelings alternate in my heart: anger toward her for tormenting me and all the children with her absence that will end when she returns, and the fear that she won't come back and will do something to herself. I could go looking for her. But where to begin? At her sister's? It's ridiculous to go there and ask. Well, God be with her; if she wants to torment someone, let her torment herself. That's what she's been waiting for. And the next time it'll be even worse. What if she's not at her sister's, and is doing something to herself, or has already done it? Eleven o'clock, twelve midnight, one o'clock. I don't go into the bedroom; it's bizarre to lie there alone and wait; I'll lie down here. I want to do something, write letters, read; but I can't do anything. I sit in my study alone, tortured, furious, listening carefully. Three o'clock, four—she's still not back. Toward morning I doze off. When I wake up—she's still not there.

"Everything at home's proceeding normally, but everyone's perplexed and regards me with a questioning and reproachful look, assuming it's all my fault. The same struggle goes on inside me—anger at her tormenting me and anxiety over her well-being.

"Around eleven in the morning her sister arrives as her messenger. The usual business begins: 'She's in a terrible state. What's all this about?' 'But nothing happened.' I describe my wife's impossible character and say that I haven't done anything.

"'Things can't go on like this,' her sister says.

"'It's all her doing, not mine,' I say. 'I won't take the first step. If we separate, so be it.'

"My sister-in-law leaves with nothing. Talking to her, I'd boldly declared that I wouldn't take the first step, but as soon as she'd left and I came out and saw the children, so pitiful and frightened, I was already prepared to take the first step. I would've been glad to do it, but I didn't know how. Once more I walk around the house, smoke, drink some vodka and wine at breakfast, and achieve what I subconsciously desire: I no longer see the stupidity or vileness of my position.

"She arrives around three in the afternoon. When meeting me, she says nothing. I assume that she's given in and begin saying that I felt provoked by

her reproaches. With the same stern and terribly tormented face she says that she hasn't come for explanations but to take the children away; she says we can't live together any longer. I begin to argue that I'm not to blame, that she's driven me out of my wits. She looks at me sternly, triumphantly, and then says:

"'Don't say another word; you'll regret it.'

"I tell her that I can't stand such comedies. Then she screams something I can't make out and runs into her room. I hear the key click behind her: she's locked herself in. I try the door; there's no answer, so I go away in a fury. Half an hour later Liza comes running in tears.

"'What is it? Has something happened?'

"'We can't hear mama.'

"We go. I tug at the door with all my strength. The double doors hadn't been well secured and the two sides separate. I go to the bed. She's lying there awkwardly in her petticoats and high boots, unconscious. There's an open bottle of opium on the nightstand. We bring her around. There are more tears and, finally, reconciliation. But not really reconciliation: there remains within the soul of each that old anger for the other with some added irritation for the pain caused by this quarrel, which each of us thinks is the other's fault. But we had to end it all somehow; life goes on as before. The same kind of quarrels occurred constantly, some even worse, once a week, once a month, once a day. It was always the same. One time I'd already acquired a passport to travel abroad—our quarrel had lasted for two days—but then there was a partial explanation, a partial reconciliation—and I didn't leave."

21

"So that was the state of our relations when this man first appeared. He arrived in Moscow—his surname was Trukhachevsky—and he came to my house. It was morning. I received him. At one time we'd been on familiar terms. He attempted to employ a tone somewhere between familiar and formal, tending toward the familiar, but I set a formal tone immediately, and he submitted at once. I didn't like him at all from the very first glance. But the curious thing is, some sort of strange, fateful force led me not to reject him or keep him at bay; on the contrary, I drew him closer to me. After all, what could be simpler than chatting with him coldly, then bidding him farewell, and not introducing him to my wife? But no, as if on purpose, I started talking about his playing and said that I'd heard he'd given up the violin. He replied that, no, on the contrary, he was now playing more than ever. He

recalled that I, too, had played at one time. I said that I no longer did, but that my wife played the piano very well.

"What an astonishing thing! My relations to him that first day, at that first hour of our meeting, were such that could have been possible only after all that happened. There was something strained in my relations with him: I noticed every word and expression employed either by him or by me and ascribed significance to them all.

"I introduced him to my wife. The conversation turned to music immediately, and he offered his services to play with her. My wife, as always of late, was very elegant and charming, disturbingly beautiful. Obviously, she took a liking to him at first sight. In addition, she so enjoyed the pleasure of playing together with a violinist that she'd previously hired a musician from the theater to play with her, and her face expressed this delight. But, seeing me, she understood my feelings immediately and altered her expression; thus began a game of mutual deception. I smiled pleasantly and pretended that I found this idea very agreeable. Looking at my wife the way all fornicators regard beautiful women, he pretended to be interested only in the subject of their conversation, precisely the thing that no longer interested him. She tried to appear indifferent, but my own false smile of jealousy, so familiar to her, combined with his lustful gaze, apparently, excited her. From their first meeting I saw that her eyes glowed in a special way and, probably as a result of my jealousy, it seemed as if some electric current was immediately passed between them, evoking identical expressions, glances, and smiles. She blushed, and he blushed; she smiled, and he smiled. We talked about music, Paris, all sorts of trifles. He rose to leave and stood there smiling, his hat resting on his twitching thigh; he glanced first at her and then at me, as if waiting to see what we would do. I remember that moment because it was precisely then that I might not have invited him; nothing more would've happened. But I looked at him and then at her. 'Don't think I'm jealous of you,' I said to her mentally, 'or that I'm afraid of you,' I said to him mentally. I invited him to bring his violin one evening to play with my wife. She glanced at me in astonishment, blushed, and, as if afraid, began to decline, saying that she didn't play well enough. That refusal irritated me further, so I insisted even more on his coming. I recall the strange feeling with which I regarded the nape of his neck, his pale neck, in contrast to his black hair parted down the middle, as took his leave from us with his sprightly, birdlike movements. I couldn't keep from admitting that this man's presence tormented me. 'It all depends on me,' I thought, 'to arrange things so that I never see him again.' But to do that would mean admitting that I was afraid of him. No, I wasn't afraid of him! It would be too

humiliating, I said to myself. And right there, in the front hall, knowing that my wife could hear me, I insisted that he come with his violin that very evening. He promised to do so and then left.

"That evening he arrived with his violin and they played together. It took a long time for them to begin playing; they didn't have the scores they needed, and what they did have, my wife was unable to play without practicing. I was very fond of music and supported their playing; I set up the music stand and turned pages. They managed to play something, some songs without words and a little sonata by Mozart.[29] He played magnificently and possessed in the highest degree what's called tone. Besides that, he had refined and elegant taste, not at all in keeping with his character.

"He was, naturally, a much stronger player than my wife and helped her, at the same time as he politely praised her playing. He was very well behaved. My wife seemed interested only in the music and was most unassuming and natural. Meanwhile I, although pretending to be interested in the music, was tormented by jealousy the entire evening.

"From the first moment he met my wife's eyes, I saw that the wild beast residing in both of them, in spite of all the conditions of their position and society, was asking, 'Is it possible?' and was replying, 'Oh, yes, certainly.' I saw that he'd never expected to find in my wife, a Moscow lady, such an attractive woman, and he was very glad of it. Therefore he had no doubt whatsoever that she was willing. The whole question was whether that unbearable husband of hers would hinder them. If I'd been pure, I wouldn't have understood this, but, like the majority of men, I regarded women in exactly this way before I was married, and therefore could read his soul like an open book. I was especially tormented by the fact that she had no other feelings for me except constant irritation, interrupted occasionally by habitual sensuality; and this man, both in his elegant appearance, his novelty, and mainly, his indubitably great talent for music, by the intimacy arising from their playing, by the influence produced by the music on their impressionable natures, especially the violin, this man was certain not merely to please her but to conquer her without the least hesitation, to crush her, twist her, wind her around his little finger, do exactly as he wished with her. I couldn't help seeing this,

29. The reference to "songs without words" may suggest the series of short, lyrical piano pieces by the German Romantic composer Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47). *Songs Without Words* (*Lieder ohne Worte*) comprises eight volumes, each consisting of six "songs" (*Lieder*), written at various points throughout the composer's life and published separately, two posthumously. That composition provided the inspiration and title of Sofiya Andreevna Tolstaya's second story included in this volume.

and I suffered terribly. But in spite of that, or perhaps, as a result of it, some sort of power forced me against my own will to be not merely polite but even affectionate with him. Whether I did it for my wife or for him, to show that I wasn't afraid of him, or for myself, to deceive myself, I don't know, but from the very first, I was unable to behave simply with him. In order not to yield to my initial desire to kill him at once, I had to be excessively nice to him. I treated him to expensive wines at supper, I praised his playing, I chatted with him wearing an especially affectionate smile; I invited him to dinner and to play again with my wife the following Sunday. I said that I would invite several of my acquaintances, music lovers, to hear him. And so it ended."

Pozdnyshev shifted his position in great agitation and emitted his peculiar sound.

"It's strange how that man's presence affected me," he began again, apparently making an effort to keep calm. "Returning home after seeing an exhibit on the second or third day, I entered the front hall and suddenly felt a heavy weight, like a stone, pressing down on my heart, and I couldn't explain to myself what it was. It was that passing through the front hall, I'd noticed something that reminded me of him. Only when I reached my study was I able to understand what it was; I returned to the front hall to check. Yes, I was not mistaken: it was his overcoat. You know, his fashionable overcoat. (Although I really wasn't aware of it, I paid unusual attention to everything that concerned him.) I ask: sure enough, he's there. I enter not through the drawing room, but through the schoolroom, into the hall.[30] My daughter Liza was sitting over a book, and nanny was at the table with the baby, making some sort of lid spin around. The door into the hall was closed, and from there I hear the even notes of an arpeggio and their two voices. I listen carefully, but can't make out what they're saying. Obviously the sounds of the piano were intended to drown out their words and maybe their kisses. My God! What I felt at that moment! I'm horrified when I merely recall the wild beast inside me at that time. My heart suddenly contracted, stopped, and then started thumping like a hammer. The main feeling, as always in any rage, was self-pity. 'In front of the children! And our nanny!' I thought. I must have appeared terrifying because Liza regarded me with a strange look. 'What shall I do?' I asked myself. 'Go in? I can't. God knows what I'd do.' But I couldn't leave. Nanny looks at me as if she understands my predicament. 'It's impossible not to go in,' I said to myself and quickly opened the door. He was sitting at the piano playing

30. This hall (*zala*), as distinct from the drawing room (*gostinaya*), was a more formal space where guests were received.

those arpeggios with his large white arched fingers. She was standing in the curve of the piano looking over some open scores. She was the first to see or hear me and looked up. I don't know whether she was frightened and pretended not to be, or she wasn't really frightened, but she didn't flinch or budge; she merely blushed, and not right away.

"'I'm so glad you're here; we can't decide what to play on Sunday,' she said in a tone she'd never use with me if we were alone. What annoyed me was that she said 'we' when talking about him and her. I greeted him in silence.

"He pressed my hand; with a smile that seemed to me purely mocking, he began explaining that he'd brought some music to prepare for Sunday and now they disagreed about what to play: something more difficult and classical, that is, a Beethoven sonata for the violin, or some shorter pieces. It was all so natural and simple: there was nothing to find fault with. Still, I was certain that it was all lies and they were conspiring to deceive me.

"Among the most tormenting conditions for jealous men (and in our social life all men are jealous)—are certain social conditions that permit the greatest and most dangerous closeness between a man and a woman. You'd be a laughingstock in other people's eyes if you prevented such closeness at a ball, or when a doctor examines his patient, or for those engaged in art, painting, and, primarily—music. Two people are occupied with the noblest art, that is, music; a certain intimacy is necessary and has nothing reprehensible about it; only a stupid, jealous husband can see anything undesirable in it. Meanwhile, everyone knows that it's precisely these pursuits, especially music, that account for the greatest number of adulteries in our society. Obviously, the embarrassment reflected on my face also embarrassed them: for a long time I stood there speechless. I was like a bottle turned upside down from which no water can flow because it's too full. I wanted to abuse him and throw him out, but felt that I had to be affectionate and polite to him again. And that's what I did. I pretended to approve of everything, and once more, with that same strange feeling that forced me to treat him with greater affection, the more I was tormented by his presence, I told him that I would rely on his taste and I gave her the same advice. I remained there as long as necessary to smooth over the unpleasant impression created when I'd first entered the room with my frightened expression and awkward silence; he soon left, pretending they'd decided on what piece to play the following day. I was absolutely certain that compared to what really occupied them, the question of what to play was of complete indifference to both of them.

"I escorted him into the front hall with particular politeness (how else could one escort a man who'd come to disturb the peace and destroy the

happiness of an entire family?). I pressed his soft, white hand with special affection."

22

"I didn't speak to her that entire day: I couldn't. Her proximity aroused such hatred in me for her that I was afraid of myself. At dinner she asked in front of the children when I was leaving. I had to make a trip the following week to attend a session in the neighboring district. I said when I was going. She asked whether I needed anything for the journey. I didn't reply and sat at the table in silence; then I walked out in silence and into my study. Of late she never came into my room, especially at that time of day. I lay there in my study, furious. All of a sudden, I heard familiar steps. A terrible, hideous thought entered my mind: like Uriah's wife, she wanted to conceal the sin she'd already committed and that was why she was coming to see me at such an unusual hour.[31] 'Is she really coming in here?' I wondered, hearing her approaching footsteps. 'If she is, then it means, I'm right.' Inexpressible hatred for her arose in my soul. The footsteps drew closer and closer. 'Or could she be going past, into the hall? No, the door creaks open and there in the doorway stands her tall, beautiful figure; she has a timid and ingratiating look she's trying to hide, but I see it and understand its significance. I hold my breath for so long that I nearly choke; continuing to look at her, I grab my cigarette case and begin to smoke.

"'Well, what's this? I've come to be with you for a while, and you start smoking,' she said and then sat down next to me on the sofa, leaning up against me.

"I moved away so as not to be touching her.

"'I see you're displeased by my wanting to play on Sunday,' she said.

"'I'm not displeased at all,' I replied.

"'As if I don't see it?'

"'Well, I congratulate you for seeing it. I no longer see anything except for the fact that you're acting like a cocotte . . .'

"'If you want to swear like a cab driver, I'll leave.'

"'Then leave, but know that if you don't value the family honor, then I don't value you (to hell with you); but I value the family honor.'

"'What's this? What?'

"'Go away, for God's sake, go away!'

31. Uriah was a Hittite captain whose beautiful wife, Bathsheba, aroused King David's lust. He arranged for Uriah to die in battle so he could marry her (2 Samuel 11:1–27).

"Either she was pretending that she didn't know what it was all about or else she really didn't understand; in either case, she was offended and angry. She stood up, but didn't leave; instead, she remained standing in the middle of the room.

"'You've really become impossible,' she began. 'Your character is such that even an angel couldn't get along with you.' Since she always tried to wound me as deeply as possible, she reminded me of my treatment of my sister (it was the time I lost my temper and uttered rude words to her; she knew that the episode was still tormenting me, and this was the tender spot she pressed down on). 'After that incident, nothing from you would surprise me,' she said.

"'Yes, insult me, humiliate me, slander me, make me out as the one to blame,' I said to myself. Suddenly I was overcome with such anger toward her as I've never experienced before.

"It was the first time I felt like expressing that anger physically. I jumped up and ran toward her; but just as I was getting up, I recall that I became aware of my own anger and asked myself whether it was good to give way to this feeling; at once I told myself that it was, that it would frighten her, and then, instead of resisting the anger, I began inflaming it further and was glad that it flared up in me even stronger.

"'Get away, or I'll kill you!' I cried, going up to her and grabbing her arm; in saying this I consciously intensified the angry tone of my voice. I must have been terrifying because she grew so timid that she didn't even have the strength to leave; she merely said:

"'Vasya, what is it? What's the matter with you?'

"'Get out!' I roared even louder. 'Only you can drive me to such rage. I can't answer for myself!'

"Having given way to rage, I reveled in it and wanted to do something unusual to show the extreme degree of my fury. I felt a terrible desire to hit her, to kill her, but I knew that was impossible; therefore, to vent my rage anyway, I seized a paperweight from my desk; I shouted 'Get out!' again and hurled the paperweight past her and onto the floor. I aimed it very carefully past her. Then she started to leave the room, but first paused in the doorway. While she still was watching (I did it so she'd see), I began grabbing things from the desk, candlesticks, an inkwell, and throwing them onto the ground, continuing to shout:

"'Get out! Go away! I can't answer for myself!'

"She left—and I stopped immediately.

"An hour later our nanny came in and said that my wife was having hysterics. I went to see her; she was sobbing, laughing, unable to speak, and shaking all over. She wasn't pretending; she really was ill.

"Toward morning she calmed down and we were reconciled under the influence of the emotion we call love.

"In the morning, when I'd confessed after our reconciliation that I was feeling jealous of Trukhachevsky, she was not in the least embarrassed and began laughing in the most natural manner. She said that even the possibility of an infatuation for such a man seemed very strange to her.

"'Could a decent woman ever feel something other than pleasure afforded by his music? Yes, if you wish, I'm prepared never to see him again. Not even this Sunday, though all the guests have been invited. Write to him and tell him that I'm unwell, and that's that. What's most repulsive is that someone, especially he, might think he was dangerous. I'm too proud a person to allow anyone to think that.'

"And you know, she wasn't lying; she believed what she was saying. With these words she hoped to arouse her own contempt and thus defend herself from him, but she didn't succeed. Everything was pitted against her, especially that accursed music. And so it ended; on Sunday the guests assembled and they played together once again."

23

"I think it's unnecessary to point out that I'm a very vain person: if one isn't vain in our everyday social life, there's nothing else to live by. Well, on Sunday I'd organized the dinner and musical evening with great taste. I myself had purchased the ingredients for the meal and invited the guests.

"The guests gathered around six o'clock; he appeared wearing a tail coat with diamond studs in bad taste. He behaved informally, replied to everyone hurriedly, with a smile of agreement and understanding, you know, with that special expression indicating that everything you say or do is precisely what he was expecting. I noticed now with particular pleasure everything offensive in him; it was all supposed to appease me and prove that he stood on such a low level for my wife that she could never lower herself. I no longer let myself feel jealous now. In the first place, I'd already suffered this torment and needed some respite; in the second place, I wanted to believe my wife's assurances, and I did believe them. But in spite of the fact that I wasn't jealous, nevertheless, I behaved in an unnatural way with him and with her during dinner, and all during the first half of the evening, until

the music began. I was still following all their movements and glances closely.

"The dinner was like every other one, boring and pretentious. The music began fairly early. Ah, I recall all the details of that evening; I recall how he brought his violin, unlocked the case, and removed the cover that had been embroidered for him by a certain lady, took the instrument out and began tuning it. I remember how my wife sat down at the piano and feigned an indifferent air, which I noticed was concealing her great nervousness—chiefly to do with her own ability—there followed the usual sound of an A on the piano, the pizzicato from the violin, and the arrangement of the score. I recall how they then glanced at each other, looked at those getting seated around them, then said something to each other, and it started. He played the first chord. He had a serious, stern, sympathetic expression; listening to his own sounds, he carefully plucked the strings and the piano answered him. And it began . . ."

He stopped speaking and emitted his sound several times in a row. He was about to speak, sniffed noisily, and stopped again.

"They played Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata*.[32] Do you know the first presto? Do you?" he cried. "Ugh! It's a dreadful thing, that sonata. Precisely that part. In general, music's a dreadful thing. What is it really? I don't understand. What is music? What does it do? And why does it do what it does? They say that music has a sublime impact on the soul—that's nonsense and not true! It does have an impact, a dreadful impact. I'm talking about myself: but it's not in any way a sublime impact on the soul. It affects the soul neither in an elevating nor a debasing way, but in an irritating way. How can I explain it? Music forces me to forget myself, my actual situation, and transports me to some other state, not my own; it seems to me that under the influence of music I feel something more than what I really feel, I understand more than I really understand, and I can do more than I can really do. I explain this by saying that music acts like yawning or like laughter: I don't feel sleepy, but when I look at someone yawning, I yawn; there's nothing to laugh about, but when I hear someone laughing, I laugh.

"It, music, immediately transports me directly into the spiritual state of the composer. My soul merges with his and I'm simultaneously transported to another state, yet I don't know why this happens. After all, the person who wrote the *Kreutzer Sonata,* let's say—Beethoven, knew why he was in such a state—and that resulted in his taking certain actions; therefore his state had

32. Sonata ("Kreutzer") for piano and violin, opus 47, composed in 1802.

meaning for him, but for me it has none whatsoever. Consequently, music merely arouses; it doesn't culminate. When they play a military march, the soldiers march and the music achieves its end; when they play a dance tune, I dance, and the music achieves its end; when they sing a mass, I take communion, and the music also achieves its end. Otherwise, it's only provocation, but what follows as a result of that provocation is lacking. That's why music is so dreadful and sometimes has such a terrible effect. In China music is a state affair. That's how it should be. Can we really permit anyone who wishes, to hypnotize another person or even many people, and then do with them as he wishes? Especially if this hypnotist is the first immoral man who just happens to turn up.

"Otherwise, it's a terrible instrument in the hands of someone who turns up. Take this *Kreutzer Sonata,* for example, the first presto. Is it really possible to play this movement in a drawing room in the presence of women wearing low-cut gowns? To play it and then applaud, to eat ice cream afterward, and gossip about the latest rumors? These pieces can be played only in certain important, significant circumstances, and then, only when certain important actions, corresponding to the music, are demanded. To play it and then act as the music directs. Otherwise the arousal of energy and emotion suited to neither the place nor the time, lacking an outlet, can't help but produce a harmful effect. At any rate, that piece had a terrible impact on me; I felt as if totally new feelings were revealed to me, new possibilities I'd never imagined before. It was as if something in my soul were saying, 'Yes, that's how it is, not at all as you thought and experienced previously, but like this.' I couldn't really explain what the new thing was that I'd discovered, but my awareness of this new state was very enjoyable. All those people, including my wife and him, appeared to me in a completely new light.

"After this presto they finished playing the superb, but ordinary, conventional andante with its vulgar variations and its utterly weak finale. Then they played Ernst's 'Elegy' at the request of the guests, and a few other short pieces.[33] All this was fine, but didn't produce even one hundredth of the impact that the first work did. All this occurred against the background of the impression of the initial presto. I felt lighthearted and cheerful. I'd never seen my wife behave the way she did that evening. Those sparkling eyes, the severity and significance of her expression as she was playing, and then the absolute melting quality of her weak, pitiful, blissful smile when they finished. I saw it all, but

33. Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst (1814–65) was a Moravian-Jewish virtuoso violinist and composer of salon pieces, fantasias, and musical variations.

didn't ascribe any meaning to it other than the fact that she felt the same as I did; that she felt some new feelings, never before experienced, now revealed or recalled, as it were. The evening ended agreeably and everyone left for home.

"Knowing that I had to leave to attend a session two days later, Trukhachevsky remarked, in parting, that he hoped to repeat the pleasure of the evening on another occasion. From that I could conclude that he didn't consider it possible to visit during my absence from home, and that pleased me. It turned out that since I wouldn't be returning before his departure, we wouldn't get to see each other again.

"I shook his hand with real delight for the first time and thanked him for the pleasure. He also said a final farewell to my wife. Their leave-taking seemed natural and proper to me. Everything was splendid. My wife and I were both very pleased with the evening."

24

"Two days later I left for the session, bidding farewell to my wife in the best, most serene mood. There was always an enormous amount of work to be done in the district and a very special life, a little world apart. I spent two days working ten hours a day at the session. On the second day a letter from my wife was delivered to my office. I read it at once. She wrote about the children, her uncle, the nanny, some purchases, and among other things, as if about a most ordinary event, she wrote that Trukhachevsky had dropped by, brought her some scores that he'd promised, and offered to play again, but she'd demurred. I didn't recall his promising to bring any scores: it seemed to me that he'd said his final farewell; therefore this news struck me unpleasantly. But I had so much work to do that I had no time to think about it; I reread her letter later that evening, when I returned to my rooms. In addition to the fact that Trukhachevsky had come again in my absence, I found the whole tone of her letter strained. The insane beast of jealousy began to growl in its kennel wanting to escape, but I feared that beast and quickly locked him in. 'What a vile feeling jealousy is!' I said to myself. 'What could be more natural than what she wrote?'

"I got into bed and began thinking about the matters I'd have to deal with the next day. It always took me a long time to fall asleep during these sessions, being in a new place, but on that occasion I dozed off very quickly. And, as sometimes happens, you know, all of a suddenly I felt an electric shock and woke up. I awoke thinking about her, my carnal love for her—and about Trukhachevsky and what had happened between them. Horror and rage gripped my heart. But I began reasoning with myself. 'What nonsense,' I said. 'You've got no grounds; there's nothing to it; nothing's happened. How can I

demean her and myself, assuming such awful things? Some hired fiddler, known as a worthless type, suddenly takes up with an honorable woman, a respected mother of a family, *my* wife! Ridiculous!' So on the one hand it seemed to me. On the other hand, 'How else could it be?' How could it fail to be this simplest and most obvious thing, the reason I'd married her, the reason I stay with her, the one thing I need from her, and therefore what others must need from her, including this musician? He's an unmarried man, healthy (I remember how he crunched the gristle of that cutlet and how greedily he slurped that glass of wine through his red lips); he's well fed, suave, not only lacking in principles, but, obviously, having the goal of taking advantage of any pleasures that come his way. And between them, the bond of music, that most refined lust of the senses. What can restrain him? Nothing. On the contrary, everything attracts him. And she? But who is she? She's a mystery: as she was, so she still is. I don't know her. I know her only as an animal. And nothing can or should restrain an animal.

"Only then did I recall their faces that evening, when, after performing the *Kreutzer Sonata,* they played some passionate little piece, I don't remember by whom, a piece sensual to the point of obscenity. 'How could I leave?' I asked myself, recalling their faces. 'Wasn't it obvious that everything had happened between them that evening? And wasn't it clear then that no further barriers existed between them, and that they both, especially she, experienced some shame after what had transpired?' I remember her weak, pitiful, blissful smile, and then, as I approached the piano, how she was wiping the perspiration from her flushed face. Even then they'd avoided looking at each other; only during supper, as he was pouring her water, did they glance at each other and exchange a slight smile. Then I recalled with horror how I caught their glance and that barely noticeable smile. 'Yes, it's all over,' one voice said to me; then another said something entirely different. 'Something's come over you; it can't be,' said that other voice. I was terrified lying there in the dark; I lit a match and felt extremely afraid in that small room with the yellow wallpaper. I lit a cigarette; as always when you whirl around in one and the same circle of unresolved contradictions—you smoke; so I smoked one cigarette after another to enshroud myself and not to see all the contradictions.

"I didn't sleep the whole night; at five in the morning, having decided that I couldn't bear the tension any longer, I resolved to leave at once; I got up, woke the caretaker who was serving me, and sent him for horses. I posted a note to the council saying that I'd been called back to Moscow on urgent business; therefore I asked to be replaced by another member. At eight o'clock I got into my carriage and left for home."

25

The conductor entered; having noticed that our candle had almost burned down, he extinguished it without leaving a new one. It had begun to grow light outside. Pozdnyshev was silent, breathing heavily all the time the conductor was in our carriage. He continued his story after the conductor had left; the only sound in the semidarkness of the carriage was the rattle of the windows in the moving train and the clerk's rhythmic snoring. I couldn't see Pozdnyshev's face in the half-light of dawn. I could only hear his voice, more and more agitated, full of suffering.

"I had to travel thirty-five versts by horse-drawn carriage and eight hours by train.[34] The carriage ride was splendid. It was a frosty autumn day with bright sunshine. You know, it was the time when horseshoes leave their imprint on the oiled roadway. The roads were smooth, the light was bright, and the air was bracing. It was nice to ride in the carriage. After it had grown light and I was on my way home, I felt better. Looking at the horses, the fields, the passersby, I forgot where I was going. Sometimes it seemed that I was simply going for a drive, and the thing that had summoned me back had never happened. I found that kind of oblivion particularly pleasant. When I remembered where I was heading, I said to myself, 'It'll all become clear; don't think about it.' In addition, when we were about halfway home, an incident occurred that delayed me en route and served to distract me even further: the carriage broke down and had to be repaired. This event was very significant because it caused me to arrive in Moscow not at five o'clock in the afternoon, as I'd expected, but at midnight; I got home near one in the morning, since I wound up missing the express and had to take the local train. Getting a cart, the repair, payment, tea at the inn, a chat with the innkeeper—all this distracted me even more. By twilight everything was ready, and I was on my way again; it was even better to travel at night than by day. There was a new moon, a light frost, still a fine road, horses, and a cheerful driver; I drove on and enjoyed myself, hardly thinking about what was awaiting me; or I was so enjoying myself precisely because I knew what was waiting for me and I was bidding farewell to the joys of life. But my serene state and the possibility of suppressing my feelings ended with the carriage ride. As soon as I boarded the train, something altogether different began. That eight-hour journey in the railway carriage was something terrible for me, something I'll never forget for the rest of my life. Whether it was because once I'd settled in the car,

34. A verst equals about two-thirds of a mile.

I vividly imagined that I'd already arrived, or whether it was that railway travel has such a disquieting effect on people, but as soon as I sat down I could no longer control my imagination, and it began incessantly conceiving scenes with extraordinary clarity that inflamed my jealousy, one after another, each more salacious than the last, all on the same theme, about what was happening there, without me, and about how she was betraying me. I burned with indignation, rage, and some peculiar feeling of intoxication with my own humiliation, as I contemplated these images, and I couldn't tear myself away from them; I couldn't keep from seeing them, I couldn't erase them, I couldn't help evoking them. Not only that, but the more I contemplated these imagined scenes, the more I believed in their reality. It was as if the vividness with which these pictures appeared to me served as proof that what I was imagining was real. Some devil, as if against my own will, devised and proposed the most terrible ruminations. I recalled a previous conversation I'd had with Trukhachevky's brother, and with some ecstasy, I rent my own heart with this conversation, relating it to Trukhachevsky and my wife.

"That had taken place a long time ago, but I remembered it. Trukhachevsky's brother, I recall, in reply to a question once about whether he frequented brothels, said that a respectable man wouldn't go to a place where he might get sick, where it was foul and dirty, if he could always find a respectable woman. And now he, his brother, had found my wife. 'True, she's no longer so young, she's missing a tooth on one side, and she's a little plump,' I imagine he was thinking. 'But what's to be done? One has to make the best of what is.' 'Yes, he's condescending to take her as his mistress,' I said to myself. 'But she's safe.' 'No, that's impossible! What am I thinking?' I said to myself in horror. 'There's nothing to it, nothing at all! There're no grounds for supposing anything like this. Didn't she tell me that even the idea that I might be jealous of him was degrading to her? Yes, but she's lying, it's all lies!' I cried, and began again. . . . There were only two passengers in our car—an old woman and her husband, neither very talkative; they got off at one of the stations and I was left all alone. I was like a wild beast in a cage: I jumped up, went to the car windows, then swaying, began to pace, trying to make the train go faster; but the car with all its seats and windows, kept on rattling, just as ours does now . . ."

Pozdnyshev jumped up and took several steps, then sat down again.

"Oh, I'm afraid, I'm afraid of railway carriages; terror overwhelms me. Yes, it's horrible!" he continued. "I said to myself, 'I'll think about something else. Let's say, the owner of the inn where I just had tea.' Well then, in my imagination I see the innkeeper with his long beard and his grandson—a boy the same

age as my Vasya. My son Vasya! He'll see the musician kissing his mother. What will happen in his poor soul? She doesn't care! She's in love. . . . And once again the same thing enters my mind. No, no . . . I'll think about the hospital inspection. Yes, the patient who complained about the doctor yesterday. The doctor had a mustache, just like Trukhachevsky's. He so impudently . . . They were both deceiving me when he said he was leaving. And it started again. Everything I thought about had some connection to him. I was suffering terribly. My primary suffering was ignorance, doubt, the split within me, not knowing—whether I should love her or hate her. My sufferings were so strong that, I recall, an idea occurred to me that I liked very much: namely, to go outside, lie down on the rails underneath the train, and end it all. Then, at least, there'd be no more hesitation or doubt. The one thing that prevented me from doing this was the pity I felt for myself, and that immediately evoked hatred for her. I felt some strange emotion toward him and an awareness of my humiliation and his victory, but toward her, I felt terrible hatred. 'I can't put an end to myself and let her be; it's necessary for her to suffer, even a little, so she understands what I've gone through,' I said to myself. I got out at every station to distract myself. At one station I saw that people were drinking, and I drank some vodka myself. A Jew was standing next to me and also drinking. He began chatting, and I, so as not to remain alone in my train carriage, went with him back to his dirty, smoky third-class car, littered with the shells of sunflower seeds. I sat there next to him; he talked a great deal and told anecdotes. I listened to him, but was unable to understand what he was saying because I kept thinking about my own affairs. He noticed this and demanded my attention; then I stood up and returned to my own car. 'I have to consider,' I said to myself, 'whether what I think is true and whether there are any grounds to torment myself.' I sat down, wanting to reflect on the matter calmly, but right away, instead of calm consideration, the same thing began again: instead of reasoning—only scenes and imaginings. 'How many times have I tormented myself like this,' I said to myself (I remembered all my previous attacks of jealousy), 'and it turned out to be nothing. Just like now, perhaps even certainly, I'll find her sound asleep; she'll wake up, be glad to see me, and by her words and look, I'll know there was nothing to it and that it was all nonsense. Oh, that would be so nice!' 'But no, that's happened too often, and it won't happen again!' some voice said to me, and it all started again. Yes, that was my punishment! I wouldn't show a syphilis ward to a young man to rid him of his desire for women, but rather show my own soul, to see what devils were tearing it apart! Why, it was awful that I recognized my absolute, undisputed rights over her body, as if it were my own, and at the

same time I felt that I couldn't own her body, that it wasn't mine, and that she could make use of it in any way she wished, and that she wished to use it not as I would like. There was nothing I could do to him or her. Just like Vanka the Steward standing before the gallows, he would sing a little song about how he'd kissed her sugary lips, and so on and so forth.[35] And he prevails. And I can do even less to her. If she hasn't yet done it, but wants to, and I know she wants to, then it's even worse: it'd be better if she's done it already, so that I knew, so there was no uncertainty. I couldn't really say what I wanted. I wanted for her not to desire what she must desire. That was complete and utter madness!"

## 26

"At the next-to-last station, when the conductor came in to collect the tickets, I gathered up my things and went out onto the brake-platform; the awareness of what was soon to follow was very close, that is, the resolution, and it increased my agitation. I felt cold and my jaw was trembling so much that my teeth began chattering. I exited the station automatically along with the crowd, hailed a horse-cab, got in, and set off. I rode along, glancing at the few passersby, the doormen, and the shadows cast by the streetlamps and my own cab, first in front, then behind, not thinking about anything in particular. After covering about a half a verst, my feet felt cold, and I thought about how I'd taken off my woolen socks in the train car and packed them away in my bag. Where was my bag? Was it here? Yes. And my wicker case? I recalled that I'd forgotten all about my baggage, but remembering it now and finding the ticket, I decided that it wasn't worth returning to get it, and continued my journey.

"As much as I try to remember now, I can't possibly recall my state of mind at the time. What was I thinking? What did I want? I don't know. I only recall that I was aware that something terrible and very significant in my life was about to happen. Whether that significant event occurred because I thought it would, or because I had a premonition of it—I don't know. Perhaps it's just that after what happened, all the preceding moments in my imagination acquired an ominous cast. I drove up to the front porch. It was after midnight. Several horse-cabs were waiting there, expecting to get passengers because there were still lights burning in the windows (those windows were in our apartment, the hall and drawing room). Without trying to

35. The hero of numerous folk songs, who boasts of his love for the master's wife or his daughter, and who pays for his bragging with his life.

account for why there were lights in our windows so late, I climbed the stairs in the same state of mind expecting something terrible, and I rang the bell. Our footman, the kind, hardworking, but very stupid Yegor, opened the door. The first thing that struck my eye was the fact that *his* overcoat was hanging on a hook in the front hall alongside other coats. I should have been surprised, but I wasn't; it was as if I'd expected it. 'That's how it is,' I said to myself. When I asked Yegor who was there, he said Trukhachevsky; I asked whether anyone else was there. He answered:

"'No one else, sir.'

"I remember that he replied with a tone as if he wished to bolster me and dispel any doubts that anyone else was present. 'No one else, sir. That's it,' he said, as if to himself.

"'And the children?'

"'Healthy, thank God. Asleep long ago, sir.'

"I couldn't breathe or keep my jaw from trembling. 'Yes, it must be different from what I thought: previously, when I thought something was a misfortune, it would turn out that everything was all right. But now it wasn't that way at all: everything was just as I imagined; I used to think it was only my imagination, yet here it all is in reality. It's all here . . .'

"I almost started sobbing, but just then the devil prompted me: 'Go on, cry, be sentimental, while they quietly say good night; they won't leave any clues, you'll have doubts and will torment yourself forever.' My sentimentality vanished immediately, and there appeared a strange feeling—you won't believe it—a feeling of joy that now my torment would end, that I could punish her now, be rid of her, and give free rein to my rage. And I did give free rein to it—I became a wild beast, mean and cunning.

"'No, don't, don't,' I said to Yegor, who wanted to enter the drawing room. 'Here's what you'll do: go find a horse-cab and drive to the station; here's my luggage ticket; fetch my belongings. Go on.'

"He walked through the corridor to get his coat. Afraid that he might alarm them, I accompanied him to his room and waited there while he got dressed. From the drawing room, through the room in between, I could hear the sound of their voices and of knives and plates. They were eating and hadn't heard the bell. 'If only they don't come out now,' I thought. Yegor put on his overcoat with an astrakhan collar and left. I let him out and locked the door behind him; I was terrified when I was left all alone and felt that I had to take action at once. What to do? I still didn't know. I only knew that now everything was finished: there could be no doubt as to her guilt; I would punish her instantly and end my relationship with her.

"Previously I'd entertained some hesitation and said to myself, 'Perhaps it's not true; maybe I'm mistaken.' Now there was nothing of the sort. Everything was resolved irrevocably. Hidden away from me, she was alone with him, at night! That showed a total disregard for everything. Or even worse: it was deliberate daring, audacity in crime, so that this audacity could serve as evidence of her innocence. It was all clear. There was no doubt. I was afraid of only one thing: they might run away, devise some new deception, deprive me of the evidence of their crime, and the possibility of punishment. And, so I could catch them more quickly, I tiptoed toward the hall where they were sitting, not through the drawing room, but through the corridor and the nursery.

"The boys were asleep in the first nursery. In the second, nanny was stirring, about to wake up; I imagined what she'd think after finding everything out. Such self-pity overcame me that I was unable to refrain from tears, and hastily tiptoed out of the room so as not to wake the children; I ran down the hallway and into my own study, where I collapsed on the sofa and burst into tears.

"'I'm an honest man, my parents' son; all my life I've dreamt of the happiness of family life; I'm a man who's never been unfaithful to her. . . . And now! Five children, and she's embracing a musician because he has such red lips! No, she's not a human being! She's a bitch, a filthy bitch! Right next to the room where the children are, those same children she's been pretending to love all her life. And writing to me as she did! Throwing herself on his neck so brazenly! What do I know? Perhaps she's been like this all the time. Perhaps she's been carrying on with the footmen and bearing their children who are considered mine. I'd have come home tomorrow and she'd have her hair all done up, with her narrow waist; she'd have greeted me with her indolent, graceful movements (I imagined her attractive, detestable face), and that wild beast of jealousy would have been lodged in my heart forever and would be tearing it to shreds. What will nanny think or Yegor? And poor Lizochka? She understands some things already. What insolence! Lies! And that animal sensuality I know so well,' I said to myself.

"I wanted to get up, but I couldn't. My heart was beating so fast that I could scarcely stand on my own two feet. Yes, I'll die of a stroke. She'll kill me. That's what she wants. Well, what would killing me mean to her? But no, that would be too advantageous for her, and I don't want to afford her that pleasure. Yes, I'm sitting here while they're eating and laughing and . . . Yes, in spite of the fact that she's no longer enjoying the bloom of youth, he didn't scorn her: she's still not bad looking, and the main thing is, at least she poses no risk to his precious health. 'And why didn't I strangle her then?' I asked

myself, recalling the moment a week ago when I'd forced her out of my study and had begun throwing things. I vividly recalled my state of mind at that time; not only did I recall it, but now felt that same need to smash, and destroy as I'd felt then. I remember how I wanted to act; all other considerations except those needed for action, passed out of my head. I entered the state of a wild beast or a man under the influence of physical excitement at a time of great danger, when a man acts meticulously, deliberately, without losing a moment, with only one definite goal in mind."

27

"The first thing I did was remove my boots; I approached the wall above the sofa in stocking feet where my guns and daggers were hanging; I chose a curved Damascus dagger that had never been used and was extremely sharp. I removed it from its sheath. The sheath, I recall, dropped behind the sofa, and I remember saying to myself, 'Afterward I have to find it, or else it'll get lost.' Then I took off my coat, which I was still wearing; stepping quietly in just my socks, I headed in.

"I crept stealthily and all of a sudden, flung open the door. I recall the expression on their faces. I remember it because that expression afforded me agonizing delight. It was an expression of horror. That's just what I needed. I shall never forget the expression of desperate horror on both their faces at the moment they first saw me. He was sitting at the table, it seems, but having seen or heard me, he jumped to his feet and stood with his back to the cupboard. On his face was an expression of the most unquestionable terror. On hers was the same expression of terror, but also of something else. If it had been only terror, then perhaps what happened wouldn't have happened; but her expression also revealed distress and dissatisfaction that her amorous passion and happiness with him had been disrupted. It was as if she didn't require anything other than to be left alone with her present happiness. Both those expressions remained on their faces for one brief moment. The expression of terror on his face was immediately replaced by one of inquiry: could he start lying or not? If he could, he'd better begin. If not, then something else would happen. But what? He looked at her with a questioning glance. Her expression of annoyance and distress seemed to be replaced by one of concern for him when she glanced at him.

"I paused in the doorway for a moment, hiding the dagger behind my back. At that moment he smiled and in a ridiculously indifferent tone of voice, he began:

"'We've been concertizing . . .'

"'I didn't expect,' she began at the same time, falling in with his tone.

"But neither one nor the other finished speaking: the same fury I'd felt a week ago took possession of me. Once again I experienced that need for destruction and violence, that ecstasy of rage, and I yielded to it.

"Neither one finished speaking. . . . That other thing he'd feared happened, something that immediately obliterated everything they were saying. I rushed at her, still concealing the dagger so he wouldn't prevent me from stabbing her in the side just below her breast. I'd chosen that spot from the very first. Just as I was rushing at her, he saw me and did something I'd never expected: he grabbed my arm and shouted:

"'Come to your senses! What are you doing? Help!'

"I yanked my arm away and silently rushed at him. His eyes met mine and he suddenly turned as pale as a ghost, even his lips; his eyes shone in an unusual way, and he did something else I'd never expected, he darted under the piano and out through the door. I was about to chase after him, but some weight was hanging onto my left arm. It was she. I tried to free myself. She hung on even more tightly and wouldn't let go. This unexpected hindrance, the weight, and her repulsive touch aggravated me even further. I felt that I was in a total rage and must be terrifying, and I was glad of it. I shook my left arm with all my might and my elbow landed right in her face. She cried out and released my arm. I wanted to chase after him, but remembered that it would be absurd to go running after my wife's lover in my stocking feet, and I didn't want to be ridiculous, I wanted to be terrifying. In spite of my frightful rage, I was aware all the while of the impression I was making on others; it was even this impression that to some extent was guiding me. I turned to her. She fell onto the couch; clasping her hand to her bruised eyes, she looked at me. Her face reflected fear and hatred of me, her enemy, the way a rat does when you lift the trap in which it's been caught. At any rate, I saw nothing else in her besides fear and hatred for me. It was the same fear and hatred that would result from her love for another man. But I might still have refrained and not done it, if she'd remained silent. But she suddenly began speaking, trying to grab the hand in which I held the dagger.

"'Come to your senses! What are you doing? What's wrong with you? There's nothing to it, nothing, nothing . . . I swear!'

"I might still have hesitated, but these last words of hers, from which I concluded just the opposite—that is, that everything had already happened—demanded a reply. And the reply had to correspond to the mood I'd brought upon myself, which was rising in a crescendo, and had to continue growing. Rage also has its own laws.

"'Don't lie, you wretch!' I howled and seized her left arm, but she managed to pull away. Then, still clutching the dagger, I grabbed her by the throat, threw her back, and began strangling her. What a firm neck she had. . . . She grabbed my hand with both of hers, trying to pull it away from her throat; as if waiting for that, I plunged the dagger into her left side with all my might, just below her ribs.

"When people say that they don't remember what they did in a fit of rage—it's nonsense, not true. I remembered everything and didn't stop remembering even for one moment. The higher I turned up the steam of my rage, the brighter the light of consciousness burned within me, by which light I couldn't help but see everything I was doing. I can't say that I knew beforehand what I'd do, but at the time I was doing it, even, it seems, for a few moments before, I knew what I was doing, as if to make repentance possible, and so I could tell myself later that I could've stopped. I knew that I was stabbing her below the ribs and that the dagger would penetrate. At the moment I was doing it, I knew that I was doing something terrible, something I'd never done before, something that would have horrible consequences. But this awareness flashed like lightning, and the act followed immediately afterward. And the act became conscious with extraordinary clarity. I heard and recall the momentary resistance of her corset and of something else, then the penetration of the knife into something soft. She grabbed the dagger with her hands, cut them, but didn't let go. For a long time afterward, in prison, after my moral transformation had occurred, I thought about that moment, remembered what I could of it, and reflected on it. I recalled for one moment, only one, preceding the act, the terrible awareness that I was killing and had killed a woman, a defenseless woman, my wife. I remembered the horror of that awareness and therefore concluded, and even vaguely recall, that having inserted the dagger, I withdrew it at once, wishing to remedy what I'd done and to stop doing it. I stood there motionless for a second, waiting to see what would happen, whether it could be remedied. She jumped to her feet and screamed:

"'Nanny! He's killed me!'

"Having heard the commotion, nanny stood in the doorway. I was still standing there, waiting, not believing. But blood was gushing from under her corset. It was only then that I realized that it was impossible to remedy; I decided at once that it was unnecessary, that this was what I'd wanted, and was exactly what I should've done. I waited until she fell; nanny rushed to her shouting, 'Good Lord!' Only then did I toss away the dagger and run out of the room.

"'I must not get excited; I must know what I'm doing,' I said to myself, without looking at her or at nanny. Nanny was shouting, calling the maid. I walked down the corridor and, after sending in the maid, went to my room. 'What do I do now?' I asked myself and immediately realized what to do. Entering my study, I went up to the wall, removed a revolver, examined it—it was loaded—and placed it on the desk. Then I retrieved the sheath from behind the sofa and sat down.

"I sat there a long time. I wasn't thinking about anything in particular, and didn't remember anything. I heard the sounds of some commotion. I heard that someone arrived and then someone else came. Then I heard and saw how Yegor brought my wicker case into the study. As if anyone needed that!

"'Have you heard what happened?' I asked. 'Tell the doorman to summon the police.'

"He didn't say a word and left. I stood up, locked the door, took out my cigarettes and matches, and started smoking. I hadn't finished one cigarette before sleep arrived and overpowered me. I probably slept for two hours. I remember that I dreamt how she and I were friendly, then we quarreled, but made up, and that something was interfering, but we still were friendly. A knock at the door aroused me. 'It's the police,' I thought and woke up. 'I killed her, it seems. Perhaps it's she, and nothing happened.' There was another knock at the door. I made no reply, trying to resolve the question: had it happened or not? Yes, it had. I recalled the resistance of her corset and the penetration of the knife, and a chill ran up and down my spine. 'Yes, it happened. Yes, now I must do myself in, too,' I said to myself. But I said this and knew that I wouldn't kill myself. However, I stood up and took the revolver in my hands once again. But it's strange: I recall that previously I'd been close to suicide many times before, as I had earlier that day on the train; it seemed easy to me, easy because I thought that by doing so, I'd shock her. Now I was unable not only to kill myself but even to contemplate the act. 'Why would I do it?' I asked myself, and there was no reply. There was another knock at the door. 'Yes, first I have to find out who's knocking. I'll still have time.' I put the revolver down and covered it with a newspaper. I went to the door and unlocked it. It was my wife's sister, a kind, stupid widow.

"'Vasya! What's all this?' she said and began shedding tears, which she always had ready.

"'What do you want?' I asked rudely. I knew there was no need or reason to be rude to her, but I couldn't adopt any other tone.

"'Vasya, she's dying! Ivan Fyodorovich said so.' He was the doctor, her doctor and her adviser.

"'So he's here?' I asked, and all my anger at my wife welled up again. 'Well, what of it?'

"'Vasya, go in to her. Ah, this is awful,' she said.

"'To her?' I asked myself. And I replied at once that I had to go to her; that's probably what's done when a husband, like me, kills his wife, then he absolutely has to go to her. 'And if that's what's done, I must go,' I said to myself. 'If I need to, I'll still have time,' I thought about my intention to shoot myself and I went in. 'Now there'll be phrases and grimaces, but I won't give in to her,' I said to myself.

"'Wait,' I said to her sister. 'It's silly to go without boots. Let me put on my slippers.'"

28

"And, it was astonishing! Once again, as I left my study and passed through familiar rooms, the hope occurred to me that nothing had happened; but then the smell of the doctor's filth—iodoform and carbolic acid—struck me.[36] No, it had all happened. Walking down the corridor past the nursery, I saw Lizonka. She looked at me with her frightened eyes. It even seemed to me that all five of our children were there looking at me. I went to the door and the maid opened it for me from the inside and went out. The first thing that struck my sight was my wife's light gray dress lying on the chair, stained dark with blood. On our double bed, even on my side of it—it was easier to get to—she lay with her knees raised. She lay there, propped up by pillows, in her unbuttoned bed jacket. Something had been applied to the site of the wound. There was a strong smell of iodoform. What struck me first and most of all was her swollen face, with bluish bruises on part of her nose and under one eye. These were the result of the blow from my elbow when she'd tried to restrain me. She was lacking in all beauty, and there seemed to be something repulsive about her. I stopped in the doorway.

"'Go on, go up to her,' her sister said.

"'Yes, she probably wants to confess,' I thought. 'Forgive her? Yes, she's dying; I can forgive her,' I thought, trying to be generous. I went up to her. She raised her eyes to me with difficulty; one eye was black and blue. With difficulty she said, faltering:

"'You got what you wanted. You've killed me . . .' Amid the physical suffering and even the proximity of death, her face expressed that same old, famil-

36. Iodoform is a crystalline compound of iodine used as an antiseptic in surgical dressings.

iar, cold animal hatred for me. 'The children . . . I still won't . . . let you . . . have them. . . . My sister will take them. . . .'

"About what I considered the most important thing, her guilt, her betrayal, she seemed to think it not worth mentioning.

"'Yes, admire what you've done,' she said, glancing at the door, and sobbed. Her sister stood in the doorway with the children. 'Yes, see what you've done.'

"I glanced at the children and at her bruised, swollen face; for the first time I forgot all about myself, my rights, my pride, and for the first time I saw in her a human being. Everything that had offended me seemed so insignificant—all my jealousy; what I'd done seemed so significant that I wanted to press my face to her hand and say, 'Forgive me!' but I dared not.

"She closed her eyes and was silent, obviously lacking the strength to go on talking. Then her disfigured face trembled and grimaced. She pushed me away weakly.

"'Why did it all happen?'

"'Forgive me,' I said.

"'Forgive? That's nonsense! If only I don't die!' she screamed, raising herself up and directing her feverish flashing eyes at me. 'Yes, you got what you wanted! I hate you! Ah! Ay!' she cried evidently delirious, fearing something. 'Well, kill, kill, I'm not afraid. . . . Only all of them, all, and him, too. He's gone, gone!'

"Her delirium continued all the while. She didn't recognize anyone. That same day around noon, she died. Before that, at about eight o'clock, they took me to the police station and from there, to prison. While there, confined for eleven months awaiting trial, I reflected on myself and my past and came to understand it. I began to understand on the third day. The third day they took me there . . ."

He wanted to say something, but was unable to refrain from sobbing and stopped. After gathering his strength, he continued:

"I began to understand only then, when I saw her lying in her coffin . . ." He sobbed, but continued hastily without delay: "Only when I saw her dead face did I understand all that I'd done. I understood that I, I had killed her; it was my fault that she who was once alive, moving, and warm, was now motionless, waxen, and cold; and it would be absolutely impossible to remedy—never, nowhere, nohow . . . Oh! oh! oh!" he cried several times and fell silent.

We sat in silence for a long time. He kept sobbing and trembling silently in front of me.

"Well, forgive me . . ."

He turned away from me and lay down on the seat, covering himself with his blanket. At the station where I was supposed to get off—it was eight o'clock in the morning—I went up to him to say goodbye. Whether he was sleeping or pretending, he didn't stir. I touched him with my hand. He uncovered his face and it was clear that he wasn't asleep.

"Farewell," I said, holding out my hand.

He shook my hand and smiled slightly, but so pitifully that I felt like crying.

"Yes, forgive me," he said, repeating the same word with which he'd ended his story.[37]

37. The narrator's "farewell" and Pozdnyshev's "forgive" are related linguistically in Russian: the former (*proshchaite*) is the customary word used to take one's leave, but it is also the imperfective form of the verb (*prostit'*) meaning "to forgive."