Introduction

OTTO BOELE

I

In the spring of 1908, Leo Tolstoy received a letter from Otiliya Tsimmerman, headmistress of a private school for boys in the provincial city of Perm. In it she relayed a dreadful discovery: her beloved pupils were not the unspoiled creatures she had assumed; they were reading racy novels, frequenting taverns, going on binges, and, worse still, engaging in sex.

The discovery was all the more painful as the headmistress had done her utmost to offer them various forms of uplifting entertainment. She had organized a balalaika class, as well as a workshop where her pupils could master the skills of carpentry. She had even ordered copies of Tolstoy's pamphlets on the nature of sexuality in the hope of satisfying the boys' curiosity about such matters. Alas, they persisted in their dissolute behavior. What was she to do? She addressed her question to Tolstoy himself:

> If I had any talent, I would write. I would write something that would allow them to come to their senses, to return to humanity, to family life. But what do they read nowadays? They engross themselves in *Sanin;* they say the hero's better than anyone else because instead of concealing his depravity, he openly and boldly expresses what others only think, yet dare not say.[1]

Elsewhere in Perm, things were even worse. Eight girls, active members of a secret society of debauchers, had delivered babies. One of them had committed suicide. Although her own pupils were not involved in this organiza-

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[1] O. V. Tsimmerman to Tolstoy, 15 April 1908, Department of Manuscripts, State Museum of Tolstoy, Moscow, f. 1, l. 4.

tion, the headmistress feared that eventually her boys might be tempted to join it. She wondered if Tolstoy would be willing to write something edifying for these young people to help them mend their wicked ways.

As far as we know, Tolstoy never answered Tsimmerman's desperate plea. He also ignored another request—that he destroy her letter immediately after reading it. As a result, we possess a confidential document that offers a personal perspective on one of the most sensitive issues in late imperial Russia: the "dissipation" of educated youth and their supposed admiration for the eponymous hero of Mikhail Artsybashev's "pornographic" bestseller *Sanin*. Indeed, what is striking about this letter is less the headmistress's dismay at the sexual laxity of her pupils than her assumption that their sexual activities have a direct connection with a literary hero who "does not conceal his depravity." While twenty-first-century readers may regard the boys' behavior as typical of adolescents exploring their awakening sexuality, the headmistress discerned a new, immoral ideology and a corresponding behavioral code: to surrender to one's base instincts, just like Vladimir Sanin.

It is impossible to judge the reliability of the account of eight young mothers and their involvement in a secret sex club. It may have been only a sensational rumor disseminated by tabloids and local gossips. Yet precisely because it was so unclear and because Tsimmerman was so genuinely concerned, her letter presents a vivid picture of what was arguably the greatest scandal in the history of Russian literature before the Revolution of 1917. Not only was *Sanin* temporarily banned by the authorities shortly after its serialized publication in 1907, its author also was nearly anathematized. Many observers viewed Artsybashev's hero as Tsimmerman did, as the embodiment of the cynical "live for the moment" mentality that had supposedly seized the Russian intelligentsia after the failed revolution of 1905. As one critic put it: "You may not agree with Sanin, but it is impossible to ignore him: he embodies a mood apparent in life, and characteristic of many."[2] Such was *Sanin*'s paradigmatic significance that the term *saninism* was quickly adopted as a convenient label for the "moral corruption" rampant among the revolutionary-minded intelligentsia. Judging by Tsimmerman's letter, at a certain point saninism even extended to the ranks of provincial high school students.

Why did this novel inspire such outrage? Why was *Sanin* considered pornographic and at the same time such a powerful statement about the radical intelligentsia? The frequency with which critics proclaimed the central character a "hero of our time," a term that immediately conjures up the image of Mikhail Lermontov's cynical hero Pechorin, suggests that a study of the political background cannot provide an exhaustive answer to these questions. Therefore, it is crucial to look more closely at the sociocultural context of fin-de-siècle Russia, as well as at the literary tradition in which the

[2] Ye. A. Koltonovskaya, "Nasledniki Sanina," reprinted in *Kriticheskie etyudy* 70 (St. Petersburg, 1912), 70.

novel was produced and received. Who was interested in *Sanin* and how was the work actually read? Viewing it only as a measure of the moral corruption that allegedly characterized the tsarist empire in its last days, modern scholars have long ignored this work, yet for that very reason it can be a most rewarding discovery. *Sanin* can serve as a concrete starting point for understanding one of Russia's most dynamic yet confusing historical periods.

II

The idea that the period of "political reaction"—the years that immediately followed the upheaval of 1905—witnessed a dramatic deterioration in morality was always popular in Soviet historiography. Positing the corruption of the tsarist regime as a principal cause implied that the October Revolution of 1917 had been both purgative and inevitable. Yet in the last decades of the twentieth century, both historians and literary scholars began to question the assumptions on which the notion of a cultural and moral crisis early in the century was founded. Research into popular culture of the time has shown that what many worried intellectuals condemned as the "vulgarization" of Russian society was in fact the immediate result of a modernization process that had already begun at the end of the nineteenth century. Technological innovations had led to new forms of entertainment, notably the cinema; activities such as sport, previously confined to the aristocratic milieu, had now acquired a mass character. These developments also affected the literary field. Improved printing techniques and increasing literacy entailed a rapid expansion of the commercial publishing industry as it hastened to cater to the growing numbers of semieducated readers. As more people learned to read, the demand for cheap popular fiction increased. In effect, "serious" literature, understood by the intelligentsia as art that was politically and socially aware, accounted for only a small proportion of Russia's entire literary production. Though it is certainly true that erotic literature and pulp fiction became very popular during the last decade of the tsarist regime, it would be naive to attribute that popularity merely to the intelligentsia's disenchantment with the revolt of 1905 and to ignore the social context or the reforms of that time. The abolition of prepublication censorship in 1905 gave Russia a virtually free press and was far more important to the "vulgarization" of Russian culture than the disappointment of the revolutionary movement.

To understand why *Sanin* could develop into one of Russia's greatest literary scandals, it is important to bear in mind that, despite the political and social changes the society was undergoing, the old dogmas of radical criticism, *realnaya kritika* ("real criticism"), still enjoyed considerable authority. Today, with the benefit of hindsight, it may seem obvious that these doc-

trines had already been marginalized by the advent of modernism and the emergence of commercial publishing—a development that found its most telling expression in the decline of the "thick journals" in Russia. Yet many representatives of the intelligentsia persisted in viewing literature as a barometer of the nation's political mood. Moreover, some commercially successful authors whose work we would now characterize as middlebrow—and we could include Artsybashev among them—were sympathetic to the traditional call for socially conscious art. Consequently, the legacy of such radical critics as Nikolai Dobrolyubov and Dmitry Pisarev not only continued to manifest itself in the reception of "serious" literature but also exerted a certain influence on the authors of boulevard fiction.

Paradoxically, while literary authorship was in practice becoming an increasingly ordinary profession, the traditional image of the writer as teacher and purveyor of truth proved surprisingly enduring. The cult of Tolstoy as the nation's conscience and the living memory of the "civic" poet Semyon Nadson, who remained one of Russia's favorite authors until the 1917 Revolution, graphically illustrate the durability of this image. Artsybashev fitted into this tradition very well. His work appeared in *Mir bozhii* (God's World), *Zhurnal dlya vsekh* (Journal for All), and *Sovremennyi mir* (Contemporary World), all respectable journals with a marked preference for solid, realist fiction. They offered an obvious platform for a writer such as Artsybashev, who would always remain conscious of his social obligations and showed little affinity for modernist experiments. In an interview in 1913 he made his views on literature clear: "Common sense, consistency, argumentation, a clear and concrete idea of one's subject that constitutes the plot of the work, a thoughtful evaluation of the phenomena introduced in the novel, clarity and concreteness—these are the things I demand of a literary work."[3]

This call for "concreteness" and "common sense" not only demonstrates Artsybashev's stylistic roots in the tradition of realism but also illustrates his typically nineteenth-century concern with the enlightenment of his readers. By raising important and topical issues, an author was meant to heighten the social awareness of his audience and thus contribute to the creation of a better society. The instructive undertone in *Sanin* (which may irritate some modern readers) is not merely an idiosyncrasy of Artsybashev's style or an indication of his lack of talent; it reflects a didactic zeal not uncommon to Russian realism and it shows the influence of Tolstoy, an author whom Artsybashev greatly admired.

Simply to relegate Artsybashev to the realm of the boulevard, as some modern scholars have done, is not as straightforward a proposition as it

[3] *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 5 June 1908, p. 6.

[4] "A proposition as it seems" (referring to "some modern scholars"): Neya Zorkaya, *Na rubezhe stoletii: U istokov massovogo iskusstva v Rossii, 1900-1910 godov* (Moscow, 1976), 160–64.

seems.[4] *Sanin* may indeed appear hackneyed from the elevated standpoint of the literary historian who knows how Russian literature developed subsequently; and the novel's life-affirming, hedonistic message may strike us as a peculiar hybrid of vulgar positivism and Nietzschean philosophy. Yet to most early twentieth-century readers, even to knowledgeable and sophisticated reviewers, the supposedly facile quality of Artsybashev's prose may not have been so obvious. The poet and critic Valery Bryusov, for example, wrote a favorable review of Artsybashev's first collection of stories, *Rasskazy* (1905–6); Aleksandr Blok, a leading Symbolist poet, was fascinated by *Sanin* and regarded it as Artsybashev's most remarkable work. Admittedly, one could argue that what we now perceive as Artsybashev's epigonism is betrayed by the fidelity with which he lived up to all aspects of the image of a "genuine" author; he even suffered from tuberculosis. By the standards of turn-of-the-century Russia, however, he was a "serious" writer and he was treated accordingly. His didactic manner, the prestigious journals in which he published, and his public statements on such issues as suicide and poverty were all in keeping with the classical image of the writer as a moral authority. Although he was occasionally attacked for his stereotypes and formulaic language, the vast majority of his contemporaries regarded his work as genuine literature.

It may come as no surprise, then, that *Sanin* is actually a very traditional Russian novel. It is a classic *roman à thèse* with a superior, idealized hero and an omniscient, even meddlesome narrator. The message of the novel is expressed by its epigraph, taken from Ecclesiastes 7:29: "This alone have I found: that God, when he made man, made him straightforward, but men invent endless subtleties of their own." In *Sanin* these "subtleties" are indeed numerous: socialism, asceticism, Christianity, and Tolstoyism, but also vanity, pride, and chastity. The upright man, on the other hand, remains true to himself and "simply" embraces happiness. In the hero's own words: "I know one thing—I live life and I don't want it to be miserable. For that, first and foremost, it's necessary to satisfy one's natural desire. Desire is everything: if desire dies in a person, life dies; and if he kills desire, he kills himself."

Of course, these words apply above all to the sexual ethics that the novel purports to defend, and therefore they betray how deeply Artsybashev is indebted to the ideas of Nietzsche (a debt the Russian author never actually acknowledged). It would be wrong, however, to assume that the novel's sexual preoccupation entirely exhausts its message. In Artsybashev's view, modern society is not simply imperfect or oppressive; it is a distortion of a more natural way of life that needs to be and *can* be restored through the removal of everything artificial.

In its plot development and polemical intent, *Sanin* is clearly patterned on the "tendentious" novel that examined the ideological clash in Russia between the idealists of the 1840s and the nihilists of the 1860s. In the typical

tendentious novel, a member of the radical intelligentsia enters an "alien" community such as a family, an estate managed by "liberals," or, in the case of Sanin, a hometown that the hero has not visited for many years. The hero's appearance has a profound impact on the lives of the community's members. Some are shocked by his unconventional behavior; others are fascinated by his ideas. In some cases, the protagonist has a love affair with a high-minded young woman who is chafing to escape her oppressive environment. At the end of the story, the hero disappears again, his eventual fate depending on the author's political stance. In the antinihilistic novel, in which radicals are attacked, he usually dies (Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* [1862], Dostoevsky's *Devils* [1871–72]) or suffers defeat in some other form. In more sympathetic works, however, the so-called stories about New People, the hero convincingly debunks the outdated ideas of the older generation or successfully puts his own ideas into practice (Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* [1863], Vasily Sleptsov's *Hard Times* [1865]).

Artsybashev's bestseller recalls the leftist subgenre of the tendentious novel, the stories about New People. Sanin's hedonistic philosophy is presented as a refreshingly new, viable ideology; in comparison the value systems of other characters appear both dated and untenable. He easily does away with Tolstoy's doctrine of nonresistance to evil by knocking down the conceited officer Zarudin in self-defense. He eloquently expounds his views on unlimited sexual freedom, which he then puts into practice by virtually raping the schoolteacher Zinaida Karsavina. On both occasions, Sanin merely acts as a catalyst, accelerating a process that has already begun. Zarudin himself has provoked the confrontation with Sanin, and thus becomes the victim of his own ego. Even the "rape" scene is intended to suggest that Karsavina enjoys the experience and is initiated into a new, more "natural" way of life. Functionally speaking, Sanin is only an instrument designed to demonstrate the superiority of a higher truth. His unpretentious enjoyment of life is clearly presented as an example to all.

Given this explicitly tendentious orchestration of events, it is not difficult to see why so many contemporaries were dismayed by the novel. The conspicuous idealization of a "rapist" who pursues only the satisfaction of his "natural desires" was bad enough; some readers even produced alternative endings to the work in which the hero was punished for his crimes. One resourceful author, hoping to cash in on Artsybashev's success, wrote a sequel titled *The Return of Sanin* (1913), which shows the hero being sent into exile to Siberia, where he is spiritually reborn.[5]

Turning Sanin into a repentant villain like Raskolnikov, the hero of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866), may have been acceptable to a nonintellectual Russian audience; to the sophisticated reader, however, the work's most unnerving aspect was its striking timeliness. Many critics

[5] Count Amori [I. P. Rapgof], *Vozvrashchenie Sanina* (Riga, 1931).

agreed that Sanin was not merely a one-of-a-kind womanizer conceived by a perverted author but a historical figure (albeit in typified form) embodying the mentality of the postrevolutionary intelligentsia. A most crucial point about Sanin was his past. A former Tolstoyan as well as a sometime revolutionary, he now seemed to care only for women and vodka. Observers maintained that this shift from a worldview based on communal solidarity and shared ideals to a more rugged individualism reflected a major change in Russian society. Sanin was to be understood as the contemporary intellectual who had abandoned his political ideals after the revolt of 1905 and "turned inward," dedicating himself to the pursuit of his personal happiness. According to Yelena Koltonovskaya, a moderate critic writing for the socialist journal *Obrazovanie* (Education), Artsybashev

> was not only the *first* to show us contemporary individualism as representative of a new morality, but he also portrayed it better than anyone else did. Sanin is amazingly logical, consistent, and therefore artistically convincing. All his actions follow from his views, which are united and in perfect agreement with each other. That's why he could be alive, possible in life, deriving from life.[6]

Artsybashev protested against the eagerness of such critics to reduce *Sanin* to a political statement on postrevolutionary Russia, claiming that he had written the book as early as 1903. Yet this rebuttal only seemed to confirm the conclusions of his reviewers. The well-known critic Pyotr Pilsky was quick to point out that even if the novel had been written before the events of 1905, it was not published until 1907. That, Pilsky insisted, could not be a mere coincidence.[7] The Populist Yakov Danilin reminded his readers of Artsybashev's initial intention to make Yury Svarozhich—his fictional student who had been expelled from Moscow University on suspicion of political activity—the main character of the novel (Artsybashev did make a statement to that effect in an interview published shortly after he completed the novel). According to Danilin, the decision to redirect the work's focus from the actual revolutionary Svarozhich to the former revolutionary Sanin, and to portray the latter as vastly superior to all other characters, could have been reached only in light of the events of 1905.[8]

Further contributing to the general mood of indignation were several conspicuous similarities between Sanin and that other charismatic rebel of Russian literature, Bazarov, the protagonist of Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons*. They shared an impressive physique and a casual but self-assured demeanor. Both had a way with ordinary people, although they belonged to the intelligentsia. Finally, there was a certain rigor about them that made them both frightening and sympathetic at the same time.

[6] Ye. A. Koltonovskaya, "Nasledniki Sanina," reprinted in *Kriticheskie etyudy*, 70.
[7] P. M. Pilsky, "Reaktsiya zamuzhem," *Problema pola, polovye avtory i polovoi geroi* (St. Petersburg, 1909), 112.
[8] Ya. Danilin, *Sanin v svete russkoi kritike* (Moscow, 1908), 6.

At first glance, it would seem that the similarity ends here, especially if we recall that Turgenev intended *Fathers and Sons* as an attack against the nihilists, whereas *Sanin* continued the more sympathetic tradition of the stories about New People. We should not forget, however, that because of Pisarev's favorable reinterpretation of Bazarov as a new historical type that was about to emerge in Russia, Turgenev's hero had also been transformed into a champion and prototype of the radical intelligentsia. Characteristically, Pisarev had no qualms about grouping Bazarov with Rakhmetov, the ascetic New Man in Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is to Be Done?* This rosy view of Bazarov as a New Man, commonly accepted among Populist and Marxist critics in the 1900s, made it possible to read *Sanin* through the prism of *Fathers and Sons*.

Therefore, it is not at all difficult to understand why any analogy drawn between Sanin and Bazarov was so annoying to the left. The idealization of a hero who was invested with Bazarov's features but mocked the values of the radical intelligentsia seemed to suggest that history was repeating itself. It hinted at a new conflict between fathers and sons, the difference being that yesterday's sons had become today's fathers. Many readers were appalled by the closing scene of Artsybashev's *Sanin,* its hero striding purposefully toward the rising sun. Was Artsybashev suggesting that Sanin heralded the coming of some new New Man?

Precisely because the image of Bazarov as an undaunted revolutionary represented the most sacred ideals of the radicals, comparisons between him and Sanin touched on the most revered traditions of the intelligentsia. Did Sanin betray the legacy of Bazarov? Or was he the ultimate advocate of a materialist worldview that lacked any moral foundations? The former view was expressed by the Marxist critic Vatslav Vorovsky, who argued that Sanin marked a break with the first generation of the *raznochinnaya intelligentsiya,* the nonaristocratic intellectuals who had entered the universities from the 1850s. In the 1860s, this intelligentsia had been the avant-garde of the revolution, a role exemplified by the historic figure of Bazarov. Gradually, however, it had become estranged from its own humble roots, the Russian people, and as a result had lost its revolutionary potential. Acknowledging that Sanin was also a nihilist of sorts, Vorovsky maintained that in the context of 1905 his nihilism merely testified to his reactionary nature.[9]

Another Marxist critic, G. Novopolin, the author of an ambitious study titled *The Pornographic Element in Russian Literature,* also acknowledged that Sanin and Bazarov had a great deal in common. He even went so far as to point out the philosophical similarities in their respective worldviews. Sanin's shocking remark "My life consists of pleasant and unpleasant sensations" was certainly reminiscent of Bazarov's pronouncement: "There are no principles, only sensations." But, the critic insisted, Sanin was no

[9] V. V. Vorovsky, "Bazarov i Sanin. Dva nigilizma," *Estetika, literatura, iskusstvo* (Moscow, 1971), 229–55.

Bazarov. He was nothing more than a vulgarized look-alike whose cynicism stood in sharp contrast to Bazarov's zest for real work. True, Bazarov also had an appetite for the fairer sex, but, as Novopolin conjectured, he could love only an intelligent woman, not any woman, as Sanin apparently could.[10]

Across the political divide, Semyon Frank reached an entirely different conclusion. In an essay titled "The Ethics of Nihilism" he argued that saninism was firmly rooted in the legacy of the 1860s. The egoistic hedonism of the present generation did not break with the spirit of Bazarov. On the contrary, it was its logical extension. In Frank's view, the present crisis exposed the ideological bankruptcy of the radical intelligentsia, which was now confronted with the ultimate consequences of a worldview bereft of moral principles.

These mutually exclusive views of Sanin and Bazarov reveal a most peculiar aspect of Artsybashev's novel: despite the popularity it enjoyed and the influence it supposedly exerted on its readers, no political faction was actually willing to claim Sanin as its figurehead. Marxists stressed his reactionary mentality and estrangement from the masses. Conservatives saw him as an outgrowth of the liberation movement. Populists were convinced that Sanin appealed only to the rich and powerful, the elite in St. Petersburg; the common people, they held, rejected the work's depraved message. Always the champion of the political or social "other," Vladimir Sanin does not seem to have attracted any real followers.

III

How successful, then, really was *Sanin?* In one of the first Western scholarly discussions of the novel, the influential critic D. S. Mirsky contended that it had been the "bible of an entire generation"—an untenable assertion, it would seem, if the response to it was so negative. The indignation it aroused could just as easily be construed as testifying to the moral health of Russian society. Moreover, Mirsky's sweeping statement derives from a rather simplistic view on how a work of fiction can influence its audience. We may know how a reader responds to a text, but it is difficult to tell how it affects his or her behavior.

Nevertheless, the question of *Sanin's* influence on the behavior of its readers is not entirely trivial. As far as we know, there are no detailed accounts of contemporary efforts to implement the novel's ideas in real life (such as we do have in the case of Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*). Yet, as we have seen, the novel is a classic *roman à thèse,* and could therefore arouse

[10] G. S. Novopolin, *Pornograficheskii element v russkoi literature* (St. Petersburg, 1909), 244.

the suspicion that some readers interpreted it as a "manual for living." Touring the provinces as a lecturer in the spring of 1908, Pyotr Pilsky observed that this was precisely how audiences approached the novel. They were not in the least interested in literary analysis; they merely wanted to be told how to live, and they believed that *Sanin* could provide the answer. The critic Yelena Koltonovskaya also assumed that this was what readers expected of the novel: not just sex but a doctrine, an ideological program. And, as we saw earlier, this was exactly what worried the headmistress Tsimmerman.

Freed from the fetters of censorship, the boulevard press carried this view to an extreme, assuming a direct relationship between *Sanin* and the sexual practices of its audience. In April 1908 it published a series of titillating reports on the activities of the so-called Free Love Leagues, secret organizations in which educated young people allegedly indulged in sexual orgies. Characteristically, these gatherings were presumed to start with an elaborate prelude that featured hard drinking and a reading of *Sanin* (though the novel does not even hint at the possibility of group sex). Only after these rituals had been observed would the orgy begin.

Some newspapers even began to discover real Sanins in everyday life. People not only identified with Artsybashev's hero, journalists maintained, they also prided themselves on being saninists (*sanintsy*). In March 1908 the *Moscow Voice* reported that a crowd of over three hundred people had broken up a literary evening dedicated to *Sanin* by loudly declaring: "We are saninists! We no longer recognize old-fashioned conventions!"[11] In its report on the same event, the widely read newspaper *Russian Word* asserted that the crowd had consisted not of three hundred but of three thousand hooligans, "all of them students, the majority female!"[12]

The Russian tabloids may have promoted such rumors in efforts to increase their circulation, but the brouhaha does raise the issue of "ordinary" readers and their response to Artsybashev's novel. One way of explaining the paradox of an absolute bestseller that aroused the indignation of its critics is to call it a succès de scandale. It is conceivable that *Sanin* attracted such a wide readership simply because it enjoyed the reputation of a sexy and fashionable novel, not because its views were widely shared. A measure of the commercial perspectives the publicity opened for scribblers hoping to jump on the bandwagon is the six more or less serious adaptations of *Sanin* for the stage. Three were rejected by the censor as early as March 1908; that is, fewer than six months after the last installment of the novel had been published.[13]

One could also speculate, however, that the outrage shared by critics represented only a part, though a significant one, of the reactions provoked by

[11] *Golos Moskvy* 73 (4 March 1908): 3.
[12] *Russkoe slovo* 53 (4 March 1908): 4.
[13] All these plays were rejected by the censor. Manuscripts are preserved in the Department of Manuscripts of the Theater Library in St. Petersburg.

the novel. Pilsky, for example, a resident of Petersburg, was surprised by the solemnity with which provincial readers imbibed the latest literature, especially those works celebrating sexual freedom. And although the Populist Danilin had observed the opposite reaction to *Sanin* in the provinces, the possibility of a significant gap between the professional critic and the "average, gray reader," as Danilin described him, should not be dismissed out of hand.

A survey of the student press and the "Letters to the Editor" sections of various provincial newspapers seems to confirm Danilin's observation that *Sanin* could not boast a considerable number of disciples. The hero's program of sensual pleasure was seen as too vague and one-sided, or simply as incompatible with "real" political and social issues in Russia. In general, the debate among educated youth, from which Sanin's followers were supposedly recruited, showed a tendency, similar to that in the "mature" press, to present Sanin as a hero of the "enemy." Even as students acknowledged that their ranks had been polluted by his ideas, they called upon their comrades to purify themselves and adhere to the straight and narrow. One student, alarmed by rumors of Free Love Leagues, even appealed to his colleagues to sign a petition condemning the "appalling activities of the debauchers."[14]

Are there any counterexamples that support Pilsky's observations? Sometimes one finds an enthusiastic reaction jotted down in the margins of an old edition of *Sanin:* "What a wonderful book! After reading it one wants to live even more!"[15] But it is impossible to tell whether this view is representative of the thousands of anonymous readers who did not record their impressions. Even if it were, it would not necessarily imply that late imperial Russia witnessed a massive imitation of *Sanin,* as some critics maintained. One student, questioned in a poll of readers in 1912, admitted that he had been a follower of the hero for a short time, but he said he had never seriously considered putting his ideas into practice.[16] By all appearances, the enthusiasm inspired by Artsybashev's novel, even if it was authentic, did not last very long.

Nevertheless, without a whole army of active followers *Sanin* was influential in a different sense. By sustaining the illusion of truthfulness and objectivity typical of realist literature, it was seen as a chronicle of contemporary life rather than as a work of fiction. Supposedly it did not merely depict reality; rather it showed life as it really was. Moreover, owing to the absence of a free press, radical critics attached special significance to literature as a vehicle for expressing "true" opinions on Russian society. To them literature was more lifelike and, in a sense, more real than reality itself.

The relaxation of censorship in October 1905 had an enormous effect on

[14] *Minskii kuer* 66 (12 April 1908): 3–4.
[15] Found in a copy of *Sovremennyi mir*, Gorky State Library, Perm.
[16] Ye. P. Radin, *Dushevnoe nastroenie sovremennoi uchashcheisya molodezhi, po dannym Peterburgskoi obshchestvennoi ankety 1912 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1913), 59.

the literary field, as we have seen; yet it did not immediately extinguish the deeply ingrained practice of viewing contemporary life through the lens of literature. Realist fiction continued to serve as an interpretive tool with which one could grasp the main tendencies and conflicts of social reality. *Sanin* was read in exactly this way. It supplied its audience with a prism through which it perceived political reaction and, in retrospect, the revolt of 1905; hence the discovery of saninists in everyday life. What may have been an ordinary drinking bout or student spree suddenly acquired the aura of a conspiracy, a movement of desperate ex-revolutionaries determined to destroy the moral foundations of society.

The boulevard press, which reached its full prosperity during these years, played a vital role in these "discoveries." Investigating rumors and tapping "anonymous but competent sources," journalists meticulously registered the effects of saninism on a day-to-day basis. This is not to say, of course, that everybody believed every rumor. Yet continuous reporting on the debauchery of educated youth indirectly reinforced the status of Artsybashev's novel as a truthful depiction of modern society. Even more skeptical commentators conceded that, while rumors of Free Love Leagues might be a hoax, there could be no smoke without fire. In their opinion, too, Russia was undergoing unprecedented moral deterioration, its most telling indication being the popular success of *Sanin*.

Saninism was less a historical phenomenon than a myth that emerged from the interaction of two separate discourses. On the one hand, "serious" literature and respectable criticism pretended to offer an objective, lifelike picture of social reality; on the other, the tabloid press also claimed to provide nothing but the facts in its relentless search for the ugly truth of post-revolutionary Russia. The significance of Artsybashev's novel, then, lies in its function as a framework for structuring and understanding the confusing reality of a rapidly changing society. Whether it was held responsible for the corruption of educated youth or perceived as an objective document, as a mimicry of reality, *Sanin* seemed to hold the key to understanding what was really happening in Russia. That perception makes it required reading for any student of Russian history or literature today.

Principal Characters

Sánin, Vladímir Petróvich *the hero*
Sánina, Lídiya Petróvna (Lída, Lídochka) *his sister*
Sánina, Márya Ivánovna *their mother*
Nóvikov, Aleksándr (Sásha) *family friend; young doctor*
Zarúdin, Capt. Víktor Sergéevich *cavalry officer*
Tanárov, Lt. Andréi Pávlovich *cavalry officer*
Svarózhich, Yúry Nikoláevich (Yúra) *student*
Svarózhich, Lyudmíla Nikoláevna (Lyálya, Lyálechka) *his sister*
Svarózhich, Nikolái Yegórovich *their father*
Ryazántsev, Anatóly Pávlovich (Tólya) *Lyudmila's fiancé; a doctor*
Karsávina, Zinaída Pávlovna (Zína, Zínochka) *teacher*
Dúbova, Ólga (Ólya) *teacher*
Ivanóv *teacher*
Semyónov *student*
Shafróv *student*

Sanin

This alone I have found: that God, when he made man, made him straightforward, but men invent endless subtleties of their own.

Ecclesiastes 7:29

I

During that most important stage in life when, under the influence of one's first encounters with people and nature, a man's character is formed, Vladimir Sanin had lived apart from his family. No one had looked after him, no hand had borne down on him, and this man's soul had developed independently and distinctively, like a tree growing in a field.

He hadn't been home in many years, and when he returned, his mother and Lida, his sister, could scarcely recognize him: his features, voice, and manner had changed very little, but there was something new about him, something unfamiliar that had matured within him and now lit his face with a new expression.

He arrived toward evening and entered the room as calmly as if he'd left it only a few minutes before. In his tall, fair-haired, broad-shouldered figure and in his serene, almost mocking expression, noticeable only in the corners of his mouth, no fatigue was evident, no agitation; the boisterous delight with which his mother and sister greeted him somehow subsided of its own accord.

While he was eating and drinking tea, his sister sat opposite and didn't take her eyes off him. She was in love with her brother, as only excessively

romantic young women can be in love with their absent brothers. Lida had always imagined him to be an extraordinary person, but extraordinary in a way that she herself had invented with the help of books. She longed to behold a tragic struggle and suffering in his life, and the loneliness of a great though unappreciated soul.

"Why are you staring at me like that?" Sanin asked her with a smile.

This thoughtful smile, accompanied by a serene, distant gaze, was his usual expression.

And, strange to say, though this smile was pleasant and attractive in itself, Lida took an immediate dislike to it. It appeared self-satisfied and provided no indication of his suffering or the struggle he was supposed to be experiencing. She fell silent, became pensive, and, averting her gaze, began leafing mechanically through the pages of a book.

When dinner ended, his mother stroked Sanin's head with tender affection and then said:

"Well, tell us what your life was like there, what you did."

"What I did?" Sanin repeated with a smile. "Well . . . I drank, ate, slept, sometimes worked, and sometimes did nothing at all."

At first it seemed as if he didn't feel like talking about himself, but when his mother continued to probe, he began speaking quite willingly. But for some reason it appeared that he was totally indifferent to the way his listeners heeded his account. His manner was gentle and attentive, but there was nothing personal in his attitude, nothing to distinguish the intimacy of his family from the rest of the world; it seemed as if this gentleness and attentiveness simply radiated from him like light from a candle, on everyone equally.

They went out to the garden terrace and sat down on the steps. Lida settled herself to one side and below and listened in silence to what her brother was saying. An imperceptible chill had already penetrated her heart. With her astute feminine instinct she began to sense that her brother was not as she'd imagined him; she began to feel timid and embarrassed in his presence, as if he were a stranger.

It was already evening and soft shadows were falling all around. Sanin lit a cigarette and the delicate smell of tobacco mingled with the fragrant aroma of the summer garden.

Sanin related how life had tossed him from one place to another, how often he'd had to go hungry or roam around, how he'd taken part in the dangerous political struggle and had abandoned it when he'd had enough.

Lida sat motionless and listened attentively, looking lovely and a little strange, as all beautiful young women do in the spring twilight.

The more he said, the clearer it became that the life she'd imagined in such glowing terms was in fact common and ordinary. There was something unusual about it, but Lida couldn't identify exactly what it was. Meanwhile, it emerged as very simple, boring, and, it seemed to her, even banal. Sanin lived wherever he happened to be, did whatever happened to come his way,

worked a bit, loafed without a goal, apparently liked to drink, and knew a lot of women. No gloomy, sinister fate plagued his life, as Lida's dreamy feminine soul had desired. He had no guiding idea; he didn't hate anyone and wasn't suffering for anyone.

For some reason Lida considered some of the words he uttered simply unattractive. For example, Sanin mentioned in passing that at one time he was so down and out that he'd had to mend his own trousers.

"You mean you really know how to sew?" Lida blurted out involuntarily, with offended bewilderment; it seemed so unbecoming and unmanly.

"I didn't before, but I learned when I had to," Sanin replied with a smile, having guessed what Lida was thinking.

The young woman gave a slight shrug of her shoulders and fell silent, staring fixedly into the garden. She felt as if she'd awakened one morning after dreaming of the sun, only to find the sky gray and cold.

His mother also felt some distress. She was deeply disturbed that her son had not assumed the place of honor in society that she felt he was entitled to. She began by saying that he really couldn't go on living as he had been doing, and that now he had to find himself a suitable position. At first she spoke cautiously, worried that she might offend him, but when she noticed that he wasn't paying her any attention, she got irritated and began to insist stubbornly, with an old woman's tiresome bad temper, that he was doing it intentionally to annoy her. Sanin was not surprised, didn't get angry, and even seemed not to hear what she was saying. He looked at her with affectionate but indifferent eyes and remained silent. Only when she posed the question "How do you plan to live?" he replied with a smile:

"Somehow or other!"

From his firm, serene voice and his bright, steady gaze one could feel that these words that meant nothing to her contained absolute, precise, and profound meaning for him.

Marya Ivanovna sighed, kept silent for a while, then replied sadly: "Well, it's your own business. You're not a little boy anymore. . . . You two ought to take a stroll in the garden; it's so nice out there now."

"Let's go, Lida, that's a good idea. Show me the garden," he said to his sister. "I've already forgotten what it's like."

Lida was aroused from her reverie; she sighed too, and then stood up.

They walked side by side along the path into the damp, already dark, green depths of the garden.

The Sanins' house stood on the main street of town, but the town was small and the garden looked directly onto the river, beyond which the fields began. It was an old manor house, with pensive, peeling columns, a big terrace, and a large garden, dark and overgrown, like a dark green cloud hovering over the earth. It was eerie in the garden at night: it seemed that there, both in the grove and in the dusty attic of the old house, some ancient, surviving, despondent spirit was wandering aimlessly.

There were spacious, darkened rooms and a parlor on the upper floor of the house; there was only one cleared path through the entire garden, strewn with dry branches and crushed frogs; what modest, quiet life still remained had all been relegated to one little corner. There, right next to the house, scattered yellow sand glistened, leafy flower beds were covered in multicolored blossoms, and a green wooden table stood where, in fine summer weather, tea and dinner were served; this little corner of the garden was alive with simple, peaceful life, at odds with the gloomy beauty of the large, deserted place, left to its natural destruction and inevitable disappearance.

When the house was hidden by vegetation and Lida and Sanin were surrounded only by silent old trees, pensive like live beings, Sanin suddenly put his arm around Lida's waist and said in a strange tone of voice that was both tender and sinister:

"You've turned out to be quite a beauty! The first man you fall in love with will be a lucky fellow."

A hot surge passed from his muscular arm, strong as iron, through Lida's soft and supple body. She became embarrassed, shuddered, and drew back slightly, as if sensing the approach of a hidden beast.

They had reached the riverbank where it smelled of damp and water, and where sharp reeds swayed pensively; the far bank appeared before them with distant glimmers of the first stars.

Sanin moved away from Lida; for some reason he reached for the large dry branch of a tree, broke it off, and tossed it into the river. The water was disturbed and smooth ripples spread away in all directions; and, as if greeting Sanin as one of their own, the reeds along the banks hastened to bow their heads.

II

It was about six o'clock. The sun was shining brightly, but soft green shadows were once again approaching from the garden. Light, quiet, and warmth filled the air. Marya Ivanovna was making jam: under the green linden tree there was a strong, mouth-watering smell of boiling sugar and raspberries.

Sanin had been working on the flower beds since early morning, trying to revive plants suffering from the heat and dust.

"You'd be better off pulling up the tall weeds first," Marya Ivanovna advised, glancing at him through the shimmering light-blue smoke over the brazier. "Tell Grunka; she'll do it for you."

Sanin raised his sweaty, cheerful face.

"What for?" he asked, pushing away the hair clinging to his forehead. "Let them grow. I like everything green."

"What a character you are!" his mother replied with an amiable shrug, but for some reason she was very pleased by what he said.

"You're the real characters!" Sanin answered with complete conviction, then went into the house to wash his hands, returned, and sat down at the table, quietly making himself comfortable in a wicker armchair.

He was feeling good, relaxed, and radiant. The verdure, the sunshine, and the blue sky cast such brilliant light that his soul opened to receive it with a feeling of complete happiness. Big towns with their noisy hustle and bustle had become loathsome to him. Now he was surrounded by sunlight and freedom; the future didn't concern him because he was ready to accept whatever life had to offer.

Sanin shut his eyes and stretched, flexing his healthy, strong muscles with great pleasure.

There was a faint, cool breeze; the entire garden seemed to be sighing gently and deeply. Sparrows were chirping somewhere, both near and far, hastily and furtively communicating about their small, terribly important, but totally incomprehensible little lives. Meanwhile Mill, the mottled fox terrier, sticking out his pink tongue and cocking one ear, listened to them indulgently from the fresh, deep grass where he lay. The leaves rustled softly overhead and their round shadows slid silently across the smooth gravel path.

Marya Ivanovna was sorely irritated by her son's serenity. She loved him just as she loved all her children, but for that very reason her heart was seething and she wanted to provoke him, wound his pride, offend him—if only to force him to acknowledge the value of her words and her view of life. Every moment of her long existence, like an ant burying itself in the sand, she'd been busy creating the frail and brittle structure of her own domestic well-being. This extensive, prosaic, and monotonous structure, similar both to a barracks and a hospital, consisted of the smallest bricks, which to her, the untalented architect, seemed to be the embellishment of life; but in fact they constrained, irritated, or frightened her, and always caused her anguish. Nevertheless, she thought it was impossible to live in any other way.

"Well, then . . . are you going to go on like this?" she asked, compressing her lips, pretending to be interested in the pot of boiling jam.

"What do you mean like this?" Sanin asked and then sneezed.

It seemed to Marya Ivanovna that he'd even sneezed on purpose, to irritate her, and although that idea was obviously foolish, she became annoyed and sullen.

"It's so nice here," Sanin said dreamily.

"Not bad," Marya Ivanovna answered with restraint, feeling she should be angry, but she was very pleased that her son praised the house and garden in whose company she'd been living as if they were her own kith and kin.

Sanin looked at her and said pensively: "And if you stopped pestering me with all this silly nonsense, it would be even nicer."

The mild tone in which these words were said contradicted their offensive meaning, and Marya Ivanovna didn't know whether to be angry or amused.

"When I look at you," she said with irritation, "I remember that you were a bit abnormal even as a child, and now . . ."

"And now?" Sanin asked cheerfully, as if expecting to hear something pleasant and interesting.

"And now you really are something!" Marya Ivanovna replied sharply, and shook her spoon.

"Well, so much the better!" Sanin said with a laugh; then, after a pause, he added: "Here comes Novikov."

A tall, fair-haired, handsome man was emerging from the house. His red silk shirt, fitting tightly over his slightly plump but strapping, handsome body, flashed its fiery red brilliantly in the patches of sunlight, and his light blue eyes looked affectionate and indolent.

"You two are always quarreling!" he called from a distance in his indolent and affectionate voice. "What about, for heaven's sake?"

"Well, Mama thinks a Grecian nose would suit me better, while I thank God for the one I have."

Sanin looked down at his own nose, started laughing, and shook Novikov's broad, chubby hand.

"Well, what next!" Marya Ivanovna replied with vexation.

Novikov gave a loud, jovial laugh, and its gently sonorous echo rang out agreeably in the green grove, as if some kind, gentle spirit out there had shared his merriment.

"Well, I know what it is . . . it's all those worries about your future!"

"Now even you're joining in!" Sanin said with comic bewilderment.

"Well, it's just what you deserve!"

"Hey!" cried Sanin. "If it's two against one, I might have to run away."

"It seems that I'll soon be the one running away from you!" Marya Ivanovna said with unexpected and, for her more than anyone else, unpleasant malice; she grabbed hold of the pot of jam and headed for the house without glancing back at anyone. The mottled Mill jumped up from the grass, cocked his ears, and watched inquisitively as she left. Then he scratched his nose with a front paw, glanced warily at the house once again, and ran off deep into the garden, preoccupied with his own business.

"Do you have a cigarette?" asked Sanin, very pleased that his mother had gone.

Novikov got out his cigarette case, lazily bending his large, imposing frame.

"It's not fair to tease her," he said with a mild reproach. "She's just an old lady."

"How am I teasing her?"

"Just now. . . ."

"What do you mean? She's the one who keeps after me. My friend, I have never asked anyone for anything; if only they'd leave me in peace . . ."

They were silent.

"Well, how are things, doctor?" Sanin asked, watching attentively as the fantastically intricate patterns of tobacco smoke rose gently in the clear air above his head.

Novikov, thinking about something else, didn't reply immediately.

"Poor . . . ly."

"How so?"

"You know, the usual. . . . Bored. I've had it up to here with this hick town; there's nothing to do here."

"Nothing to do? Why, you yourself complained you didn't have time to breathe."

"That's not what I'm talking about. One can't see patients all the time. There's another life to lead."

"And just who prevents you from leading that other life?"

"Well, that's a complicated question!"

"What's so complicated? What more do you want: you're a young man, handsome, in good health."

"It turns out that's not much!" Novikov replied with good-natured irony.

"How can I put it?" Sanin said with a smile. "I think it's rather a lot."

"But not enough for me!" Novikov laughed. From his laugh it was clear that he was pleased by Sanin's opinion of his looks, strength, and health, and that he felt slightly embarrassed, like a young lady during the inspection of the bride.

"There's only one thing you need," Sanin said pensively.

"What's that?"

"A genuine outlook on life. . . . You're oppressed by the monotony of your own existence; but if someone told you to give it all up and set off into the wide world, you'd be afraid."

"How? As a tramp? Please. . . ."

"Why not as a tramp? You know, I look at you and think: Here's a man who, if given a chance to provide the Russian empire with some sort of constitution, would be willing to spend the rest of his days in Schlüsselburg fortress, to be deprived of all his rights, freedom, everything. . . .[1] And all for the sake of a constitution! But when it's a question of overthrowing his own tedious life and going off in search of new interests and meaning elsewhere, then the question arises immediately: How will I live? I'm a strong, healthy

[1] The issue of providing Russians with some sort of legal constitution was a recurrent theme during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Schlüsselburg fortress dominated the entrance to Lake Ladoga from the Neva River, north of St. Petersburg; from the eighteenth century it was used as a prison for high-ranking persons and political prisoners.

man, but won't I perish if I'm deprived of my salary, of cream for my morning tea, of my silk shirts and collars? It's very strange, really it is!"

"There's nothing strange about it. In the first case, it's a matter of ideas, whereas here . . ."

"What is it?"

"Well . . . how can I express it?" Novikov snapped his fingers.

"See how you beat about the bush!" Sanin interrupted him. "Right away you come up with all sorts of qualifications! You don't expect me to believe you're more consumed by your longing for a constitution than by finding meaning and interest in your own life."

"Well, that's another question. Perhaps I am."

Sanin waved his arm in vexation.

"Stop it, please! If someone were to cut off your finger, you'd feel more pain than if they cut off the finger of any other inhabitant of Russia. That's a fact."

"Or it's cynicism!" Novikov tried to reply sarcastically, but it came out comically.

"So be it. But it's true. And now, when there's not only no constitution but not even a hint of one, not just in Russia but in many other countries of the world as well, you're depressed because your own life brings you no comfort, not because of some constitution! And if you say otherwise, you're lying. You know what I have to say," Sanin interrupted himself with a merry twinkle in his bright eyes. "You're depressed now not because your life in general isn't satisfying but because Lida hasn't fallen in love with you yet! Isn't that so?"

"Well, now you're talking nonsense!" Novikov exclaimed, his face turning the color of his red shirt; tears of the most naive and genuine embarrassment welled up in his kind, calm eyes.

"What kind of nonsense is it if you don't see anything else in the whole world except Lida! Why, one wish is written all over you, from your head to your toes—to have her. And you say it's nonsense!"

Novikov winced in a strange way and began pacing hurriedly up and down the path. If it weren't Lida's own brother who was saying this, he might have been ashamed, but it was so strange for him to hear these words about her from Sanin that he didn't even quite understand him.

"You know," he muttered, "you're either posing or . . ."

"Or what?" Sanin asked, smiling.

Novikov shrugged in silence and looked aside. His second conclusion led him to see Sanin as a bad, immoral man, as Novikov understood it. But he couldn't tell Sanin that because he'd always felt genuine affection for him, even as far back as their time together in the gymnasium.[2] It would then appear that he, Novikov, liked a worthless fellow, and that, of course, couldn't

[2] A secondary school that prepared students to enter a university.

possibly be true. As a result, Novikov suddenly felt confused and uncomfortable. The mention of Lida was painful and embarrassing, but inasmuch as he worshiped Lida and cherished his deep and abiding affection for her, he couldn't get angry at Sanin for bringing up her name: it was tormenting but at the same time intensely pleasurable. It was as if someone's burning hand had taken hold of his heart and given it a gentle squeeze.

Sanin remained silent and kept smiling; his smile was courteous and affectionate.

"Well, think of something. I can wait," he said. "I'm in no hurry."

Novikov kept walking up and down the path; he was clearly suffering. Mill came running up, looked around anxiously, and began to rub against Sanin's legs. He was obviously happy about something or other and wanted everyone to know about it.

"What a good dog you are!" Sanin said, stroking him.

Novikov was having difficulty restraining himself from resuming the discussion, but he was afraid that Sanin might once again touch on the one subject that interested him more than anything else in the world. However, everything that occurred to him seemed empty, boring, and dull compared to Lida.

"And . . . where is Lidiya Petrovna?" he asked absent-mindedly, precisely the question he wanted to ask, but couldn't actually bring himself to do so.

"Lida? Where else could she be? Strolling the boulevard with some officers. Nowadays all our young women stroll the boulevard."

With a desolate stab of dark jealousy Novikov replied: "Lidiya Petrovna? How can she, such a clever, mature young woman, spend time with those empty-headed gentlemen?"

"Hey, my friend!" Sanin said with a smile. "Lida's young, beautiful, robust, just like you . . . even more so, because she has what you lack: a thirst for life! She wants to know everything, experience everything. . . . Why, here she comes herself. Just look at her and you'll see! What a beauty she is!"

Lida was shorter and much better looking than her brother. One was struck by her subtle, enchanting combination of graceful delicacy and agile strength, by the passionate, majestic expression of her enigmatic eyes, and by her soft, sonorous voice, of which she was so proud and with which she played. She came down the steps slowly, her whole body in a state of mild excitement, like a beautiful young filly; she held up her long gray dress with dexterity and certainty. Brandishing their spurs and clinking them very loudly, two handsome young officers followed in their shining boots and tight-fitting riding breeches.

"Who's the beauty? Me?" Lida asked, filling the whole garden with her loveliness, her feminine freshness, and her sonorous voice. She stretched out her hand to Novikov and cast a sidelong glance at her brother; she still couldn't get used to him or decide whether he was joking or being serious.

Novikov shook her hand firmly and blushed so deeply that tears welled

up in his eyes. But Lida didn't notice: she'd long since gotten used to the timid, reverent gaze he directed at her and was no longer troubled by it.

"Good evening, Vladimir Petrovich," said the officer, the older, fairer, and handsomer one, rattling his spurs cheerfully and musically, standing up straight like an excited, spirited stallion.

Sanin already knew that his name was Zarudin, that he was a cavalry captain, and that he persistently and stubbornly sought Lida's affection. The other officer was Lieutenant Tanarov, who considered Zarudin a model officer and tried to imitate him in all respects. But he was reserved, not very accomplished, and not as good-looking as Zarudin.

Tanarov clinked his spurs in the same way, but said nothing.

"Yes, you!" Sanin said to his sister, in too serious a tone.

"Of course, of course . . . a beauty, and, you should add, an indescribable one!" laughed Lida, throwing herself into a chair after glancing at her brother. Raising her hands to her head and in doing so emphasizing her shapely bosom, she began unfastening her hat, let a long hatpin fall onto the sand, and got her veil tangled in her hair and pins. "Andrei Pavlovich, help me!" she said in a plaintive and flirtatious way, turning to the more reserved officer.

"Yes, quite a beauty!" Sanin repeated pensively, without taking his eyes off her.

Once more Lida cast a sidelong, apprehensive glance at him.

"All of us here are beautiful!" she said.

"What do you mean?" Zarudin laughed, showing his shining white teeth. "We're merely the paltry backdrop against which your beauty is all the more dazzlingly and splendidly displayed!"

"You're so eloquent!" Sanin said in surprise, a note of sarcasm almost imperceptible in his voice.

"Lidiya Petrovna would make anyone eloquent!" replied the more reserved Tanarov, trying to help remove her hat and tugging at her hair, which both angered her and made her laugh.

"And you're also very eloquent!" Sanin drawled in surprise.

"Leave them alone," Novikov whispered insincerely, though with pleasure.

Lida screwed up her eyes and looked directly at her brother; in her darkened pupils Sanin could clearly read: Don't think I don't know who these people are! But this is what I want! It amuses me! I'm no more foolish than you are; I know exactly what I'm doing!

Sanin smiled at her.

Her hat was off at last and Tanarov solemnly carried it over to the table.

"Oh, now look what you've done, Andrei Pavlovich!" Lida exclaimed, instantly altering her demeanor, becoming both plaintive and flirtatious once more. "You've spoiled my hairdo. Now I have to go back inside."

"I shall never forgive myself!" Tanarov muttered in embarrassment.

Lida stood up, gathered up her skirt, and, excitedly sensing all the men's

glances directed at her, laughed unaccountably, turned away, and dashed onto the porch.

After she'd gone, all the men felt freer; they relaxed immediately and sat down, losing all that nervous tension men usually feel in the presence of an attractive young woman. Zarudin took out a cigarette and, after lighting it with pleasure, began talking. It was evident that he was talking only out of his habit of facilitating conversation, and that he was thinking about something altogether different.

"Today I've been trying to persuade Lidiya Petrovna to give up everything else and to study singing seriously. With a voice like hers, a career is a sure thing!"

"A fine choice of career indeed!" Novikov replied gloomily, looking aside.

"What's wrong with it?" Zarudin asked in genuine surprise, and even took the cigarette from his mouth.

"Well, what's an actress really? Nothing but a whore!" Novikov answered with sudden irritation.

He was tormented and exasperated by jealousy: he suffered at the thought that the woman whose body he loved would be on display for other men to see, perhaps wearing provocative costumes, revealing her body, and making it all the more sinful and alluring.

"That's going too far," Zarudin said, lifting his eyebrows.

Novikov looked at him with hatred: in his view Zarudin was precisely one of those men who craved the woman he loved; besides, he was terribly irritated that Zarudin was so handsome.

"No, it's not going too far. To appear on stage half-naked! To pose and play voluptuous scenes before the gaze of men who'll leave her tomorrow just as they leave a prostitute after paying their money. Yes, indeed, that's splendid!"

"My friend," replied Sanin, "there's nothing a woman enjoys more than having her body admired."

Novikov shrugged in irritation.

"What a vulgar thing to say!"

"The devil knows whether it's vulgar or not, but it's true. Lida would be effective on the stage; I'd like to see her there."

Even though these words stirred some avid, instinctive curiosity in them all, they also felt uncomfortable. Zarudin, who considered himself cleverer and more resourceful than the rest, considered it his duty to rescue everyone from this awkward situation.

"Well then, what do you think a woman should do? Get married? Pursue her studies and let her talents be wasted? Why, that would constitute a crime against nature, which has endowed her with its finest gifts!"

"Oh," Sanin replied with undisguised sarcasm. "Well, I'll be! How is it that this crime never occurred to me?"

Novikov laughed maliciously, but out of propriety he replied to Zarudin:

"Why do you call it a crime? A good mother or a good doctor is a thousand times more useful than a good actress!"

"Well!" Tanarov retorted indignantly.

"Don't you find it tiresome to keep repeating such things?" asked Sanin.

Zarudin choked on his reply, and it suddenly seemed to everyone that it really was tiresome and useless to talk about all this. Nevertheless, everyone felt offended. It became quiet and very tedious.

Lida and Marya Ivanovna appeared on the balcony. Lida overheard her brother's last phrase, but didn't grasp what he was talking about.

"You seem to have talked yourself to the point of boredom rather quickly!" she observed cheerfully. "Let's go down to the river. It's so lovely there now."

And, walking past the men, she gave a little stretch; for a moment her eyes became dark and mysterious, promising something, communicating something.

"Take a stroll until suppertime," Marya Ivanovna said.

"With pleasure," Zarudin agreed, clicking his spurs and offering Lida his arm.

"I hope you'll allow me to accompany you?" Novikov asked, trying to speak with venom, as a result of which his face assumed a pathetic expression.

"Who's stopping you?" Lida asked, laughing over her shoulder.

"Go on, friend, go," Sanin advised. "I'd go along, too, if she were not, unfortunately, so absolutely convinced that I'm her brother!"

Lida flinched peculiarly and pricked up her ears. Then she cast a swift glance at her brother and gave a short, nervous laugh.

Marya Ivanovna was shocked.

"Why do you say such foolish things?" she asked rudely after Lida had left. "You're always trying to be so original!"

"I intend no such thing," Sanin replied.

Marya Ivanovna looked at him with incomprehension. She didn't understand her son at all, couldn't tell when he was joking or being serious, what he thought and felt when everyone else thought and felt the same as she herself did, or almost the same. According to her own understanding, a person should always feel, say, and do exactly what all other people with the same level of education, economic means, and social status say and do. For her it was natural that people were not simply individuals with all their own traits endowed by nature, but rather were all cast in a well-known common mold. Life around her confirmed this belief: everyone's educational efforts were directed toward this goal, and that was what distinguished the intelligent people from the unintelligent. The latter could preserve their individuality and be despised for it, while the former were divided into groups only according to their education. Their convictions always corresponded not to their personal characteristics but to their position: every student was a revolutionary, every civil servant a bourgeois, every artist a freethinker; every officer had an exaggerated opinion of his outward nobility; and when a student suddenly turned out to be a conservative or an officer an anarchist, then this seemed very strange indeed, sometimes even unpleasant. According to his birth and education, Sanin should have been entirely different from what he was; just like Lida, Novikov, and everyone who came in contact with him, Marya Ivanovna looked at him with an unpleasant feeling of disappointed expectation. With a mother's intuition, she took note of the impression her son made on everyone around him, and that caused her pain.

Sanin saw this. He'd have liked very much to comfort his mother, but he didn't know how. At first it even occurred to him to pretend and express the most reassuring thoughts to her, but he couldn't think of anything; he laughed, stood up, and went into the house. He lay down on his bed and began thinking about how people wanted to transform the whole world into a kind of monastic barracks, with one set of rules for everyone based on the annihilation of all personality and the subordination of its power to some mysterious group of elders. He began to reflect on the role and fate of Christianity, but that proved so boring that he dozed off and slept until late evening.

Marya Ivanovna watched him leave, then sighed deeply and also began thinking. She reflected on the fact that Zarudin was courting Lida, and she hoped it would turn out to be in earnest.

Lidochka's already twenty! she thought. Zarudin seems to be a nice man. They say he'll be assigned a squadron this year. . . . If only he could stay out of debt! But why did I have that awful dream? I know it's nonsense, yet I can't get it out of my head!

For some reason the dream that Marya Ivanovna had had the first night Zarudin had been to their house was really tormenting her. She dreamed that Lida was wearing a white dress, walking through a meadow covered with grass and flowers.

Marya Ivanovna sat down in an armchair, resting her head on her hand in the way old women do, and for a long time gazed at the slowly darkening sky. Trivial but distressing, tiresome thoughts crept into her mind; she felt gloomy and afraid of something.

III

The strollers returned when it was already quite dark. Their distinct, animated voices resounded from the depths of the garden, gently muffled in the darkness.

Lida, spirited and flushed, ran up to Marya Ivanovna. She bore the scent

of the cool, fresh river combined with that of a beautiful young woman excited by the society of aroused young men whom she liked.

"Supper, mama, supper!" she demanded affectionately, harassing her smiling mother. "Meanwhile Viktor Sergeevich will sing for us."

Marya Ivanovna went to arrange supper and, as she left, reflected on the fact that the fate of such an interesting, attractive, healthy, and forthright young woman as Lida couldn't be anything but happy.

Zarudin and Tanarov went in to the piano in the drawing room; Lida sat down in a rocking chair on the balcony and stretched out gracefully and passionately.

Novikov silently paced the creaking floorboards of the balcony, casting sidelong glances at her face, her full bosom, and her shapely feet in black stockings and yellow shoes visible beneath her dress; but, overcome with the powerful and enchanting sensation of her first passion, she noticed neither his glances nor the man himself. Her eyes were closed tight and she was smiling enigmatically to herself.

The usual struggle raged in Novikov's soul: he loved Lida, but couldn't understand her feelings. Sometimes it seemed as if she loved him, sometimes not. And when he thought she did, it seemed altogether possible, easy, and splendid that her young, nubile, virgin body would one day belong entirely and voluptuously to him. But when he thought that she didn't love him, the same idea seemed vile and shameless; then he accused himself of sensuality and considered himself depraved, good for nothing, and unworthy of Lida.

Novikov paced the floor and tried to guess his fortune: "If I step on the last board with my right foot, then she loves me and I must declare myself; but if it's with my left foot, then . . ."

He didn't want to think about what would happen then.

He stepped on the last board with his left foot, broke out in a cold sweat, and immediately said to himself: Ugh! What nonsense! Just like an old woman! Well. . . . One, two, three . . . On "three" I'll go right up and tell her. How will I? It doesn't matter. Well then, one . . . two . . . three. . . . No, on the third time. One, two, three. . . . One, two . . .

His head was on fire, his mouth was dry, and his heart was pounding so violently that his knees were knocking.

"Stop walking around like that!" Lida said with annoyance, opening her eyes. "I can't hear a thing!"

Only now did Novikov realize that Zarudin was singing.

The young officer was crooning an old romance:

> "I loved you; that love, perhaps,
> Has not entirely died in my breast. . . ."[3]

He didn't sing badly, but, like all people who lack formal training, he used

[3] An inexact rendering of one of Aleksandr Pushkin's most famous love lyrics, "Ya vas lyubil" ("I loved you," 1829).

exaggerated dynamics instead of subtle expression. Novikov found his singing extremely unpleasant.

"What's that, his own composition?" he asked with unusual malice and irritation.

"No. Don't interrupt! Sit quietly!" Lida ordered capriciously. "If you don't like music, you can stare at the moon."

In fact, a completely round and still reddish moon slowly and mysteriously appeared over some black treetops in the garden. Its soft elusive light slid across the steps, Lida's dress, and her face with its thoughtful smile. The shadows in the garden had grown darker and become as black and deep as in the forest.

Novikov sighed. "I'd rather look at you," he said awkwardly, and thought: What nonsense I can utter!

Lida gave a laugh. "Ugh! What a clumsy compliment!"

"I don't know how to pay compliments," Novikov replied gloomily.

"Will you sit still . . . and listen!" Lida said, shrugging in annoyance.

> "But let my love not disturb you any more,
> I don't wish to trouble you in any way!"

The sounds of the piano spread like resonant crystal splashes in the damp green garden. The moonlight became brighter, the shadows even deeper and darker. Down below Sanin walked softly across the grass, then sat down under a linden tree; he was about to light a cigarette, but changed his mind and sat there motionless, as if enchanted by the stillness of the evening, which was unbroken but somehow amplified by the sounds of the piano and the young singer's passionate voice.

"Lidiya Petrovna!" Novikov blurted out suddenly, as if it had immediately become clear that this moment could not be lost.

"What?" Lida asked mechanically, gazing at the garden, the moon, and the dark branches outlined against its bright round disk.

"I've waited so long . . . I want to talk—" Novikov continued, his voice breaking off.

Sanin turned his head and listened.

"What about?" Lida asked again, absent-mindedly.

Zarudin finished one romance, was silent for a while, and then began another. He thought he had an unusually fine voice and he loved to sing.

Novikov felt that he was blushing and blanching; he didn't feel at all well and thought he might faint.

"I . . . don't you see . . . Lidiya Petrovna, would you care to be my . . . wife?" His tongue was twisted and he felt that this was not at all what one was supposed to say and do at such moments. Even before he finished speaking, it somehow became perfectly clear that the answer would be no and that something shameful, stupid, and unbearably ridiculous was suddenly about to happen.

Lida inquired mechanically: "Whose wife?" and suddenly blushed, stood

up, was about to say something, but didn't, and turned away in embarrassment. The moon was staring right at her.

"I love you. . . ." Novikov continued to mumble, feeling that the moon had stopped shining, that the air in the garden was stifling, and that everything was hurtling into some dreadful, hopeless abyss. "I . . . I don't know how to say it, but that's not important and . . . I love you very much."

Why did I add "very much," as if I were talking about ice cream? he thought all of a sudden and fell silent.

Lida tugged nervously at a leaf that somehow happened to be in her hands. She was disconcerted because it was so totally unexpected, unnecessary, and it created an unfortunate, irreparable awkwardness between her and Novikov, with whom she'd long felt comfortable, almost as if they were related, and whom she genuinely liked.

"I don't know, really. . . . I haven't thought about it at all."

Novikov felt his heart sink with a dull ache; he turned pale, rose, and picked up his cap.

"Good-bye!" he said, without hearing his own voice. His lips curled strangely into a ridiculous and inappropriate quivering smile.

"Where are you going? Good-bye!" Lida replied distractedly, extending her hand and trying to smile casually.

Novikov quickly shook her hand and, without putting his cap on, strode briskly along the dew-covered path into the garden. Slipping into the first shady spot, he stopped suddenly and grasped his head in his hands.

Oh, my God! Why am I so unlucky? Shall I shoot myself? This is all nonsense, but to shoot myself . . . This thought came rushing like a whirlwind into his incoherent mind, and he felt that he was the most unhappy, disgraced, and ridiculous man in all the world.

Sanin wanted to call out to him, but changed his mind and then grinned. He found it amusing that Novikov was tearing his hair out and almost weeping because a woman whose face, shoulders, breasts, and legs attracted him didn't want to give herself to him.

Sanin also found it reassuring that his lovely sister wasn't in love with Novikov.

Lida stood motionless on the same spot for a few moments; with keen interest Sanin observed her white silhouette in the pale moonlight.

Zarudin emerged from the illuminated yellow doors of the house onto the balcony and Sanin could clearly hear the meticulous jangling of his spurs. In the drawing room Tanarov was softly and sadly playing an old waltz, its heavy somber tones all-pervading.

Zarudin went up to Lida quietly and, with a gentle, agile movement, put his arm around her waist; Sanin could see clearly how their two silhouettes blended easily into one, swaying strangely in the moonlight.

"Why have you become so pensive?" Zarudin whispered softly, touching her sweet little ear with his lips, his eyes shining.

Lida's head was swimming sweetly and terrifyingly. As always when she was embracing Zarudin, she was overcome with a strange feeling: she knew that he was infinitely below her in intelligence and culture, and that she could never be subordinate to him, but at the same time she found it pleasant and terrifying to permit this physical contact with a big, strong man, as if she were glancing into a mysterious, bottomless pit with the bold thought: What if I throw myself in? I could if I wanted to!

"They'll see us," she whispered, barely audibly, without drawing nearer or pulling away, thus exciting and arousing him even more by her compliant passivity.

"One word," Zarudin continued, pressing closer to her, his ardent passion overflowing. "Will you come?"

Lida trembled. It wasn't the first time he'd asked her this question and every time something in her began to languish and tremble, making her feel frail and weak-willed.

"For what?" she asked indistinctly, glancing at the moon with her wide-open, moist eyes.

Zarudin was unable and unwilling to reply truthfully, although, like all men who so easily become intimate with women, he was convinced in the depths of his soul that Lida herself desired it, and that she knew, but that she was afraid.

"For what? So I can look at you, exchange a few words. This is torture . . . you're tormenting me. . . . Lidiya . . . will you come?" he repeated, passionately drawing her prominent, firm, warm hips toward his own trembling legs.

From the contact of their legs, burning like glowing iron, the warm, fragrant, enveloping mist became even thicker, just like a dream. All of Lida's supple, delicate, graceful body froze, swayed, and drew closer to him. She was tormented by pleasure and fear. Everything around her was being transformed strangely and incomprehensibly: the moon was no longer the moon and seemed to be very, very close, visible through the trellis of the terrace, as if hanging just above the brightly lit lawn; the garden, no longer the one she knew but another, warm and mysterious, suddenly closed in on her. Her head began to swim slowly and heavily. Swaying with strange languor, she freed herself from his arms and immediately whispered with difficulty through her parched, swollen lips:

"I will. . . ."

Reeling, she made her way into the house, feeling as if something terrible, inevitable, yet alluring was drawing her toward an abyss.

That's nonsense . . . it's not that at all . . . I'm only joking. I'm merely curious; it'll be amusing, she tried to convince herself, standing in her room in front of a dark mirror, seeing only her black silhouette reflected on the illuminated door leading into the dining room. She slowly raised her hands to her head, locked her fingers, and stretched voluptuously, observing the movement of her slim, supple waist and her broad prominent hips.

Left alone, Zarudin shuddered on his handsome, well-proportioned legs, stretched, screwed up his eyes, and, baring his teeth in a grin beneath his fair mustache, shrugged. He was usually a fortunate fellow and felt that the future contained even better fortune and greater enjoyment. He fervently pictured Lida at the moment of her surrender as so extraordinarily voluptuous that he himself suffered physical pain from the passion.

At first, when he had begun to court her, and even later, when she had allowed him to embrace and kiss her, Zarudin was still afraid of her. There was something unfamiliar and incomprehensible in her darkened eyes, as if, while allowing him to caress her, she secretly despised him. She seemed so clever, so unlike all those other girls and women he caressed and with whom he was haughtily aware of his own superiority; he was so proud that, while embracing her, he would freeze, as if expecting a slap in the face, and was somehow afraid to think about possessing her entirely. Sometimes it seemed that she was playing with him and that his position was simply foolish and ridiculous. But after her promise today, uttered in a strangely faltering and submissive voice, one that Zarudin recognized from his experience with other women, all of a sudden he unexpectedly felt his own strength and the imminent proximity of his goal, and he understood that it could turn out in no other way than the one he desired. And this sweet, languorous feeling of voluptuous anticipation was combined with a slight and unconscious trace of spite, that this proud, clever, pure, cultured young woman would lie beneath him, just like all the others, and that he would do with her exactly as he wished, just as he had done with all the others. His bitter, cruel mind began vaguely to conceive of imaginatively humiliating, lascivious scenes in which Lida's naked body, disheveled hair, and astute eyes were woven into some wild bacchanalia of voluptuous cruelty. He suddenly had a clear picture of her lying on the floor; he heard the swish of a whip, saw the pink stripe on her tender, naked, submissive body, and shuddering, he staggered at the rush of blood to his head. Golden sparks flashed in his eyes.

It was physically unbearable for him to contemplate all this. With trembling fingers Zarudin lit a cigarette, swayed once again on his strong legs, and went inside.

Sanin, who couldn't hear but saw and understood everything, followed him in, feeling something akin to jealousy.

Animals like that are always lucky! he thought. How the hell is this possible? Lida and he!

They had supper. Marya Ivanovna was in a bad mood. Tanarov was silent as usual, and mused about how splendid it would be if he were like Zarudin, and if a girl like Lida were in love with him. It seemed to him that he would love her in a different way than Zarudin, who was incapable of appreciating such good fortune. Lida was pale, reserved, and didn't look at anyone. Zarudin was cheerful and cautious, like a wild beast on the prowl,

while Sanin, as always, yawned, ate, drank a great deal of vodka, and seemed extremely eager to go to bed. But that didn't prevent him from declaring after supper that he wasn't sleepy and that he planned to walk Zarudin home.

It was already late and the moon had risen high in the sky. Sanin and Zarudin made their way to the officer's quarters almost in silence. Along the way Sanin kept glancing at the officer and debated whether or not to smack him in the face.

"Hmm, yes," he began when they'd reached the house. "There are so many different kinds of scoundrels in the world!"

"Namely?" Zarudin asked in surprise, raising his eyebrows.

"Generally speaking, that is. And scoundrels make the most interesting people."

"You don't say!" Zarudin laughed.

"Of course. There's nothing more boring in this world than an honest man. What's an honest man? The program of honesty and virtue has long been known to everyone and there can't be anything new in it. As a result of that archaic rubbish a person loses all diversity; life is lived within a single frame of virtue, narrow and tedious. Don't steal, don't lie, don't cheat, and don't commit adultery. . . . And the main thing is that all this is innate to people: everyone lies, and everyone cheats, and everyone commits as many 'adulteries' as possible."

"Surely not everyone!" Zarudin remarked condescendingly.

"Yes, everyone. One need only examine, more or less carefully, the life of each person to discover his sins. Treachery, for example. At the very moment we render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, lie down to sleep, or sit down to eat, we commit treachery."

"What are you saying?" Zarudin cried involuntarily, almost in outrage.

"Of course. We pay our taxes and do our military service, but that only means we deliver thousands of people to that same war and injustice that fill us with indignation. We lie down to sleep, yet don't run to rescue those who are perishing at that very moment for our sake, for our ideas. We eat the extra morsel of food, condemning to hunger those whose well-being we should be concerned with all our lives if we are virtuous. And so on. That's understandable! But a scoundrel's different, a genuine, blatant scoundrel! First of all, this man's perfectly sincere and natural."

"Natural?"

"Absolutely. He does what's completely normal for a man to do. He sees something nice that doesn't belong to him, and he takes it: he sees a beautiful woman who won't give herself to him, and he takes her by force or deceit. And that's perfectly natural because this need for and understanding of gratification is one of the few traits that distinguish a natural man from animals. The more animal an animal is, the less it understands gratification and the less able it is to secure it. It merely satisfies its needs. We all agree that

man isn't created to suffer and that suffering isn't the goal of human aspirations."

"That goes without saying," Zarudin agreed.

"In other words, gratification is the goal of life. Paradise is a synonym for absolute gratification and everyone more or less dreams of paradise on earth. It's said that originally there was paradise on earth. That legend is by no means nonsense, but a symbol and a dream.

"Yes," Sanin continued after a pause, "by nature man's not adapted to abstinence, and the most sincere people are those who don't hide their physical desires . . . that is, those who, in society, are called scoundrels. Why, take you, for instance."

Zarudin was startled and taken aback.

"You, of course," Sanin continued, pretending not to notice anything. "You're the best person on earth. At least, in your own eyes. Well now, confess, have you ever met anyone better?"

"Many," Zarudin replied indecisively; he no longer had a clue what Sanin was talking about and didn't know whether to be offended or not.

"Name them," Sanin proposed.

Zarudin shrugged in perplexity.

"Well, then," Sanin exclaimed cheerfully. "You're the very best person, and I, of course, am the very best, and yet wouldn't you and I like to steal, lie, and commit 'adultery'. . . especially 'adultery'?"

Zarudin shrugged again. "Very o-rig-i-nal," he muttered.

"You think so?" Sanin asked with a slight tone of offense. "I had no idea. . . . Yes, scoundrels are the most sincere people and the most interesting, because it's impossible even to imagine the boundaries and limits of human vileness. I'll shake hands with a scoundrel with particular pleasure."

Sanin shook Zarudin's hand with unusual candor, looking him straight in the eye, then suddenly knitted his brows and muttered in a completely different tone of voice: "Good-bye. Good night!" and then left.

Zarudin stood motionless for several moments on the same spot, watching Sanin leave. He didn't know how to take Sanin's words and felt confused and uneasy. But then he remembered Lida; he smiled and recalled that Sanin was her brother, that what he'd said was essentially correct, and that he felt some brotherly attachment and friendship for him.

An entertaining fellow, damn it all! he thought complacently, as if, to some extent, Sanin already belonged to him, too. Then he opened the gate and returned to his quarters across the moonlit courtyard.

Sanin went home, got undressed, lay down, and started to read *Thus Spake Zarathrustra,*[4] which he had found in Lida's room, but he felt annoyed and bored from the first few pages. The pompous images didn't stir his soul. He spat, tossed the book aside, and fell fast asleep.

[4] Friedrich Nietzsche's greatest work (1883–84, 1891), a poem condemning traditional morality, especially Christian ethics, and proclaiming the gospel of the Übermensch (superman).

IV

Nikolai Yegorovich Svarozhich, a retired lieutenant and landowner who lived in the same town, was being visited by his son, a student at the technical institute.

His son, Yury Svarozhich, had been expelled from Moscow and was under police surveillance as a suspected member of a revolutionary organization. He'd previously informed his family by mail that he'd been arrested, served a six-month prison term, and been expelled from the capital; therefore his arrival came as no surprise to them. Although Nikolai Yegorovich held different convictions, he saw his son's acts as childish foolishness and was sorely grieved by the whole episode; he loved his son, welcomed him affectionately, and tried to avoid conversation on all sensitive subjects.

Yury had traveled for two days in a third-class railway car where the foul air, stench, and wailing babies made it impossible for him to sleep. He was exhausted, and after greeting his father and his sister Lyudmila (who was known as Lyalya, a name she herself had chosen in childhood), he lay down to sleep on the bed in Lyalya's room.

He awoke toward evening, when the sun was setting, its slanting rays outlining the silhouette of the window in red stripes against the wall. Forks and glasses could be heard clinking in the next room, as well as Lyalya's cheerful laughter and a gentleman's unfamiliar but pleasant voice.

At first it seemed to Yury that he was still traveling in a railway car, hearing the noise of the buffers, the rattling of windowpanes, and the voices of strangers in the next compartment. But he soon recalled where he was, and quickly sat up in bed.

"Yes," he said slowly, making a face and running his hand through his unruly, thick black hair. "Here I am!"

And the thought occurred to him that he shouldn't have come home. He'd been granted the right to choose his own place of residence. Yury couldn't explain to himself precisely why he'd chosen to come back here. He thought and he still wanted to think that he'd said the first thing that had occurred to him, but that wasn't true: Yury had lived all his life without having to work, helped by his father, and he was terrified of finding himself alone without support, in an unfamiliar place among strangers. He was ashamed of this

feeling and didn't admit it even to himself. But now he thought he had made the wrong choice. It was clear that his family couldn't understand or approve of what had happened to him; in addition, the material question would certainly arise—extra years as a financial burden to his father—and all this ensured that good, sincere, harmonious relations could never be established between them. Besides, it would be very boring in this little town where he hadn't lived for the last two years. Yury indiscriminately considered all the inhabitants of small provincial towns petty bourgeois, incapable not only of understanding but even of taking an interest in those philosophical and political questions that he believed were the only important and interesting part of life.

Yury got up, went to the window, opened it, and leaned out over the front garden that hugged the walls of the house. It was covered with red, blue, yellow, purple, and white flowers, all interspersed as if viewed through a kaleidoscope. A deep, dark garden lay beyond; like all gardens in this lush river town, it extended to the river, which shimmered below like pale glass among the tree trunks. The evening was quiet and clear.

Yury became sad. For too long he'd lived in large towns built of stone, and although he'd always believed that he loved nature, it remained desolate for him and did nothing to relieve his feelings, to soothe or delight him; instead, it aroused in him an incomprehensible, wistful, painful sadness.

"Aha. . . . You're up! It's about time!" said Lyalya, entering the room.

Yury came away from the window.

An oppressive feeling caused by awareness of his isolated and ill-defined position combined with a quiet melancholy aroused by the dying of the day, so that Yury was not at all pleased to see his sister so cheerful and to hear her resonant, carefree voice.

"Why are you so radiant?" he asked somewhat unexpectedly, even for himself.

"Well, how do you like that!" Lyalya exclaimed, opening her eyes wide, but immediately beginning to laugh even more cheerfully, as if her brother's question reminded her of something amusing and joyous. "Why on earth are you asking about my cheerfulness? I'm never bored. I've no time to be."

Assuming a serious look and apparently taking pride in what she was saying, she added: "This is such an interesting time that it would simply be sinful to be bored! I'm occupied with working people now, and the library takes up a great deal of my time. While you were away we organized a people's library. It's gotten off to a very good start!"

At another time this would have interested Yury and aroused his attention, but now something was bothering him.

Lyalya looked serious and, in an amusing way, waited for his approval like a young child; therefore Yury made a great effort and said: "You don't say!"

"How could I possibly be bored?" Lyalya drawled contentedly.

"Well, I'm feeling totally bored," Yury replied, again involuntarily.

"That's nice, I must say!" Lyalya feigned irritation. "You've only been home a few hours, you've slept most of those, and you're bored already!"

"What's to be done? It's my God-given fate!" Yury replied with a slight trace of complacency. He thought it was both better and cleverer to be bored than to be cheerful.

"God-given fate! God-given!" Lyalya sang out, pretending to pout, and waved her hand at him dismissively. "Ugh!"

Yury didn't notice that he was already feeling more cheerful. Lyalya's resonant voice and enjoyment of life quickly and easily banished the burdensome feeling he'd considered so serious and profound. And unconsciously Lyalya didn't believe in his melancholy, so she wasn't in the least offended by his utterances.

Yury looked her straight in the eye and said with a smile: "I'm never cheerful!"

Lyalya laughed as though he'd told her something very amusing and jolly.

"Well, that's enough, you knight of rueful countenance![5] If you say never, then it's never. Instead, let's go and I'll introduce you to a young man . . . of pleasant appearance. Let's go!"

Lyalya laughed and took her brother's hand.

"Wait a minute. And just who might this pleasant young man be?"

"My fiancé," Lyalya cried out in a loud, cheerful voice, right in Yury's face, and she danced around the room in an ecstasy of embarrassment and delight, her dress billowing out.

Yury knew from his father's letters and from Lyalya herself that a young doctor who had arrived in town not long ago was courting Lyalya, but he hadn't known that the matter was settled.

"You don't say!" he replied in surprise, and it seemed strange to him that this pure, sweet little Lyalya, whom he still thought of as a little girl, already had a fiancé and would soon get married, become a woman and a wife. He felt tenderness for his sister and a vague touch of pity.

Yury put his arm around Lyalya's waist and went with her into the dining room, where a lamp was already lit and a large, highly polished samovar stood shining. There sat Nikolai Yegorovich and an unfamiliar, solidly built young man who didn't look Russian; he had a dark complexion and alert, curious eyes.

He stood up to greet Yury in a relaxed, refined, composed manner.

"Well, let's get acquainted."

"Anatoly Pavlovich Ryazantsev," Lyalya announced in a comically exaggerated manner, extending her arm with hand upturned.

"I ask your love and indulgence," Ryazantsev added, also in a joking manner.

They shook hands in a sincere gesture of goodwill, and for a moment

[5] A reference to the hero of Cervantes's *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605).

thought about embracing each other, but did not; they merely looked each other in the eye amicably and courteously.

So that's the sort of brother she has! Ryazantsev thought in surprise, having expected that the brother of the short, spry, blonde, flourishing Lyalya would also be fair and full of joie de vivre. But Yury was tall, thin, and dark, though just as good-looking as Lyalya; his delicate, regular facial features even resembled hers.

Meanwhile, glancing at Ryazantsev, Yury reflected that here was the very man who'd come to love the grown woman in the innocent little girl Lyalya, fresh as a spring morning. He loved her, of course, in precisely the same way that Yury loved women. And for some reason he found it unpleasant and awkward to look at Ryazantsev and Lyalya, as if they could guess what he was thinking.

They felt that they had many important things to say to each other. Yury wanted to ask: Do you love Lyalya? Sincerely and earnestly? It would be pitiful and squalid if you were deceiving her. She's so pure and innocent!

And Ryazantsev would have replied: Yes, I love your sister very much, and it's impossible not to love her. Look at how pure, fresh, and pretty she is, how much she cares for me, and what lovely cleavage she shows.

But instead Yury said nothing at all and Ryazantsev asked: "Have you been banished for a long time?"

"Five years," Yury replied.

Nikolai Yegorovich, who was pacing the room, paused for a moment, but regained control of himself and continued pacing with the overly regular, measured steps of a former military man. He still didn't know the details of his son's expulsion, and this unexpected news came as quite a shock.

What the hell is going on? he thought to himself.

Lyalya understood her father's reaction and was frightened. She feared all quarrels, arguments, and unpleasant scenes, and tried to change the subject.

What a fool I am, she reproached herself mentally, not to have remembered to warn Tolya.

But Ryazantsev didn't know what all this was about, and, after answering Lyalya's question about whether or not he'd like some tea, he began to interrogate Yury once more.

"What do you intend to do now?"

Nikolai Yegorovich frowned and kept silent. Suddenly Yury perceived his father's silence and, before he could imagine the consequences, was filled with irritation and obstinacy. He replied intentionally: "Nothing for the moment."

"What do you mean, nothing? How can that be?" Nikolai Yegorovich asked, stopping his pacing. He didn't raise his voice, but a hidden reproach could clearly be heard in his tone: How can you say "nothing"? Aren't you ashamed to say that, as if I were obliged to have you hanging around my neck! How dare you forget that I'm old, that it's high time you were earning your keep? I won't say a thing; do as you wish; but how is it you yourself don't understand this? His tone implied all this.

And the more acutely he felt this, because he recognized his father's right to think this way, the more Yury was offended.

"Just so, nothing. What am I supposed to do?" he asked provocatively.

Nikolai Yegorovich wanted to say something harsh, but kept silent and, with a mere shrug began pacing again from corner to corner with his heavy, rhythmic, measured tread. His own gentlemanly upbringing prevented him from arguing with his son on the day of his arrival.

Yury followed him with his shining eyes, no longer able to restrain himself, now bristling and on guard, ready to seize upon the slightest pretext. He knew perfectly well that he was provoking a quarrel, but he could no longer control his own obstinacy and irritation.

Lyalya was almost in tears; in dismay she glanced imploringly from her brother to her father. Ryazantsev finally understood and felt sorry for Lyalya. He quickly and not very skillfully changed the subject.

The evening was tedious and drawn out. Yury didn't consider himself at fault, because he couldn't agree with Nikolai Yegorovich that political struggle was none of his business. He thought that his father didn't understand the simplest things because he was old and intellectually backward; unconsciously he blamed him for his old age and intellectual backwardness, and was annoyed. The topics raised by Ryazantsev didn't interest him; listening with only half an ear, he continued to follow his father's movements intensely and spitefully with his dark, gleaming eyes.

Novikov, Ivanov, and Semyonov arrived in time for supper.

Semyonov was a consumptive university student[6] who'd been living in town for several months, giving lessons. He was very plain-looking, gaunt, and weak; the barely perceptible but terrible shadow of imminent death could be seen in his prematurely aged face. Ivanov was a teacher at the people's school; he had long hair, broad shoulders, and an ungainly build.

They'd been strolling together along the boulevard and, learning of Yury's arrival, had dropped in to welcome him.

Things livened up after their arrival. There were witticisms, jokes, and laughter. Everyone drank at supper, Ivanov more than the rest.

In the few days that had passed since his unsuccessful declaration of love to Lida Sanina, Novikov had calmed down somewhat. He began to think that her refusal had been accidental, that he himself was to blame for it because he hadn't prepared her for it. But he still felt too ashamed and awkward to visit the Sanins. Therefore he tried to see Lida elsewhere, meeting her accidentally at a friend's house or on the street. And because Lida pitied him and felt a bit guilty, she treated him with exaggerated affection and attention; as a result, Novikov began to have hope once again.

"Here's what, ladies and gentlemen," he said, as they were about to leave. "Let's organize a picnic at the monastery. What do you say?"

[6] Tuberculosis was popularly known as consumption; one who suffered from tuberculosis was a consumptive.

The local monastery was the usual place for outings because it stood on a hill in a pleasant, open spot near the river, not far from town, and the road that led there was good.

Lyalya, who more than anything on earth loved all sorts of activity, outings, swimming, boat rides, and walks in the woods, seized upon the idea with enthusiasm.

"Of course, of course. But when?"

"Why, tomorrow if you like!" replied Novikov.

"Who else will we invite?" asked Ryazantsev, who also liked the idea of an outing. In the forest he'd be able to kiss Lyalya, embrace her, be in exasperatingly close contact with her body, which tempted him so intensely by its freshness and purity.

"Who else? There's the six of us. . . . We could ask Shafrov."

"Who's he?" asked Yury.

"A young studious type from around here."

"Well . . . and Lyudmila Nikolaevna will invite Karsavina and Olga Ivanovna."

"Who?" Yury asked again.

Lyalya laughed. "You'll see!" she said, kissing her fingertips in a particularly enigmatic way.

"Aha," said Yury with a smile. "We'll see, we'll see."

Novikov hesitated and then added with unnatural indifference: "We could invite the Sanins."

"Lida, absolutely!" cried Lyalya, not so much because she liked the young woman, but because she knew about Novikov's love and wanted the event to be nice for him. She was very happy in her own love and wanted everyone around her to be equally happy and content.

"Only then we'll have to invite the officers, too," Ivanov put in caustically.

"Well, what, we will. . . . The more, the merrier."

Everyone went out onto the porch.

The moon was shining brightly and evenly. It was warm and still.

"What a night," said Lyalya, inconspicuously drawing closer to Ryazantsev.

She didn't want him to leave. Ryazantsev firmly pressed her warm, round arm with his elbow.

"Yes, it's a marvelous night!" he said, lending to these simple words a special meaning known only to the two of them.

"Yes, well, good for it," Ivanov said in his deep bass. "But I'm going to sleep. Good night, kind sirs."

And he strode off along the street, waving his arms like the sails of a windmill.

Then Novikov and Semyonov left. Ryazantsev took his time saying farewell to Lyalya, using the pretext of conferring about the picnic.

"Well, night-night," Lyalya said jokingly after he had gone. She stretched and sighed and with some regret took her leave of the moonlight, the warm night air, and everything to which they summoned her young, flourishing body.

Yury recalled that his father was not yet asleep and that if they were left alone, they would have to have that unpleasant conversation that would get them nowhere.

"No," he said, looking away toward the bluish mist stretching like a shroud above the river beyond the black fence. "I don't feel sleepy yet. I'll go out for a while."

"As you like," Lyalya replied in a soft, strangely tender voice. She stretched again, narrowed her eyes like a pussycat, smiled vaguely at the moonlight, and went away. Yury remained alone. For a moment he stood motionless, looking at the dark shadows of the houses and trees that seemed so deep and cold; then he shuddered and went off in the same direction as Semyonov.

The sickly student hadn't managed to get very far. He walked quietly, hunched over, coughing dryly, and his dark shadow followed him across the brightly lit ground. Yury caught up with him and immediately noticed the change that had taken place in him: all during supper Semyonov had been joking and laughing, almost more than the others, but now he was walking along gloomily, looking depressed; something awful, sad, and hopeless could be heard in his dry cough, like the illness from which he suffered.

"Ah, it's you!" he said distractedly, and, it seemed to Yury, with hostility.

"I don't feel like sleeping. So I'll walk you home," Yury explained.

"Go ahead," Semyonov agreed indifferently.

They walked on in silence for a while. Semyonov kept coughing and hunching over.

"Aren't you cold?" asked Yury, merely because this painful coughing had begun to oppress him.

"I'm always cold," Semyonov replied, seeming to be annoyed.

Yury felt awkward, as if he'd touched on a sore spot.

"Did you leave university a long time ago?" he asked again.

Semyonov didn't reply right away.

"A long time ago," he answered.

Yury began to talk about the mood of the students, what they considered most important and current. At first he spoke simply, but then he got carried away, grew livelier, and began to speak with expression and passion.

Semyonov listened and kept silent.

Then Yury shifted imperceptibly to the decline of revolutionary fervor among the masses. Clearly this subject caused him genuine pain.

"Have you read Bebel's latest speech?" he asked.[7]

"I have," Semyonov replied.

"Well, what do you think of it?"

[7] Ferdinand August Bebel (1840–1913) was the leader of a German social democratic movement and an advocate of women's rights.

In irritation Semyonov suddenly shook his stick with its large crook. His shadow also shook its arm and the movement reminded Yury of the sinister flapping wings of a black bird of prey.

"What can I say?" Semyonov began in haste and confusion. "I can tell you that I'm dying."

And he shook his stick again, and once more the black shadow of a bird of prey repeated its movement. This time Semyonov noticed it too.

"There," he said bitterly, "death is standing right behind me and watches every move I make. What do I care about Bebel? He's a babbler who babbles; another man will babble something else; it's all the same to me since I'll die tomorrow, if not today."

Embarrassed, Yury remained silent; he was depressed, pained, and offended at someone for what he heard.

"Now you think it's all so very important . . . what happens in the university or what Bebel says. But I think that when your turn comes to die, like me, and when you know for sure that you're dying, it won't even occur to you to think that some words uttered by Bebel, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, or anyone else have any meaning!"

Semyonov fell silent.

As before, the moon was shining brightly and evenly, and a black shadow followed them persistently.

"My organism is deteriorating," Semyonov said suddenly in an altogether different, weak, and pitiful voice. "If only you knew how much I don't want to die. . . . Especially on such a clear, warm night!" he said with plaintive anguish, turning his plain, haggard face with its abnormally shining eyes to Yury. "Everything's alive, but I'm dying. That seems like a trite remark to you, and so it should. But I'm dying. Not in some novel, not on any pages written 'with artistic truth,' but I really am dying, and it doesn't seem trite to me. Sometime it will happen to you. I'm dying, I'm dying, and that's that!"

Semyonov started coughing.

"Sometimes I begin thinking that soon I'll be lying in the cold ground surrounded by complete darkness, my nose eaten away, my hands rotting; meanwhile, on earth everything will be exactly as it is now while I'm alive. Why, you'll still be alive. . . . You'll be walking, looking at the moon, breathing; you'll walk past my grave and stop to relieve yourself on it, and I'll be lying there decaying. What do I care about Bebel or Tolstoy or millions of other pompous asses?" Semyonov suddenly cried shrilly and with malice.

Yury was silent, dismayed and distressed.

"Well, farewell," said Semyonov quietly. "This is where I go in."

Yury shook his hand and looked with deep pity at his sunken chest, his hunched shoulders, and his walking stick with the large crook that Semyonov had fastened to a button of his student's overcoat. Yury wanted to say something, to console and encourage him somehow, but he felt it was impossible to do so; he sighed and replied: "Good-bye."

Semyonov raised his cap and opened the gate. His steps and muffled coughing could still be heard behind the fence. Then everything fell silent.

Yury walked back. Everything that had seemed so light, bright, quiet, and peaceful half an hour ago—the moonlight, starry sky, poplar trees lit by the moon, and the mysterious shadows—now seemed deathly, sinister, and terrible, like the cold of a vast common grave.

When he arrived home he quietly made his way to his room and opened the window overlooking the garden; for the first time it occurred to him that everything he was involved in so deeply, with such confidence and self-sacrifice, was not at all what was really needed. He imagined that at some time, when he was about to die, like Semyonov, he'd feel unbearable, tormenting regret, not because people hadn't become any happier as a result of his efforts, not because the ideals he'd worshiped all his life had yet to be realized, but rather because he was dying and would cease seeing, hearing, and feeling, without having had time to enjoy everything that life could offer him.

But he felt ashamed of this thought, made a great effort, and came up with an explanation:

Life can be spent in struggle.

Yes, but for whom, if not for oneself or for one's own place in the sun? The secret thought arose gloomily within him. But Yury pretended not to heed it and tried to think about something else. But that was difficult and tedious; his thoughts kept returning to the same thing; he felt bored, pained, and wretched to the point of shedding bitter, tormenting tears.

V

After receiving a note from Lyalya Svarozhich, Lida Sanina handed it to her brother. She thought he'd decline the invitation, and that's what she wanted him to do. She felt that on a moonlit night on the river she'd be powerfully and sweetly drawn to Zarudin, and that would be both terrifying and entertaining; and that at the same time, she'd feel embarrassed in her brother's presence, that she'd be with none other than Zarudin, whom her brother apparently despised from the depths of his soul.

But Sanin agreed immediately and willingly.

It was an absolutely cloudless day, warm, but not too hot. It was even painful to look at the sky; it shimmered from the pure air and the gleaming white-gold rays of the sun.

"By the way, there'll be some young ladies there; you can make their acquaintance," Lida said mechanically.

"Now, that is good news!" said Sanin. "And the weather's perfect. Let's go."

At the appointed hour Zarudin and Tanarov arrived in a spacious regimental carriage, drawn by a pair of large horses belonging to the regiment.

"Lidiya Petrovna, we're waiting!" Zarudin cried cheerfully, all clean and white, emitting his eau de cologne.

Lida, wearing a thin, bright-colored dress with a collar and broad waistband of pink velvet, came down the stairs and offered Zarudin her hands. For a moment Zarudin grasped them suggestively, surveying her figure with a swift, frank glance.

"Let's go, let's go," Lida cried, understanding his glance and feeling both embarrassed and excited by it.

A short time later the carriage was rolling swiftly along a little-used road through the steppe, bending the tough stems of field grass to the ground, which lashed their feet as they sprang back up. The fresh breeze gently tousled their hair and made soft waves in the grass along both sides of the road.

Just outside the town they caught up with another carriage carrying Lyalya and Yury Svarozhich, Ryazantsev, Novikov, Ivanov, and Semyonov. They were cramped and uncomfortable, and so were cheerful and in a friendly mood. Only Yury Svarozhich, after yesterday's conversation with Semyonov, felt a little uncomfortable in his presence. It seemed strange to him and even a little unpleasant that Semyonov was cracking jokes and laughing just as lightheartedly as the others. Yury couldn't understand how he could laugh after everything he'd said the day before.

Was he putting on an act, or what? Yury wondered, casting a sidelong glance at the sickly student. Maybe he's not really all that ill?

But he was embarrassed by his own thought and tried to forget it.

Witty remarks and greetings were exchanged from both carriages; Novikov, playing the fool, jumped down and ran through the grass alongside Lida. Somehow a tacit agreement had been established between them to express their friendship in an exaggerated manner. They were both extremely jocular and amicably impudent.

The hill where the shining cupolas and white stone walls of the monastery were gleaming became larger and more visible. The whole hill was overgrown with trees, and the green tops of the oaks made it look as if it were covered with curls. Those same oaks also grew on the islands; below, at the foot of the hill and among the trees, the broad river flowed by serenely.

The horses turned off the smooth road and trotted through the soft, lush grass along the riverbank, the carriage wheels and light pressure of the horses' hoofs digging deep ruts in the damp earth. There was a strong scent of river water and oak forest.

At the agreed place, a favorite one, a student and two young ladies in Ukrainian dresses who'd arrived earlier sat waiting on rugs spread out on the grass; laughing, they were preparing tea and snacks.

The horses halted, snorting and whisking away flies with their tails; the new arrivals, enlivened by the trip, the air, and the smell of river and forest, immediately jumped down from their carriages.

Lyalya exchanged loud kisses with the two young ladies preparing tea. Lida greeted them in a more restrained manner and introduced her brother and Yury Svarozhich to them. The young ladies regarded them with youthful, discreet curiosity.

"You've yet to make each other's acquaintance," Lida remembered suddenly. "This is my brother, Vladimir Petrovich, and this is Yury Nikolaevich Svarozhich."

Smiling, Sanin shook hands gently yet firmly with Yury, who paid him no attention. Sanin was interested in everyone and loved meeting new people, while Yury was convinced that there were very few interesting people and so was always indifferent to new acquaintances.

Ivanov knew Sanin vaguely and liked what he'd heard about him. He regarded Sanin with curiosity and was the first to come up and speak to him. Semyonov extended his hand apathetically.

"Well, now we can enjoy ourselves!" Lyalya cried. "We're finished with all the boring formalities!"

At first everyone felt a bit awkward because many were meeting for the first time. After they'd begun eating and the men had downed several shots of vodka while the women drank wine, the awkwardness disappeared and they became very merry. They drank a great deal, laughed, and cracked jokes, sometimes very clever ones; they chased one another and climbed the hill. The forest was so green and lovely, it was so quiet, bright, and clear all around, that no one could harbor anything dark, distressing, or evil in his soul.

"Now," said Ryazantsev, completely out of breath, "if people were to run around like this and jump up and down, nine-tenths of the world's illnesses would not exist!"

"Nor its vices either," said Lyalya.

"Well, people will always have plenty of vices," observed Ivanov; even though what he said didn't seem particularly apt or amusing, they all laughed heartily.

While they drank their tea the sun started to set, the river turned golden, and long slanting rays of reddish sunlight lengthened between the trees.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, to the boats!" Lida exclaimed. Hoisting her skirt up high, she was the first to start running toward the riverbank. "Who's the fastest?"

While some ran, others proceeded in a more dignified manner, but everyone followed her and, with roars of laughter and many jokes, took their seats in a large, brightly painted boat.

"Cast off!" Lida cried in a youthful, reckless tone of voice.

The boat glided gently away from the bank, leaving behind it two broad furrows that spread evenly toward both sides of the river.

"Yury Nikolaevich, why are you so quiet?" Lida asked Svarozhich.

"I have nothing to say," Yury replied with a smile.

"Really?" Lida drawled, tossing her head and sensing that all the men were admiring her.

"Yury Nikolaevich doesn't like talking nonsense," Semyonov began. "And he—"

"Oh, he needs a serious subject, does he?" Lida interrupted.

"Look, there's a serious subject!" cried Zarudin, pointing to the bank.

There, under a precipice, among the gnarled roots of a crooked old oak tree, was a narrow, gloomy, black opening overgrown with tall weeds.

"What's that?" asked Shafrov, who came from elsewhere.

"A cave," replied Ivanov.

"What kind of a cave?"

"The devil only knows! They say that once there was a place for making counterfeit money near here. As usual, they were all arrested. It's really too bad about that 'as usual,' " Ivanov inserted.

"Or else you might want to open a counterfeiting operation yourself and start making twenty-kopeck pieces?" asked Novikov.

"What for? Silver coins, my friend, rubles!"

"Hmm," Zarudin said and shrugged his shoulders slightly. He didn't like Ivanov and didn't understand his jokes.

"Yes. . . . Well, they were caught and the cave was abandoned. It collapsed and no one goes in it anymore. When I was a young boy, I used to explore it. It's very interesting."

"Interesting? I should say so!" cried Lida. "Viktor Sergeevich, you go in there. You're so brave!"

Her voice had a strange tone, as if now, in the presence of other people and for all to see, she wanted to deride and repay Zarudin for that strange and frightening enchantment he had aroused when they'd been alone together the other evening.

"What for?" Zarudin asked, without understanding.

"I'll go," Yury replied and blushed, afraid that the others would think he was striking a pose.

"That's a fine idea," Ivanov said in encouragement.

"Maybe you'll go, too?" asked Novikov.

"No, I'd rather wait here."

Everyone laughed.

The boat approached the bank and now the black opening loomed just above their heads.

"Yury, please don't do anything stupid," Lyalya said, trying to dissuade her brother. "For heaven's sake, it's stupid!"

"Of course it's stupid," Yury agreed jokingly. "Semyonov, pass me a candle."

"But where will I find one?"

"Just behind you, in the basket!"

Semyonov lazily took a candle from the basket.

"Are you really going in?" asked one of the young ladies, a tall, lovely girl

cave

with a full bosom, whom Lyalya called Zina and whose surname was Karsavina.

"Of course! Why not?" Yury replied, pretending to be nonchalant, recalling how he'd tried to be just as nonchalant during all his dangerous political escapades. For some reason this recollection was unpleasant.

It was dark and damp at the entrance to the cave. Sanin glanced in and said, "Brr!"

He was amused that Yury would enter such an unpleasant, dangerous place just because other people were watching.

Yury lit the candle, trying not to look at the others. A secret thought was already tormenting him: did he look ridiculous? He felt a bit ridiculous, though at the same time it was odd because not only was he not ridiculous, he was astonishing and magnificent, arousing in women that enigmatic feeling that is both pleasant and frightening. He waited for the wick to light and then, laughing to protect himself from mockery, he went forward and disappeared at once into the darkness. Even the candle seemed to go out. Everyone became really concerned for him as well as interested.

"Watch out, Yury Nikolaevich," Ryazantsev shouted. "Sometimes wolves hide in there!"

"I have a revolver!" came Yury's muffled reply; his voice sounded somewhat strange from under the ground, as if he were dead.

He made his way forward carefully. The walls of the cave were low, uneven, and damp, like the inside of a large cellar. The floor rose up and then fell away; twice Yury almost fell into a large hole. He thought it would be best to turn back or sit down and wait a little while, and then say he'd gone deep into the cave.

Suddenly he heard footsteps behind him, someone slipping in the wet clay, as well as the sound of heavy breathing. Someone was following him. Yury raised the candle above his head.

"Zinaida Pavlovna!" he cried in surprise.

"The very one!" Karsavina replied cheerfully, lifting her skirt to jump over a hole.

Yury was pleased that it was she—a cheerful, buxom, lovely young woman. He looked at her with gleaming eyes and smiled.

"Let's go on!" the young woman urged, a bit flustered.

Yury proceeded obediently and effortlessly, no longer worrying about the danger and carefully lighting the way for Karsavina.

The walls of the cave, made of moist brown clay, at times advanced on them as if in silent threat, then retreated and gave way. In some places large piles of stones and earth had tumbled down, leaving only deep, dark cavities. The mass of earth hanging above them seemed mortifying, and there was something terrifying about the fact that it didn't come crashing down but just hung there motionless, supported by its own invisible, powerful laws.

Then all the paths seemed to converge into one large, dark cavern filled with heavy air.

Yury walked all around it, looking for a way out; he was followed by shimmering shadows and glimmers of light swallowed by darkness. But the few exits had all been blocked by earth. In one corner lay the gloomily decomposing remains of an old wooden platform, reminiscent of the abandoned planks of a rotting coffin disgorged from the ground.

"Not much of interest here!" Yury said, involuntarily lowering his voice without knowing why. He was oppressed by the large mass of earth above them.

"Oh, yes there is!" whispered Karsavina, looking around, her eyes gleaming in the candlelight. She was scared and clung unconsciously to Yury, as if seeking his protection.

Yury noticed and enjoyed this fact: it aroused a touching feeling of tenderness for the young woman's beauty and weakness.

"It's as if we were buried alive," Karsavina continued. "It seems that if we were to shout, no one would hear us!"

"Probably not," Yury said with a laugh.

And suddenly his head began to spin. He cast a sidelong glance at her ample bosom, barely covered by her flimsy Ukrainian blouse, and at her round sloping shoulders. The thought that, in essence, she was completely in his power and no one could hear anything was so strong and unexpected that for a moment everything grew dark before his eyes. But he immediately regained control of himself because he was genuinely and earnestly convinced that it was abominable to violate a woman—and for him, Yury Svarozhich, it was altogether inconceivable. And instead of doing what he wanted to do more than life itself, that which filled his whole body with strength and passion, Yury said merely:

"Let's give it a try."

The strange tremor in his own voice frightened him; it seemed to him that Karsavina might guess his thoughts.

"What?" the young woman asked.

"I'll fire my gun," he explained, pulling out his revolver.

"Won't the earth cave in?"

"I don't know," Yury answered for some reason, although he was certain that it wouldn't. "Are you afraid?"

"No. . . . Well . . . fire away," Karsavina said, drawing back from him slightly.

Yury stretched out his hand with the revolver and fired. A blazing streak flashed out, pungent, heavy smoke instantly enveloped everything, and a deafening rumble resounded gravely and angrily through the hillside. But the earth hung there as motionless as before.

"That's all there is to it," said Yury.

"Let's go back."

They started back; as Karsavina walked ahead, Yury noticed her broad, strong hips; once again the same desire took hold of him and it was difficult for him to overcome it.

"Listen, Zinaida Pavlovna," said Yury, fearing the sound of his own voice and of his question but feigning nonchalance. "Here's an interesting psychological question: Why weren't you afraid to come in here with me? You yourself said that if someone were to shout, no one would hear us. But you don't know me at all."

Karsavina blushed deeply in the darkness, but kept silent.

Yury's breathing was labored. He felt intensely pleased, as if he'd skirted some abyss, and at the same time felt intensely ashamed.

"I thought, of course, that you were a decent man," the young woman muttered weakly and unsteadily.

"But what if you'd been wrong to think that?" Yury replied, toying with the same burning sensation. Suddenly it seemed that the way he was speaking was very original and that there was something splendid about it.

"Then . . . I would've drowned myself," Karsavina answered, even more quietly, blushing even more deeply.

And, as a result of these words, Yury felt the onset of gentle compassion. Instantly his excitement vanished and he felt relieved.

What a fine girl! he thought with warmth and sincerity; and his awareness of the purity of this warmth and sincerity was so pleasant that tears welled up in his eyes.

Karsavina smiled at him happily, proud of her own reply and his silent approval.

As they made their way to the mouth of the cave, the young woman reflected with strange agitation: Why wasn't she offended or ashamed when he asked her that question? Why was she instead so intensely pleased?

VI

Those waiting above sat down on the riverbank or stood near the entrance to the cave cracking jokes at the expense of Svarozhich and Karsavina. The men smoked cigarettes, throwing their matches into the water and watching the wide even circles spread over the surface. Lida, singing softly to herself, made her way through the grass; placing her hands on her hips, she performed some dainty dance steps with her little yellow shoes, while Lyalya picked flowers and tossed them at Ryazantsev, caressing him with her eyes.

"Isn't it time for us to have something to drink?" Ivanov asked Sanin.

"A magnificent idea!" agreed Sanin.

They got back into the boat, opened some beer, and started to drink.

"You unscrupulous drunkards, you!" Lyalya said, hurling a tuft of grass at them.

"Ex-cel-lent!" Ivanov announced with pleasure.

Sanin laughed.

"I'm always surprised when people oppose the use of alcohol, " he said in jest. "In my opinion, only a drunkard lives life as he should."

"Or like an animal," Novikov echoed from the bank.

"So what if that's true!" replied Sanin. "Nevertheless, a drunkard does whatever he wants. If he wants to sing, he sings; if he wants to dance, he dances; and he's never ashamed of his joy and merrymaking."

"And sometimes he fights," observed Ryazantsev.

"It can happen. People don't know how to drink . . . they're too embittered."

"You don't fight when you're drunk?" asked Novikov.

"No," replied Sanin. "I'm more likely to fight when I'm sober; when I'm drunk, I'm the kindest of men because I forget so many abominations."

"Not everyone's like that," Ryazantsev observed again.

"It's a pity that not everyone is. . . . But I really don't care in the least what others are like."

"One shouldn't say things like that!" said Novikov.

"Why not? Especially if it's true!"

"A fine truth, indeed!" Lyalya replied, shaking her head.

"The finest I know," Ivanov said, supporting Sanin.

Lida began singing in a loud voice and then stopped abruptly. "They don't seem to be hurrying!" she said.

"Why should they?" replied Ivanov. "It never pays to hurry."

"That Zina is a heroine without fear or reproach,"[8] Lida observed sarcastically.

Tanarov burst into loud laughter at his own thoughts and then felt embarrassed.

Lida looked at him and put her hands on her hips; her whole body swayed gracefully.

"Well, perhaps they're really having fun down there!" she added enigmatically, with a shrug.

"Shh!" Ryazantsev said, interrupting her.

A muffled roar echoed from the dark opening.

"A shot!" cried Shafrov.

"What does that mean?" Lyalya asked timidly, clinging to Ryazantsev's arm.

"Calm down, if it's a wolf, they're tame at this time of year . . . and it wouldn't attack two people," Ryazantsev said, trying to reassure her, but feeling annoyed at Yury and his childish prank.

[8] A variation on *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche* (knight without fear and without reproach), a characterization applied to Pierre Du Terrail, seigneur de Bayard (1474–1524), French hero of the Italian wars.

"Hey, of all the nerve!" Shafrov growled, he too feeling annoyed.

"Here they come, here they come! Don't worry," Lida said with a contemptuous curl of her lip.

The sound of approaching footsteps could be heard and soon Karsavina and Yury emerged from the darkness.

Yury blew out the candle and smiled at everyone in a polite yet hesitant way, because he didn't yet know how they regarded his escapade. He was completely covered with yellow clay, and Karsavina's shoulder was also very dirty where she'd brushed against the wall of the cave.

"Well, how was it?" Semyonov asked apathetically.

"Quite unusual and beautiful," Yury replied indecisively, as if trying to justify himself. "But the passageways don't lead very far; they're all blocked up. And there was some kind of wooden floor decaying."

"Did you hear the shot?" Karsavina asked with animation, her eyes flashing.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we've drunk all the beer and our souls are sufficiently invigorated!" cried Ivanov from below. "Let's go!"

By the time the boat reached a broader part of the river, the moon had already risen. The night was astonishingly quiet and transparent; the golden light of the stars was shining equally above and below, in the sky and in the water, and the boat seemed to be floating between two infinite airy depths. The forest both along the riverbank and reflected in the water was black and mysterious. A nightingale started to sing. When everyone fell silent to listen, it seemed that it wasn't really a bird singing but some happy, intelligent, pensive being.

"How lovely!" said Lyalya, raising her eyes and laying her head on Karsavina's warm, round shoulder.

Then they remained silent and listened for a long time. The nightingale's song filled the forest completely; his trill resounded over the pensive river and carried over the meadows where grasses and flowers were growing stiff in the moonlit mist, into the distance and far above, into the cold starry sky.

"What's he singing about?" Lyalya asked again, as if accidentally placing her hand, its palm turned upward, on Ryazantsev's knee, feeling how his strong, firm leg shuddered, both fearing and rejoicing at his movement.

"About love, of course!" Ryazantsev replied, half-joking, half-serious, and gently covering with his own hand her small, warm, tender palm resting innocently on his knee.

"On an evening like this, one doesn't need to think about good and evil," said Lida, replying to her own thoughts.

She was thinking about whether she was right to be enjoying this alarming and engaging game. Looking into Zarudin's face, even more manly and handsome in the moonlight, a dark brilliance shining in his eyes, she felt a familiar sweet languor and a frightening lack of will throughout her being.

"About something altogether different!" Ivanov replied to her earlier question.

Sanin smiled and didn't take his eyes off Karsavina, who was seated facing him: her prominent bosom and beautiful neck were lit by the moon.

The dark, flimsy shadow of the hill advanced and when the boat, after leaving a wake of dark-blue silvery stripes, once more emerged into an illuminated place, it seemed even brighter, broader, and freer.

Karsavina tossed aside her large straw hat and, expanding her chest even more, began to sing. She had a lovely, high voice, though not too powerful. Her song was Russian, beautiful, and sad, like all Russian songs.

"Very tender!" Ivanov muttered.

"Nice!" said Sanin.

When Karsavina finished, everyone clapped, and their applause echoed strangely and harshly through the dark forest and above the river.

"Sing another, Zinochka," Lyalya implored. "Or, even better, recite some of your own verses."

"Are you a poet too?" asked Ivanov. "How much poetry can God grant to just one of his creatures!"

"Is that a bad thing?" Karsavina asked, joking in her embarrassment.

"No, it's a very good thing," Sanin replied.

"If, let's say, the girl's young and charming, then what good is it?"

"Recite, Zinochka!" Lyalya cried, all tender and ablaze with love.

Grinning in embarrassment, Karsavina turned to look at the water and then recited in the same even, resonant, high voice:

"My dear, my dear, I won't tell you,
Won't tell you how much I love you.
I close my eyes so full of love—
They guard my secret. . . .
No one will discover this secret. . . .
Only the dreary days know,
Only the quiet blue nights,
Only the golden fires of the stars,
Only the thin, bright tracery
Of the branches in love with nighttime tales
Know everything. . . . But they won't tell, won't tell
About my secret love."

And again everyone was ecstatic and applauded Karsavina with enthusiasm, not because her verses were so fine but because they all felt good and yearned for love, happiness, and sweet sorrow.

"Oh, night, day, and dark eyes of Zinaida Pavlovna, be so kind as to tell me: am I the lucky man?" Ivanov suddenly cried so loudly and unexpectedly in a wild bass voice that everyone was startled.

"I can answer that," Semyonov replied. "You're not!"

"Woe is me!" Ivanov wailed.

Everyone laughed.

"Are my verses that bad?" Karsavina asked Yury.

Yury thought they were unoriginal and resembled hundreds of other verses, but Karsavina was so lovely and was looking at him so sweetly with her dark, bashful eyes that he made a very serious face and replied: "They seemed melodious and charming to me."

Karsavina smiled at him and was surprised that his praise pleased her as much as it did.

"You still don't know my Zinochka," Lyalya said with genuine ecstasy. "She herself is melodious and charming."

"How do you like that!" Novikov said in surprise.

"It's true," Lyalya insisted, as if justifying herself. "She has a melodious and charming voice, she herself is beautiful, and her verses are melodious and charming too . . . even her last name is melodious and charming!"

"My goodness! Let's see—style, brilliance, and gusto!" Ivanov said admiringly. "By the way, I agree with you completely."

Karsavina blushed in embarrassment and laughed, enjoying the praise.

"It's time to go home!" Lyalya said shrilly; she wasn't pleased by all this praise for Karsavina. She considered herself prettier, more interesting, and cleverer.

"Won't you sing something?" asked Sanin.

"No," Lida replied angrily, "I'm not in good voice."

"In fact, it really is time to go," agreed Ryazantsev, recalling that tomorrow he had to get up early and go to the hospital for a postmortem examination.

But everyone else was sorry to leave.

As they made their way home everyone was silent, feeling a contented, languorous exhaustion.

Once again, although now no longer visible, the steppe grasses bent under the wheels and a white cloud of dust was left behind, but soon settled back on the white road. The fields, bluish from the moon's haze, seemed flat, deserted, and endless.

VII

About three days afterward, late in the evening, Lida returned home tired and unhappy. She was depressed and felt drawn somewhere: she both knew and didn't know where.

Entering her room, she stopped, folded her arms, and stood there for a long time, looking pale, staring at the floor.

All of a sudden Lida was horrified to realize how far she'd gone in giving herself to Zarudin. For the first time she perceived that, from that irretrievable and incomprehensible moment, the obviously fatuous and shallow offi-

cer, so far beneath her, enjoyed some kind of humiliating power over her. Now she could no longer refuse to come if he demanded it; she could no longer dally with him as she liked, either submitting to his kisses or resisting and laughing; now, without a will of her own, she must yield to his crudest caresses like a slave.

She couldn't understand how this had happened: as always, she dominated him, his caresses were under her control, and she was just as pleased, frightened, and amused; then suddenly a moment came when the fire in her body enveloped her head with a whitish haze in which everything drowned except for the burning, curious desire pushing her into an abyss. The ground swam beneath her feet, her body became powerless and submissive, and before her there remained only two dark, burning, terrifying, shameless, attractive eyes; her bare legs shamelessly and passionately shuddered from the powerful contact with the crude hands undressing her; she desired this experience all the more intensely, this shamelessness, pain, and pleasure.

Lida trembled at this recollection, shrugged her shoulders, and buried her face in her hands.

She stumbled across the room, opened the window, stared for a long time at the moon hanging right over the garden, and listened, without noticing, to a solitary nightingale singing somewhere far away in a neighboring garden. She was oppressed by melancholy. In her soul there was a strange combination of vague desire and mournful pride at the thought that she'd ruined her life for a vapid and inane man, that her fall had been stupid, sordid, and accidental. Something threatening began to rise up before her. She tried to banish this advancing, anxious foreboding of the future by stubborn and contemptible bravado.

Well, I slept with him and that's that! she thought, knitting her brows with painful pleasure as she uttered these crude words. It's all nonsense! I desired it and gave myself to him! And I still felt so happy, it was so . . . Lida shuddered and, putting out her folded hands, she stretched. It would have been absurd not to give myself to him! No need to think about it. . . . There's no going back.

With an effort she moved away from the window and began to get undressed, undoing the straps on her skirt and allowing it to slip to the floor.

After all, one has only one life to live, she thought, shivering at the cool air softly caressing her bare shoulders and arms. What would I have gained if I'd waited until I was legally married? And what good would that have been? Isn't it all the same? Am I really so foolish as to lend it special meaning? That's stupidity! Suddenly it seemed to her that all this was in fact just nonsense, that tomorrow would put an end to it all, that she'd won what was most interesting in this little game of hers, and that now she was as free as a bird, with life, interests, and happiness all ahead of her.

"If I want to fall in love, I will, and if I want to fall out of love, I will," Lida sang softly; listening to the sound of her own voice, she thought with pleasure that hers was nicer than Karsavina's was.

"It's all nonsense. If I want to, I'll give myself to the devil!" she suddenly replied to her own confused thoughts with this rude and unexpected outburst. Placing her bare arms behind her head, she straightened up so quickly and violently that her breasts shook.

"You're still not asleep, Lida?" asked Sanin's voice outside her window.

Lida shuddered with fright, then at once smiled, flung a large shawl over her shoulders, and went to the window.

"You startled me!" she said.

Sanin drew nearer and rested his elbow on the sill. His eyes were sparkling and he was smiling.

"There's no need for that!" he said cheerfully and softly. Lida looked around inquisitively.

"You looked much better without the shawl," he remarked just as softly and expressively.

Lida turned to him in perplexity and instinctively wrapped the shawl more tightly around her.

Sanin started laughing. In embarrassment Lida leaned her bosom against the windowsill and put her head out of the window. Sanin's breath could be felt on her cheek.

"You're quite a beauty!" he said.

Lida cast him a swift glance and was frightened by what she thought she saw reflected in his expression. She turned abruptly toward the garden and felt in her body that Sanin was looking at her in a very peculiar way. And this seemed so terrible and vile that she felt a chill in her breast and her heart skipped a beat. All men regarded her in exactly the same way, and that pleased her, but for some reason for him to do so was incredible and impossible. She regained control of herself and smiled.

"I know. . . ."

Sanin was silent and stared at her. When she had rested against the windowsill, her blouse and shawl had slipped down and to one side had revealed the upper part of her unbelievably tender bosom illumined by white moonlight.

"People constantly defend themselves against happiness by building a Great Wall of China around them," Sanin said; his soft, trembling voice was strange and it scared Lida even more, almost to the point of terror.

"What?" she asked faintly, without taking her eyes off the dark garden, afraid of meeting his gaze. It seemed to her that something might happen that was absolutely impossible to allow.

And at the same time she no longer had any doubts; she knew and felt horrible, hideous, and curious. Her head was on fire and she saw nothing before her; she sensed with horror, loathing, and curiosity his hot strained breath on her cheek, at which the hair bristled on her temples and shudders ran up and down her spine under the shawl.

"Nothing . . ." Sanin replied, and his voice broke off.

Lida felt as if a bolt of lightning had passed through her entire body; she

straightened up swiftly and, without noticing what she was doing, leaned over the table and blew out the lamp.

"It's time to go to sleep!" she said and shut the window.

After the lamp was out, it became brighter outside; Sanin's face and figure appeared more clearly, illumined by the blue moonlight. He stood there in the deep, dew-covered grass, laughing.

Lida came away from the window and lowered herself mechanically onto the bed. Everything in her was trembling and throbbing, and her thoughts were confused. She heard Sanin's footsteps as he retreated through the rustling grass, and she pressed her hand to her pounding heart.

What's this? Am I going crazy? she wondered with loathing. How disgusting! A chance phrase, and already I . . . What is it, erotomania? Am I really so vile, so depraved? How low must I have sunk to think that . . .

All of a sudden Lida buried her face in the pillow and wept softly and bitterly.

Why am I crying? she asked herself, not understanding the reason for her tears, merely feeling unhappy, pitiful, humiliated. She cried because she'd given herself to Zarudin and because she was no longer the same proud, pure young woman she had been, and because now she felt terrible and shameful in her brother's eyes. She thought that before he never could have looked at her this way and that now it was all because she'd fallen so low.

But one feeling was stronger, more galling, and more comprehensible to her: it was painful and shameful that she was now a woman, and that as long as she was young, strong, healthy, and beautiful, her best powers would go to giving herself to men, providing them with pleasure, and the more pleasure she gave them and herself, the more they would despise her.

For what? Who gave them that right? After all, I'm just as free as they are, Lida thought, gazing intently into the dreary darkness of her room.

Will I never really see a different life, a better life?

Her entire young, strong body told her powerfully that she had the right to take from life all that was interesting, pleasant, and necessary, and that she had the right to do anything she wanted with her own magnificent, strong, vital body, which belonged to her alone.

But this thought was tangled in confusing webs, struggling as if in a vise, and it was feebly and miserably lost to oblivion.

VIII

Yury Svarozhich had taken up painting some time ago; he liked it and devoted all his free time to it. At one time he had dreamed of becoming an

artist, but at first his lack of money and later his party activities blocked his way; now he painted only occasionally and with no specific goal.

And because he had no definite training or goal, his painting brought him little welcome enjoyment; it aroused heartbreak and disappointment. Each time his work didn't go well, Yury became annoyed and suffered; when it did go well, he sank into quiet and dreamy contemplation, brought on by the troubled awareness that it was all in vain and would result in neither success nor happiness.

Yury: Karsavina

Yury was really taken by Karsavina. He liked such tall, beautifully firm, ample women, with their lovely voices and tender, slightly sentimental eyes. Everything he thought about her attractiveness, purity, and spiritual depth was conveyed through her physical beauty and tenderness, but for some reason Yury didn't admit this to himself; he tried to convince himself that he found the young woman attractive not because of her shoulders, bosom, eyes, or voice but rather because of her chastity and purity. And it seemed easier, nobler, and better for him to think that way, even though it was precisely her purity and chastity that aroused him, inflaming his blood and exciting his desire. From the very first evening he experienced a vague but familiar feeling, although he wasn't fully aware of it at the time: a cruel desire to deprive her of her purity and innocence; this insatiable desire usually arose in the presence of beautiful women.

Since his thoughts were now preoccupied by this lovely, healthy young woman, so full of joyous, sunny life, Yury decided to capture life in his painting. As usual, he was easily roused to enthusiasm and became ecstatic about his idea; it seemed to him that this time he would definitely bring his task to a successful conclusion.

Having prepared a large canvas, Yury set to work on the picture with feverish speed, as if afraid to delay. When he daubed on the first colors and only beautiful, lush spots appeared on the canvas, everything inside him trembled with ecstasy and strength; his future painting easily and appealingly arose before him in all its details. But the further the work progressed, the more technical difficulties arose that Yury was unable to overcome. What in his imagination seemed bright, powerful, and magnificent appeared on the canvas as flat and impotent. Details no longer fascinated him, but confused and irritated him. He stopped hesitating and began to paint in a broad, careless manner, but then, instead of bright, powerful life, there emerged pretentiously and carelessly a picture of a hastily drawn, crude woman. There seemed to him nothing original or magnificent about it; everything was stale and trite. Then Yury realized that his picture was unoriginal, that he was simply imitating sketches by Mucha,[9] and that the very idea of his painting was banal.

[9] Alphonse Mucha (1860–1939), Czech painter and designer, active in France, who became best known for his Art Nouveau posters.

Yury felt oppressed and gloomy, as usual.

If for some reason he hadn't thought it shameful to cry, he'd have burst into tears, buried his face in the pillow, whined, and complained to someone about something, but not about his own inadequacy. Instead, he sat before his picture sullenly and reflected that life in general was boring, confusing, and futile, and that there was nothing left that he, Yury, could possibly take an interest in. He imagined with horror that he still had many years left to live, perhaps right here in this little town.

Then—death! Yury thought, his forehead cold as ice.

Suddenly he decided to portray death. He took a knife and with particularly severe malevolence began scraping off his painting of life. It irritated him that something he'd worked on with such enthusiasm was so difficult to erase. The paint came off reluctantly, the knife slipped, jumped, and twice cut the canvas. Then it turned out that his charcoal wouldn't show up on the painted surface and this was a source of acute suffering for Yury. He took a brush and began to make an outline in brown paint; then he began painting again slowly, carelessly, and with heavy, somber emotion. The work that he now conceived didn't suffer at all; rather it benefited from his carelessness and from the dull, heavy colors. But his original idea of death had for some reason disappeared, and Yury was now depicting old age. He painted it in the form of an emaciated, bony old woman, wandering along a well-trodden road into quiet, sad twilight. The last ray of sunlight had died out on the horizon; black crosses and indistinct, dark silhouettes could be glimpsed in its greenish glow. On the old woman's back lay a heavy, black coffin of great weight, pressing down on her bony shoulders. And her expression was lackluster and joyless; one of her feet was poised on the edge of a black abyss. The whole picture was murky, gloomy, and foreboding.

Yury was called to dinner, but he didn't go and kept on painting. Then Novikov arrived and began to tell him something or other, but he didn't listen or reply.

Novikov sighed and sat down on the sofa. He was glad to be quiet and to think; besides, he'd come to see Svarozhich only because he didn't like being at home alone. His distress was desolate and painful. Lida's refusal still weighed upon him, and it was impossible to figure out whether he was ashamed or depressed. He was very forthright and slow-witted, and didn't understand all the gossip about Lida and Zarudin that was beginning to circulate in town. He wasn't feeling jealous of Lida; he merely suffered from the dashed dream that at one point had seemed so close and real that he was already feeling happy.

Novikov had begun to think that everything in life had been ruined for him; nevertheless, it never occurred to him that if this were the case, there was no point in living and he should end it all. On the contrary, he thought that now that his own life had become one of pure torment, it was his duty, since he'd stopped worrying about personal happiness, to dedicate his life to other people. He couldn't account for it, but he'd decided to give up everything and move to St. Petersburg, to revive his ties with the party, and to throw himself headlong into death. This idea seemed both magnificent and exalted to him, and his awareness of the fact that this noble and splendid idea was his own relieved his sadness and gladdened his heart. His image of himself grew in his own eyes; it was surrounded by a pleasant, bright, sad halo, and the unintentional sad reproach to Lida almost made him cry.

Then he began to feel bored. Svarozhich continued to paint and paid no attention to him. Novikov stood up and walked toward him.

The painting was unfinished, but that was precisely why it produced the impression of a powerful hint. For the time being, Yury was unable to finish it.

The painting seemed wonderful to Novikov. His jaw dropped slightly and he looked at Yury with naive, childlike delight.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Yury.

It seemed to Yury that although the painting did, of course, possess some defects, and that these might even be obvious and considerable, it was still more interesting than any painting he'd ever seen. He was unable to explain why this was so, but if Novikov said it was a bad painting, he'd be genuinely offended and embittered. But Novikov said softly and ecstatically:

"Ve-ry nice!"

Yury felt as if he were a genius despising his own creation. He sighed meaningfully, tossed his brush aside, smearing paint on the corner of the couch, and walked away, without even glancing at his painting.

"Hey, my friend!" he said.

He almost confessed to himself and to Novikov that vague feeling occasioned by the joy of victory—that is, that he was totally incapable of making anything out of this auspicious sketch. But instead, he reflected and said aloud:

"There's no point in it at all!"

Novikov thought Yury was striking a pose, but his own disappointed distress immediately pierced his heart and he thought: That's true. But after a short silence he replied: "What do you mean, there's no point in it at all?"

Yury couldn't precisely answer this question and remained silent. Novikov looked at the picture a little longer, then lay down on the sofa.

"My friend, I read your article in the journal *Country*," he began again. "Well done!"

"To hell with it!" Yury replied in annoyance, not really sure why, but recalling Semyonov's words. "What good can come of it? They'll go on executing, robbing, and raping all the same. One must do more than write articles! I'm sorry I wrote it. . . . What of it? Maybe two or three idiots will read it, if that. In the end, what business is it of mine? Why, I ask, should I bang my head against a wall?"

Yury saw passing before his eyes the first years of his involvement in party activity: conspiratorial meetings, propaganda, risk and failures, his own en-

thusiasm, and the total apathy of those he wished to save. He paced the room and waved his arm dismissively.

"From that point of view it's not worth doing anything," Novikov drawled; and, remembering Sanin, he added: "You're all egoists, that's all there is to it!"

"It's not worth it," Yury said heatedly and sincerely, under the influence of the same recollections and the twilight that had begun to make everything in the room look pale. "If one speaks about humanity, what good are all our efforts, constitutions, and revolutions when we can't even imagine the impending prospects awaiting it? Perhaps the seeds of destruction lie in the very freedom we dream of, and once man has achieved his ideal, he'll revert and once more crawl around on all fours. . . . In order to start all over again? And even if I think only about myself, what can I achieve? At best, I can win fame by utilizing my own talents, I can nourish myself on the admiration of those beneath me, those less important—that is, precisely those I can't respect and whose admiration shouldn't really matter to me. And then live, live until I die . . . and no longer! Ultimately the crown of laurels would fit so snugly on my bald head that even I'd become fed up with it!"

"All this is about yourself!" Novikov muttered, feigning mockery. "So!"

But Yury didn't hear him and went on, listening to himself with grief and painful pleasure; his words seemed dismal and eloquent, and aroused in him a feeling of elevated self-esteem.

"In the worst case, I'll be an unacknowledged genius, a ridiculous dreamer, the subject of humorous sketches . . . absurd, of no use to anyone."

"Aha!" Novikov interrupted him in triumph, and even stood up. " 'Of no use to anyone'—that means you realize it yourself!"

"You're a strange fellow," Yury said; now it was his turn to interrupt. "Do you really think I don't know what to live for and what to believe in? Perhaps I might even submit joyfully to crucifixion if I believed my death would save the world! But I don't believe that: whatever I do, in the end it won't change the course of history, and the good I can accomplish will be so small, so insignificant, that if it didn't exist at all, the world would be not one iota worse off. Meanwhile, for this amount smaller than one iota, I must live and suffer and grievously await death!"

Yury didn't notice that he was talking about something else now, replying not to Novikov's words but to his own strange, oppressive feelings. All of a sudden he stopped short, unexpectedly remembering Semyonov, and felt a despicable, cold, terrifying shiver run down his spine.

"You know, this inevitability torments me," he said softly and confidentially, gazing unwittingly out of the darkened window. "I know it's natural and I can't do anything about it, but it's horrible and hideous!"

Novikov knew it was all true, and felt sad and afraid, but still he replied: "Death is a necessary physiological phenomenon."

What a fool! thought Yury with rage, and replied in annoyance: "Oh, my God! What difference does it make to us if our death serves any purpose or not!"

"What about your crucifixion?"

"That's another thing altogether," Yury said indecisively, after a momentary pause.

"You're contradicting yourself," Novikov observed with a feeling of superiority, avoiding Yury's eyes in a gesture of generosity.

Yury caught his tone and was very annoyed. He ran his fingers through his unruly black hair and grew angry.

"I never contradict myself. It's entirely understandable that if I were to die as a result of my own desire . . ."

"It's all the same," continued Novikov in the same tone, not yielding. "You all merely want fireworks, applause. . . . It's all egoism!"

"So what? It doesn't change matters."

The conversation became confused. Yury felt it had taken a wrong turn and couldn't catch the thread that only a few minutes ago had seemed so clear to him. He paced the room, gasping angrily; trying to soothe himself, he thought, as he usually did in such circumstances:

Occasionally it happens that I'm not in good form . . . sometimes I speak so clearly, as if I could see everything before my own eyes; at other times I become so completely tongue-tied . . . everything comes out clumsily . . . stupidly. . . . This can happen!

They remained silent. Yury paced the room, stopped near the window, and picked up his cap.

"Let's go for a stroll," he said.

"Let's go," Novikov agreed, with the secret hope, fear, and joy that they might accidentally meet Lida Sanina.

IX

They walked up and down the boulevard once or twice, meeting no one they knew; they listened to the music being played in the garden, as usual. It was discordant and out of tune, but from a distance it sounded tender and melancholy. They kept encountering men and women flirting with each other. Their laughter and loud, excited voices didn't blend with the soft, sad music and the soft, sad evening; that irritated Yury. At the very end of the boulevard they met Sanin, who greeted them cheerfully. Yury didn't like him very much, and as a result the conversation didn't go well. Sanin laughed at everything they happened to see; then he met Ivanov and set off with him.

"Where are you going?" asked Novikov.

"I want to treat my friend!" replied Ivanov, who took a bottle of vodka from his pocket and displayed it triumphantly.

Sanin laughed merrily.

The vodka and laughter struck Yury as unnatural and vulgar; he turned away in disgust. Sanin noticed it, but said nothing.

"Thank you, Lord, so to speak, that I'm not like this publican!" Ivanov said in a deep voice, smiling ambiguously.

Yury blushed.

He cracks jokes, too! he thought contemptuously, shrugged, and walked away.

"Novikov, you comatose Pharisee, come with us!" Ivanov cried.

"What the hell for?"

"To drink vodka!"

Novikov glanced wistfully down the boulevard, but Lida was nowhere to be seen.

"Lida's at home repenting of her sins," Sanin remarked with a smile.

"What nonsense," Novikov muttered in an offended tone. "I have a patient waiting."

"Who'll die without your help," Ivanov rejoined. "By the way, we can also finish the vodka without your assistance."

Should I get drunk, or what? Novikov wondered gloomily, and said: "Well, all right . . . let's go!"

They set off, and for a long time Yury could hear Ivanov's rude bass voice and Sanin's carefree, merry laugh.

He walked along the boulevard again. Some women's voices called out to him. Zina Karsavina and the teacher Dubova were sitting on one of the benches along the boulevard. It was already quite dark and he could scarcely make out their figures in their dark dresses; they weren't wearing hats and were holding books in their hands. Yury went up to them quickly and eagerly.

"Where've you come from?" he asked in greeting.

"We were in the library," Karsavina replied.

Dubova quietly moved aside, making room for Yury; although he really wanted to sit next to Karsavina, he felt awkward and sat down instead next to the unattractive teacher.

"Why do you look so gloomy?" asked Dubova, curling her thin, dry lips sarcastically, as she usually did.

"Why do you think I look gloomy? I'm very cheerful. But to tell the truth I'm a bit bored."

"Obviously, you have nothing to do," Dubova replied derisively.

"While you yourself have something to do?"

"Yes, and no time to weep."

"I'm not weeping."

"Well, you're whining," Dubova joked.

"My life is such that I've forgotten how to laugh."

Such a bitter note had sounded in his voice that everyone unwittingly fell silent. Yury remained quiet and smiled.

"One of my friends has said that my life's instructive," he added, even though no one had ever told him that.

"In what sense?" inquired Karsavina cautiously.

"In the sense of how not to live."

"Well, tell us all about it. Perhaps we can derive some benefit from your example," Dubova suggested.

Yury regarded his life as a complete failure and considered himself a totally unhappy man. He took some gloomy satisfaction in this and found it pleasant to complain about his life and other people. He never spoke to men about this, instinctively sensing that they wouldn't believe him; but to women, especially beautiful young women, he willingly talked about himself at great length. He was handsome and spoke well, and women always felt affection and pity for him.

On this occasion, too, having begun with a joke, Yury quickly assumed his usual tone and spoke at length about his life. According to him, he was a man of enormous power, consumed by his surroundings and circumstances, misunderstood by the party; the fact that he'd become just another student, exiled for something insignificant, instead of a leader of the people, was due to the vagaries of fate and human stupidity; he himself was not to blame. As to all people of great pride, it never occurred to him that this fact didn't demonstrate his exceptional strength, and that every man of genius was surrounded by just such circumstances and people. It seemed to him that only he himself was pursued by such an oppressive and invincible fate.

Since he spoke so eloquently, energetically, and candidly, it sounded very much like the truth; the young women believed him, pitied him, and grieved with him. The music continued out of tune, but plaintively; the evening was dark and meditative, and they all felt sad and dreamy. When Yury fell silent, Dubova, reflecting on the fact that her own life was boring and monotonous, and that she'd soon grow old without ever having experienced happiness or love, asked softly:

"Tell me, Yury Nikolaevich, have you ever considered the idea of suicide?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Just to know."

They were both silent.

"You were on the party committee, weren't you?" Karsavina asked with interest.

"Yes," Yury replied curtly and as if unwillingly, but he found it pleasant to admit it because he thought it aroused some obscure interest in this pretty young woman's eyes.

Then Yury escorted them home. They talked and laughed a great deal along the way, and it was no longer so dreary.

"What a fine fellow he is," said Karsavina after Yury had left.

"Be careful you don't fall in love with him!" Dubova said, wagging her finger.

"Don't be silly!" Karsavina exclaimed with secret, instinctive fear.

Yury returned home in an excited and happy frame of mind. He looked at the picture he'd begun, but didn't feel anything, and went to sleep feeling satisfied. But that night he saw voluptuous and radiant images in his dreams, as well as beautiful young women.

X

The next evening Yury returned to the place where he'd met Karsavina and Dubova. All day he'd found it pleasant to recall the evening spent with them; he wanted to meet them again, talk with them about the same things, and see once more the expression of affection and sympathy in their affable, gentle eyes.

The evening was perfectly clear, quiet, and warm. A fine, dry dust hung in the air above the streets, and there was no one on the boulevard except for a few random passers-by.

Yury shook his head angrily at the feeling of annoyance rising within him, as if someone had offended him; he walked slowly along the boulevard, his eyes fixed on the ground.

How boring, he thought. What can I do?

Suddenly the student Shafrov appeared, quickly striding toward him, swinging his arms and smiling to him courteously from afar.

"Why are you hanging around here?" he asked amicably, stopping and extending his large, broad hand to Svarozhich.

"I'm bored and have nothing to do. Where are you off to?" Yury asked in an offhand, disdainful manner. As a former member of the committee, he always talked to Shafrov like this because he'd always regarded him as a naive student who was just toying with the idea of revolution.

Shafrov smiled happily and contentedly.

"We're having a reading today," he said, showing him a pile of assorted thin pamphlets.

Yury mechanically picked one up, opened it, and read the long, dry title of a popular article on a social issue, one that he'd read a long time ago and completely forgotten.

"Where's your reading?" Yury asked with the same disdainful smile, handing back the pamphlet.

"In the local school," Shafrov replied, mentioning the school where Karsavina and Dubova both worked.

Yury recalled that Lyalya had mentioned these readings before, but then he hadn't paid any attention to them.

"Can I come along?" he asked Shafrov.

"Please do," Shafrov agreed at once, smiling happily.

He viewed Yury as a genuine activist and, exaggerating his role in the party, held him in esteem so high that it bordered on devotion.

"I'm very interested in this subject," Yury considered it necessary to add, thinking it nice that he'd be occupied that evening and might even get to see Karsavina.

"Yes, please do," Shafrov said again.

"Well, let's go."

They walked quickly along the boulevard, turned onto the bridge with its fresh, humid smell rising from both sides, and entered the two-story school building, where people were already gathering.

In a large, quiet, dark room set with even rows of chairs and benches, a white screen for a magic lantern was barely visible, and one could hear the sounds of restrained but animated laughter. Near a window, through which one could see both the darkened sky and the tops of dark-green trees, stood Lyalya and Dubova. They greeted Yury with rapturous exclamations.

"It's so good of you to come!" said Lyalya.

Dubova shook his hand vigorously.

"Why don't you start?" Yury asked, glancing furtively around the dark room but not seeing Karsavina. "Doesn't Zinaida Pavlovna attend these readings?" he asked, sounding uncertain and disappointed.

But at that very moment on the speaker's platform, right next to the screen, a match was struck and Karsavina appeared as she lit the candles. Her lovely, fresh face was brightly illumined from below and she was smiling cheerfully.

"To think I don't attend these lectures!" she exclaimed clearly, leaning over to shake Yury's hand.

Yury was heartened but silent as he took her hand, while she, leaning on him a little, easily jumped down from the platform. Yury caught the strong scent of her robust health and freshness.

"It's time to begin," Shafrov said, coming in from the other room.

The night watchman, treading heavily in his large boots, went around the room lighting the lamps one after another, and the hall was soon illuminated with bright, cheerful light. Shafrov opened the door to the corridor and announced loudly:

"Ladies and gentlemen, this way, please!"

At first one could hear the sound of hesitant footsteps, then it became

more pronounced as people began coming in through the door. Yury regarded them with curiosity; his customary perspicacious interest as a propagandist was aroused. There were old people and young, as well as children. Nobody sat down in the first row, but then some ladies unknown to Yury, the portly school director, and some familiar male and female teachers from the primary school took up their places there. The rest of the hall was filled by people in jackets and coats, soldiers, peasants, old women, and many children in assorted shirts and dresses.

Yury sat down at a table next to Karsavina and began to listen as Shafrov read quietly but poorly a paper on the right of universal suffrage. His voice was muffled and monotonous, and everything he read sounded like a statistical table; but people listened attentively. Only the intellectuals in the first row soon began whispering and fidgeting. Yury got annoyed with them and felt sorry that Shafrov was reading so poorly. When the student got tired, Yury said softly to Karsavina:

"Shall I continue reading?"

Karsavina glanced at him tenderly from under her eyelashes and said: "What a good idea! Yes, do read."

"It won't seem awkward?" he asked his confederate with a smile.

"Not at all! Everyone will be delighted."

And, taking advantage of the break, she told Shafrov. He was tired and depressed by the fact that he read so poorly; not only did he agree, he was even glad.

"Please do, please do," he repeated, as was his custom, and gave up his place.

Yury liked to read and was good at it. Without looking around, he climbed onto the platform and began in a strong, resonant voice. Once or twice he glanced at Karsavina, and both times met her bright, expressive gaze. Smiling at her in embarrassment and joy, he turned back to the book and read in an even louder and more expressive voice; he felt as if he were performing some incomprehensibly fine and interesting task for her.

When he finished, the people in the first row began to clap. Yury bowed gravely and, leaving the platform, smiled broadly at Karsavina, as if wishing to say to her, That was for you!

The audience, stamping their feet, exchanging comments, and pushing back their chairs, began to disperse, but Yury stayed behind to make the acquaintance of two ladies who said a few nice words to him about his reading.

Then they began putting out the lights and it became darker in the room than before.

"Thank you," said Shafrov warmly, squeezing Yury's hand. "If people would only read like that all the time!"

Reading was Shafrov's job and consequently he considered himself obliged to Yury as if for a personal favor, even though he said he was thanking him in the name of "the people." Shafrov uttered this word steadfastly and confidently.

"There are few among us who do anything for the people," he said, looking as if he were letting Yury in on a big secret. "And if they do, it's done . . . halfheartedly. It really seems strange to me: to entertain a group of bored gentlemen, they hire dozens of first-rate actors, singers, and readers, while for the people someone like me sits down to read." Shafrov waved his arm with good-natured irony. "And everyone's satisfied. What more do they need?"

"That's true," said Dubova, "it's revolting to see: whole columns in the newspapers are devoted to describing how marvelous actors are, while here . . ."

"But what good work this is!" Shafrov said enthusiastically, and began gathering his pamphlets together lovingly.

Blessed naiveté! thought Yury, but Karsavina's presence and his own success made him good and kind; this simplicity even moved him somewhat.

"Where are you off to now?" asked Dubova when they'd reached the street.

It was much brighter outside than back in the room, even though stars had just begun to appear in the sky.

"Shafrov and I are going to the Ratovs'," said Dubova. "You can walk Zina home."

"With pleasure," Yury said sincerely.

They went their separate ways.

Karsavina shared an apartment with Dubova in the small wing of a house set in a large but poor garden. All the way there Yury and Karsavina talked about their impressions of the reading; it seemed more and more to Yury that he'd done something significant and good.

At the gate Karsavina said, "Would you like to come in?"

"I would," Yury agreed cheerfully.

Karsavina opened the gate and they entered a small courtyard overgrown with grass, beyond which stood the dark garden.

"Go into the garden," said Karsavina with a laugh. "I'd invite you into our rooms, but I'm afraid I haven't been home since morning so I don't know whether it's neat enough to receive guests!"

She went inside while Yury slowly made his way to the fragrant, verdant garden. He didn't go far, but stopped on the path and looked with anxious curiosity at the open, dark windows of the apartment; it seemed to him that something special, beautiful, and mysterious was happening in there.

Karsavina appeared on the porch and Yury could scarcely recognize her: she'd taken off her black dress and put on a thin, short-sleeved Ukrainian blouse with a low neck and a blue skirt.

"Here I am," she said, smiling in embarrassment for some reason.

"I see," Yury replied with a mysterious expression that she understood.

She smiled and turned gracefully, and they walked along the path among low green lilac bushes and high grass.

There were large and small cherry trees with the strong odor of sap on their new leaves. Behind the garden there was a meadow covered with flowers and tall uncut grass.

"Let's sit here," Karsavina said.

They sat down on a ramshackle wattle fence and gazed across the meadow at the translucent setting sun.

Yury reached for a branch of lilac and they were showered with little dewdrops.

"Would you like me to sing for you?" asked Karsavina.

"Of course I would," Yury replied.

Just as she had done by the river, Karsavina thrust out her chest, clearly outlined beneath her thin blouse, and began to sing: "Oh, luxuriant star of love . . ."

Her voice rang out smoothly, naturally, and passionately in the evening air. Yury fell silent, hardly breathing or taking his eyes off her. She felt his gaze, closed her eyes, lifted her chest higher, and sang even better and louder. Everything seemed to fall silent in order to listen to her; Yury recalled the rapt and mysterious silence that reigns when a nightingale sings in the forest at springtime.

When she fell silent after a high silvery note, it seemed to become even quieter. The sunset had faded entirely and the sky had grown deeper and darker. The shimmering leaves were barely visible or audible; the grass rustled and something tender and sweet-smelling like a sigh floating in air came wafting from the meadow and spread through the garden. Karsavina glanced at Yury, her eyes gleaming in the twilight.

"Why are you so quiet?" she asked.

"It's very beautiful here!" Yury whispered. Once again he took hold of a branch and showered them with dewdrops.

"Yes, it is!" Karsavina replied dreamily. "It's good to be alive!" she added, then fell silent.

In Yury's mind a familiar, deceptively somber thought began to rise, but it didn't take shape and vanished.

Two shrill whistles came from the other side of the meadow and then all became quiet again.

"Do you like Shafrov?" Karsavina asked unexpectedly, then began laughing at her own question.

A feeling of jealousy stirred in Yury's breast, but he replied in earnest, forcing himself somewhat.

"He's a fine fellow."

"He's so very devoted to his work!"

Yury was silent.

A light, whitish mist began to rise above the meadow, turning the grass white with dew.

"It's getting damp," Karsavina said with a slight shrug.

Yury glanced unwittingly at her round, soft shoulders and was embarrassed; she caught his glance and was embarrassed too, but felt cheerful and secure.

"Let's go."

With regret they made their way back along the narrow path, brushing gently against each other. The garden was empty and dark; when Yury looked around, it seemed to him that some entirely private, mysterious life must now be beginning there: shadows would steal among the low trees and over the dewy grass, the twilight would fade, and silence would fall with its own inaudible, greenish voice. He said all this to Karsavina. The young woman glanced around and gazed into the dark garden with thoughtful, shining eyes. Yury thought that if suddenly she were to throw off her clothes and then, bare, light, and gay, run through the dewy grass into the mysterious green grove, it wouldn't be at all strange, but splendid and natural; instead of destroying the verdant life of the dark garden, it would only enhance it. Yury wanted to tell her this too, but he didn't dare; instead, he began talking about the reading and the people. But the conversation didn't go well and he fell silent, as if they were talking about something other than what needed to be said. So they walked as far as the gate in silence, smiling at each other and brushing the wet, dewy bushes with their shoulders. It seemed that everything had become quiet and was as meditative and happy as they were.

As before, the courtyard was deserted and still, and the white wing of the house with its open windows could be seen in the darkness. But the gate to the street had been left open and hurried footsteps could be heard in the rooms, and the sounds of drawers being opened and closed.

"Olya's back," said Karsavina.

"Zina, is that you?" Dubova asked from inside, and by her voice it was clear that something terrible had happened.

She came out onto the porch looking distraught and pale.

"Where've you been? I've been looking for you. Semyonov's dying," she said hurriedly, gasping for breath.

"What?" Karsavina asked in horror, taking a step toward her.

"Yes, he's dying. His throat filled with blood. Anatoly Pavlovich says he's done for. They've taken him to the hospital. It was so strange, so unexpected . . . we were sitting having tea with the Ratovs. He was so cheerful, arguing with Novikov about something or other; then suddenly he started coughing, stood up, staggered, and blood spurted out . . . right onto the tablecloth, into a little bowl of jam . . . all thick and dark!"

"And does he . . . know?" Yury asked with uncanny curiosity, instantly recalling that moonlit night, the black shadow, and Semyonov's irritatingly mournful, weak voice saying, "You'll still be alive . . . you'll walk past my grave and stop to relieve yourself on it, and I'll . . ."

"He seems to know," Dubova replied, wringing her hands nervously. "He

looked at us and said, 'What's this?' Then, shaking from head to foot, he added, 'Already?' Oh, how hideous and terrible it is!"

Everyone was silent.

It had grown completely dark, and even though everything was as translucent and beautiful as before, it now seemed dreary and gloomy.

"Death's a horrible thing!" Yury said, turning pale.

Dubova sighed and looked down. Karsavina's chin was trembling and she was smiling sorrowfully and guiltily. She couldn't feel the same dejection as the others because life filled her whole body and wouldn't allow her to concentrate on death. Somehow she couldn't believe or even imagine that on such a lovely summer evening, just when she was feeling so happy and full of light and joy, anyone could be suffering and dying. It was only natural, but for some reason it felt wrong to her. Ashamed of her own feelings, she tried unconsciously to suppress them and to muster others; as a result she expressed her sympathy and anxiety more than the rest.

"Oh, the poor man! will he . . . ?"

Karsavina wanted to ask, Will he die soon? but she choked on the words and annoyed Dubova by asking senseless, pointless questions.

"Anatoly Pavlovich said he'd die tonight or tomorrow morning," Dubova replied indistinctly.

Karsavina said timidly and softly, "Shall we go to see him? Or perhaps that's unnecessary? I don't know."

The same question occurred to them all: was it necessary to see Semyonov die, and would it be a good thing or a bad thing? They all wanted to go but were afraid of what they would see; it seemed like a very good idea, but also a very bad one.

Yury shrugged indecisively.

"Let's go. Perhaps we won't have to go in, and perhaps . . ."

"Maybe he wants to see someone," Dubova agreed with relief.

"Let's go," Karsavina said decisively.

"Shafrov and Novikov are there," Dubova added, as if to justify herself.

Karsavina ran into the house for her hat and coat, and everyone, gloomy and despondent, set off through town to a large, gray, poorly plastered three-story hospital, where Semyonov lay dying.

It was dark in the corridors with their low, resonant ceilings, and there was a strong smell of carbolic acid and iodoform. As they passed the psychiatric ward they heard someone speaking quickly and angrily in a strangely strident voice, and because no one was visible, it seemed very eerie. They glanced apprehensively at a small, dark square window. An old gray-haired man with a long white beard like a bib, wearing a long white apron, met them in the corridor, shuffling in his large boots.

"Whom do you wish to see?" he asked, stopping.

"A student was brought here . . . Semyonov . . . today," said Dubova.

"In the sixth ward. Upstairs, please," the attendant said and walked away. They heard him spit noisily on the floor and rub the spot with his foot.

It was brighter and cleaner upstairs and the ceilings weren't vaulted. A door with a little sign saying "Doctor's Office" was ajar. Inside a lamp was lit and someone was clinking glass bottles.

Yury glanced inside and spoke.

The bottles stopped clinking and Ryazantsev came out, looking fresh and cheerful as always.

"Ah!" he said loudly and cheerfully, obviously accustomed to the surroundings that the others found so oppressive. "I'm on duty today. Greetings, ladies!"

And then immediately, arching his brows, he announced in an entirely different voice, gloomy and portentous: "It seems he's already unconscious. Go in. Novikov and the others are there."

As they walked in single file along the corridor that was excessively clean and deserted, past large white doors with black numbers on them, Ryazantsev said:

"We've already sent for a priest. It's astonishing how fast he was finished! Even I was surprised. Recently he's been getting colds, and in his condition that was the last straw. He's in here."

Ryazantsev opened a large white door and went in. The others collided in the doorway; they pushed one another awkwardly and then followed him in.

The ward was large and clean. Four beds were empty and covered identical with coarse gray blankets neatly tucked in; for some reason they resembled coffins. On one bed sat a small, wrinkled old man in a robe, fearfully eyeing the newcomers; on the sixth bed, stretched out beneath the same kind of coarse blanket, lay Semyonov. Next to him, hunched over on a chair, sat Novikov, while Ivanov and Shafrov stood by the window. Everyone felt uneasy and awkward greeting each other and shaking hands in the presence of the dying Semyonov, but for some reason it was just as awkward not to do so, as if underscoring the proximity of death; consequently, there was a pause. Some exchanged greetings, others didn't. Everyone remained standing in the same place, looking at Semyonov with timid, fearful curiosity.

Semyonov was breathing slowly and with difficulty. He bore little resemblance to the Semyonov they all knew. In general, he didn't look at all like a living being. Although he still had the same facial features as when he was alive and the same limbs as other people had, it now seemed as if both his features and his body were somehow special, terrifying, and immobile. What animated and moved the bodies of other people so simply and comprehensibly seemed not to exist for him. Somewhere in the depths of his strangely immobile body something swift and horrible was happening, as if hastening to accomplish some essential and inevitable task; all the life remaining in him was directed there, seemingly watching this task and listening to it with strained, inexplicable attention.

The lamp hanging from the middle of the ceiling clearly and distinctly illumined his motionless, blind, and deaf features.

Everyone stood there staring in silence, unable to avert their eyes, holding their breath, as if afraid to disturb something majestic; and in that silence the sound of Semyonov's monstrous, whistling, and arduous breathing was terribly conspicuous.

The door opened and they could hear the staccato steps of an old man. A small, corpulent priest had arrived together with a gaunt, swarthy man who recited psalms. Sanin came in with them too. The priest, coughing occasionally, greeted the doctors and bowed politely to them. They replied in unison to his greeting with extreme alacrity and exaggerated civility, and then fell silent. Sanin, without greeting anyone, sat down on the windowsill and began looking with interest at Semyonov and those assembled here, trying to understand what he and they were feeling and thinking.

Semyonov's breathing continued as before and he didn't move.

"Is he unconscious?" the priest asked softly, addressing no one in particular.

"Yes," Novikov replied rapidly.

Sanin emitted some unintelligible sound. The priest glanced at him questioningly, but, hearing nothing, turned away, rearranged his hair, put on his stole, and began to read in a high-pitched, sugary tenor with great expressiveness, as befitted the death of a man professing the Christian faith.

The psalm reader turned out to have a hoarse, unpleasant bass, and as these two dissimilar voices converged and diverged, they sounded sad and strange in their dissonance under the high ceiling.

When the loud, shrill lamentation began, all those present glanced with involuntary fright at the face of the dying man. It seemed to Novikov, who was standing the closest, that Semyonov's eyelids fluttered a little and his sightless eyes turned slightly in the direction of the voices. But the others thought he remained just as strangely motionless as before.

At the first notes Karsavina started weeping softly and mournfully; she didn't wipe away the tears streaming down her beautiful, young face. Everyone glanced at her and then Dubova began crying too; even the men felt tears welling up in their eyes and clenched their teeth, trying to restrain them. Every time the chanting became louder, the young women's weeping increased; meanwhile Sanin frowned and squared his shoulders in annoyance, thinking that if Semyonov could hear, it would be intolerable for him to listen to this chanting, so painful even for healthy people who are far from death's door.

"Not so loud," he said angrily to the priest.

At first the priest leaned forward politely to hear his comment, but after doing so, he began to chant even louder. The psalm reader glared sternly at Sanin, while everyone else looked at him apprehensively, as if he'd said something inappropriate and wrong.

Sanin waved his hand in annoyance and fell silent.

When everything was done and the priest had wrapped the cross in his stole, the atmosphere became even more oppressive. Semyonov remained motionless as before.

Then the same terrible but undeniable idea occurred to all of them: they wanted everything to end quickly and Semyonov to die. With a feeling of shame and horror they tried to conceal and suppress this shared desire, afraid even to exchange glances.

"If only it were over," Sanin said softly. "It's a nasty business!"

"Hmm, yes!" Ivanov replied.

They spoke softly, and although it was obvious that Semyonov could hear nothing, the others still stared at them in indignation.

Shafrov wanted to say something, but at that moment a new, inexpressibly piteous, sad sound made them all shudder painfully.

"Ugh . . . ugh-ugh," Semyonov moaned.

And then, as if finding what was needed instead of lapsing into silence, he began to draw out this long, moaning sound, interrupted only by his own hoarse, labored breathing.

At first those around him seemed not to understand what was happening, but then Karsavina, Dubova, and Novikov began weeping. The priest slowly and solemnly began to recite the prayer for the dying. His plump, good-natured face expressed tenderness and sublime grief. Several minutes elapsed. Semyonov suddenly fell silent.

"It is finished," the priest muttered.

But at that moment Semyonov slowly and with considerable effort moved his tightly compressed lips, his face contracted as if in a smile, and everyone heard his hollow, incredibly weak, horrible voice; it seemed to come from somewhere deep within his chest, as if from under the coffin lid:

"What a windbag!" he uttered, looking directly at the priest.

Then he shuddered, opened his eyes wide with an expression of insane terror, and stretched himself out full length.

Everyone heard his words, but no one stirred; the expression of sublime grief instantly disappeared from the priest's sweaty, reddish face. He glanced around timidly, but no one was looking at him; only Sanin smiled.

Semyonov moved his lips again, but there was no sound; one side of his thin, fair mustache drooped. Then he stretched out again and became even longer and more appalling.

There was not another sound, not another movement.

This time nobody cried. The gradual approach of death was more terrible and sorrowful than its immediacy. Everyone even felt rather strange that this exhausting, tormenting affair had ended so quickly and so simply. They remained standing next to the bed, staring at the dead man's pointed features, as if expecting something more to happen, trying to summon up pity and fear; they watched with strained attention as Novikov closed Semyonov's eyes and crossed his arms on his chest. Then they began to file out of the

room, shuffling their feet in a reserved way. Lights had already been lit in the corridor and things out there were so simple and familiar that everyone breathed more easily. The priest went first. He took tiny, mincing steps; trying to say something nice to console the young people, he sighed and said softly:

"I feel sorry for the young man, all the more because he died, apparently, without having repented. But God is merciful, you know."

"Yes . . . of course!" replied Shafrov out of politeness; he was standing closest to the priest.

"Does he have any family?" asked the priest, feeling bolder.

"I really don't know," Shafrov replied, finding himself at a loss.

Everyone exchanged glances and it seemed odd and even indecent that no one knew whether Semyonov had any relatives and where they lived.

"His sister's a student in high school somewhere," Karsavina observed.

"Ah! Well, then, good-bye!" said the priest, tipping his hat with his chubby fingers.

"Good-bye!" they replied in unison.

On reaching the street they sighed with relief and halted.

"Well, where to now?" asked Shafrov.

At first they all shuffled indecisively, but then somehow all at once began to take their leave and headed off in different directions.

XI

When Semyonov saw his own blood and felt the ominous emptiness around and within him, and when later they lifted him up, carried him away, put him to bed, and did everything for him that he used to do for himself, he understood that he was dying and felt strange that he wasn't afraid of death in the least.

When Dubova referred to his fear, she'd reached that conclusion because she herself was afraid; fear in a healthy person confronted by death convinced her that a dying person must fear it infinitely more. She, like all the others, interpreted Semyonov's pallor and wandering gaze—actually resulting from his weakness and loss of blood—as an indication of his fear. But that wasn't really the case, just as the question posed by him to the doctor, "Already?" wasn't really the case either.

Semyonov had always feared death, especially since learning that he had consumption. When he first found out, his condition was terribly tormenting; in all likelihood, it resembled that of a man with no hope of reprieve from a death penalty.

It almost seemed to him that the world had ceased to exist from that moment; everything he'd previously found so beautiful, pleasant, and cheerful had disappeared irrevocably; everything was dying and in a state of insufferable agony, which right now, any minute or any second, must be resolved by something unbearably horrible, yawning like a black abyss.

It was precisely in the form of a huge, round, totally black abyss that Semyonov imagined death. Wherever he went, whatever he did, this round black void stood before him; all sounds, colors, and sensations were lost and vanished in its black emptiness.

This was a terrible frame of mind, but soon it began to diminish. The more time passed and the closer Semyonov got to death, the further away from it he felt and the less intelligible and distinct it became to him.

Everything around him, all sounds, colors, and sensations remained exactly as he had always known them.

The sun shone just as brightly, people went about their business in the same way, and Semyonov himself had both important and unimportant things to do. Just as before, he got up in the morning, carefully washed himself, had dinner at noon, found tasty things good to eat and nasty things not so good; just as before he enjoyed seeing the sun and moon, and was angry at the prolonged rain and slush; as before, he played billiards with Novikov and others in the evening, read books and couldn't help finding some of them important and interesting, others boring and foolish. At first it seemed strange, insulting, even disturbing that everything around him remained as before, not only in nature and in the people surrounding him but in himself as well. He tried to change all this, to force everyone to take an interest in him and his death, to comprehend the full horror of his predicament, to realize that everything was over. But when he talked about it to his acquaintances, he saw that it wasn't right to do so. At first his acquaintances were surprised; then they didn't believe it, although they expressed their sympathy and their disbelief in the doctor's grim prognosis; then they tried to banish the unpleasant impression by talking insistently about something else; and a minute or two later Semyonov himself, without noticing it, was talking with them not about death but about life. All his efforts to involve the whole world in what was happening to him turned out to be entirely ineffectual.

Then he tried to withdraw, become introspective, and suffer all alone the complete and invincible awareness of the full horror of his death. But it was precisely because everything remained the same all around him and in his own life that it seemed absolutely absurd to imagine that it could be otherwise and that he, Semyonov, wouldn't always exist in exactly the same way as he did now. And the thought of death, at first piercing his heart sharply, began to grow less acute and to release his constricted soul. Moments of

complete oblivion began to occur more and more frequently, and once again life became richer with its colors, movements, and sounds.

A sense of the proximity of the round, black abyss came only in the late evenings when he was alone. When he put out the light, it seemed to him in the darkness that something formless and faceless rose slowly above him and whispered inexorably: Sh . . . sh . . . sh. . . . And to this soundless, ceaseless whispering in the darkness something from within him replied in another miserable, horrible whisper. Then he felt as if everything were merging more and more into this whisper, this emptiness, this darkness, and that his own body was quivering in this chaos of whispers, emptiness, and darkness like a slender, pathetic splinter of wood, ready to disintegrate at any moment and disappear without a trace.

Then he took to sleeping with the lamp still lit. In its light the whisper became inaudible, the darkness receded, and the sense of all-enveloping emptiness disappeared because it was filled by thousands of details of daily life, all very ordinary and understandable: the chairs, the light, the inkstand, his own feet, an unfinished letter needing to be finished, an icon with a lamp he'd never lit, boots he'd forgotten to leave outside the door, and other items and cares surrounding him.

Yet even then the whisper was heard in those corners where the lamplight didn't reach: the darkness grew thicker there and the same all-enveloping emptiness yawned like a bottomless pit. Semyonov was afraid to look into the darkness and to think about it. All he had to do was remember the darkness and emptiness, and they rose up from all corners and filled the room, surrounded him, extinguished the lamp, drowned out his cares, and sealed the world off from him with an impenetrable shroud of ghastly, cold mist. This was inexpressibly horrible and tormenting. At such moments he wanted to cry like a little boy and bang his head against the wall.

But with every passing day, as Semyonov's life dwindled, these sensations became more and more routine. They erupted with terrible new strength only when some word, gesture, or the sight of a funeral, graveyard, or coffin reminded him that he was really dying. He avoided these reminders, no longer taking those streets that led past the cemetery and never going to sleep on his back with his arms crossed on his chest.

It was as if two lives had taken shape in him: his former extensive and observable life that couldn't accommodate the idea of death, forgot all about it, went about its business, and hoped to live forever, no matter what; and the other life, secret, elusive, hidden like a worm in an apple, which like black darkness filtered through his first life and, like venom, poisoned it with unbearable, inevitable torment.

There was something special about this double life: when Semyonov finally stood face to face with death and understood that his life was finished, he experienced hardly any fear.

"Already?" he asked, only so as to know for sure.

After realizing from the faces of those around him that "already" was the right answer to his question, Semyonov was merely surprised that it was all so simple and natural, like the end of a difficult task that had exhausted him by requiring more strength than he possessed. But he understood right away with a special new inner awareness that it couldn't be otherwise because death comes only when the organism lacks the strength to go on living.

He merely felt sorry that he would never get to see anything again. As they took him off to the hospital in a cab, he looked around silently, his tearful eyes wide open, trying to take everything in with one glance, and suffering because he couldn't retain the whole world in his memory to the very last detail, with its sky, people, verdure, and its spacious light-blue vistas. He found equally precious and dear all those little things he'd never noticed before, as well as those he'd always considered important and beautiful: the translucent darkening sky with its golden stars, the gaunt back of the cabman in his shabby blue jacket, Novikov with his sad, frightened face, the dusty road, the houses with bright lights in their windows, the dark trees receding quietly behind them, the sound of the wheels, the warm evening breeze—everything that he saw and heard and felt.

Afterward, in the hospital, he hurriedly and greedily ran his eyes over the ward, followed and remembered every movement, every face, and every object, until his physical suffering began to displace his surroundings and envelop him in loneliness. All his sensations moved to somewhere deep within his breast, to the source of his suffering. Gradually he began to withdraw from life. When something appeared before him, it already seemed alien and unnecessary. The final struggle between life and death had begun; it filled his entire being, creating its own special, lonely world of vacillation, glimmers of life, downturns, declines, and desperate efforts.

Sometimes he'd experience a moment of clarity; the torments eased, his breathing became deeper and calmer, and images and sounds appeared more or less clearly through the white shroud. But they seemed insignificant and weak, as if they came from far away.

Semyonov heard sounds clearly, but it was as if he didn't really hear them properly, and figures around him moved noiselessly, as though in a motion picture projector; at times familiar faces would appear in his field of vision, but it was as if they were unknown to him, and didn't trigger any recollections.

Near his neighbor's bed sat a man whose face was strangely clean-shaven, reading a newspaper aloud, but it never occurred to Semyonov to think about why he was reading aloud or to whom. He distinctly heard that the elections in parliament had been postponed, that an attempt had been made on the life of the Grand Prince, but the words were somehow empty, rising and bursting in a void, like bubbles, then disappearing without trace or sound. Lips moved, concealing and revealing teeth, round eyes rolled, sheets

of paper rustled, the lamp shone on the ceiling evenly, as if large, ominous black flies were circling it incessantly and noiselessly.

Then something was born in his brain, glimmered like a bright spot, and began to flare up, illuminating more and more all around. Suddenly, with complete clarity and consciousness, Semyonov understood that everything was unnecessary for him now, that all the hustle and bustle of the world couldn't add even one more hour to his life because he had to die.

Once more he sank into rolling waves of dark mist, and the silent mortal battle began again between two terrible, secret forces trying to destroy one another with their imperceptible efforts, but enveloping his whole world in convulsions.

The second time he returned to life was when they began weeping and chanting over him; all this was totally unnecessary and had no connection whatsoever with what was happening within him. But once again for a brief moment it produced in him a bright spot, fanned it, and he saw and understood completely the sublimely sad face of the man who meant nothing to him and to whom he meant nothing either.

This was his last sign of life; it was followed by something completely incomprehensible and unimaginable for living human beings.

XII

"Let's go back to my place; we'll hold a wake for the dear departed soul!" Ivanov said to Sanin.

Sanin nodded in silence.

They stopped at a shop for vodka and snacks and continued on their way, catching up with Yury Svarozhich, who looked despondent as he walked along the boulevard.

Semyonov's death had made a bewildering and painful impression on Yury, who found it both necessary and yet impossible to make sense of it.

"Well, it's all very simple." Yury tried to draw a straight, short line in his mind. "A person doesn't exist before he's born, and that doesn't seem terrible or incomprehensible. And a person no longer exists after he's dead, and that's just as simple and comprehensible. Death, like the complete collapse of a machine that produces the life force, is entirely understandable, and there's no horror in it. Once there was a lad named Yura, who went to school, broke his enemies' noses in the second grade, and cut down nettles; he had his own special, surprising, complicated, entertaining life. Then this Yura died, and instead of him, there's someone entirely different, the student

Yury Svarozhich, who walks and thinks. If they were ever to meet, Yura would never be able to understand today's Yury Svarozhich, and therefore might even hate him as a person who, for all one knows, might become his tutor and create considerable unpleasantness for him! In other words, there's a gap between them; in other words, the lad Yura really died. Yura died; I myself died and didn't notice it until now. That's what happened. It's simple and natural! Yes. . . . Otherwise, what do we lose in dying? What, exactly? In life, in any case, more bad happens than good. Nevertheless, joy still exists and it's hard to lose it, but the relief provided by death from the large mass of evil must still be seen as a great plus. Yes, it's very simple and not in the least bit terrible!" Yury said aloud with a sigh of relief, but immediately pulled himself up with a feeling of acute spiritual pain: "No! The fact is the whole world, alive, extremely subtle and complex, in one instant turns into nothing, into a clod, a despicable lump. This isn't the rebirth of the lad Yura into Yury Svarozhich; it's absurdly and sickeningly revolting, and therefore incomprehensible and terrible."

A light film of cold sweat covered Yury's forehead.

He started to muster all his mental powers to understand the condition that everyone finds impossible to bear but that everyone has to bear, just as Semyonov had recently done.

He didn't die in fear! Yury thought to himself, smiling at the strangeness of his thought. On the contrary, he was still mocking us, with the priest, the singing, and the tears. . . .

It seemed that there was a certain point that, if suddenly grasped, would illumine everything. But it was as if a thick, impregnable wall stood between his soul and that point. His mind glided over an imperceptibly smooth surface, and just when it seemed that meaning was near, his thought turned out to be at the bottom again, where it was before. In whatever direction he spread this net of subtle thoughts and ideals, invariably the very same flat and painfully unsatisfying words came back to him: incomprehensible and terrible! His thoughts went no further; indeed, it seemed they could go no further.

This was excruciating and sapped his mind, soul, and entire body. Grief invaded his heart, his thoughts became vapid and pallid, his head ached, and he wanted to sit down right there on the boulevard and give up on everything, even life itself.

How could Semyonov laugh, knowing that in a few moments everything would end? What is he—a hero? No, this isn't a question of heroism. Can it be that death isn't as terrible as I think?

At that moment Ivanov loudly and unexpectedly called out to him.

"Ah, so it's you! Where are you going?" Yury asked with a shudder.

"To a wake for our dear departed friend!" Ivanov replied coarsely and cheerfully. "Come along with us. Why do you always dawdle around alone?"

It must have been because Yury was feeling so frightened and dejected that Sanin and Ivanov didn't seem as unpleasant as usual.

"All right, let's go!" he agreed, but immediately remembered his superiority over them and said to himself: What on earth will I do with them? Drink vodka? Talk vulgar nonsense?

He was just about to turn down the invitation, but his whole being instinctively resisted the loneliness, so he went along.

Ivanov and Sanin were silent, so they reached Ivanov's house in silence.

It was already totally dark; they could scarcely make out on a bench near the gate the figure of a man holding a thick stick with a crooked handle.

"Ah, it's my uncle, Peter Ilich!" Ivanov cried joyfully.

"It is," the man replied in a low bass, his powerful voice resounding authoritatively in the night air

Yury recalled that Ivanov's uncle was an elderly, drunken member of the church choir. He had a gray mustache like a soldier at the time of Nicholas I, and his well-worn black double-breasted jacket always had a nasty smell.

Boo-oom, boo-oom! His voice sounded like something striking against a barrel when Ivanov introduced him to Yury.

Yury shook his hand clumsily and didn't know what to say or how to behave with such a fellow. But he recalled at once that for him, Yury Svarozhich, all men must be treated equally, so he walked along with the old singer, trying to let him go first.

Ivanov lived in a place that more resembled a storeroom than living quarters because there was so much dust, trash, and disorder. But when his host lit the lamp, Yury saw that all the walls were decorated with prints and paintings by Vasnetsov,[10] and the piles of trash turned out to be stacks of books.

"Do you like Vasnetsov?" asked Ivanov and, without waiting for an answer, went to fetch some plates.

Sanin told Peter Ilich that Semyonov had died.

"May he rest in peace!" The barrel resounded once again; and after falling silent for a moment, Peter Ilich added: "Well, then . . . it's a good thing. Everything's been completed."

Yury looked at him thoughtfully and suddenly took a liking to the old singer.

Ivanov came back bringing some bread and pickles on a plate, and some glasses. Setting all this on a table covered with a sheet of newspaper, he picked up a bottle and with a swift, almost imperceptible movement removed the cork without spilling a drop.

"What skill!" said Peter Ilich approvingly.

"It's immediately apparent which of us knows what he's doing!" Ivanov joked smugly, pouring the light-greenish liquid into the glasses. "Well, gentlemen," he said, picking up his glass and raising his voice, "to the repose of the departed, etc., etc.!"

[10] Viktor Mikailovich Vasnetsov (1848–1927), Russian painter, was an outstanding representative of Slavic revival, using fairy tales and folk epics for his subject matter.

They began eating snacks, then drank again and again. They talked very little and continued to drink. It soon became warm and stuffy in the little room. Peter Ilich lit a cigarette and at once the air was filled with the blue fumes of cheap tobacco smoke. Yury began to feel dizzy from all the vodka, smoke, and heat. He remembered Semyonov again.

"Death is a very nasty business!"

"Why?" asked Peter Ilich. "Death? Oh! But it . . . it's inevitable! Death! And if one were to live forever? Oh! Beware of talking like that. Eternal life! What on earth?"

Yury suddenly wondered what it would be like to live forever. He imagined some endless gray ribbon extending aimlessly and exhaustingly into the void, as if carried along from one wave to the next. All conception of colors and sounds, the depth and fullness of experience were somehow swept away and rendered pale, merging into gray obscurity, flowing without course or movement. This was no longer life; it was also death.

Yury grew really frightened. "Yes, of course," he muttered.

"Obviously, it's made a big impression on you," Novikov observed.

"Who wouldn't be impressed by it?" Yury asked, instead of replying.

Ivanov nodded vaguely and began telling Peter Ilich about Semyonov's last moments.

It had now become unbearably stuffy in the room. Yury watched mechanically as the vodka, glistening in the lamplight, was transferred to Ivanov's thin red lips; he felt that everything around him was beginning to spin and swim.

"Ah-ah-ah-ah," a faint, mysteriously sad voice sang into his ear.

"No, death is a terrifying thing!" he repeated, without noticing it himself, as if replying to that mysterious voice.

"You're much too nervous about it!" Ivanov said condescendingly.

"And are you ready for it?" Yury asked mechanically.

"Me? Well, no! Of course I don't want to die: it's a futile task; it's much more amusing to live . . . but if one has to die, it's better to do it instantaneously and without any idle chatter.

"You haven't died so you don't know," Sanin said with a smile.

"That's certainly true!" Ivanov agreed with a laugh.

"All this has been said before," Yury remarked suddenly with desolate rancor. "You can say what you want, but death is still death! It's horrible both in and of itself, and a person who . . . well, a person who's aware of life must find that this inevitable, violent end will destroy any joy in life! What's the sense?"

"This has also been said before," Ivanov interrupted with a grin, he too with unexpected irritation. "You all think that only you . . ."

"What's the sense?" Peter Ilich repeated his question thoughtfully.

"There isn't any!" cried Ivanov, with the same incomprehensible rancor.

"No, that's impossible," Yury objected. "Everything's too wise and . . ."

"In my opinion, there's nothing good," Sanin added.

"What do you mean? What about nature?"

"What about nature?" Sanin said with a faint smile, waving his hand dejectedly. "It's merely customary to say that nature's perfect. But to tell the truth it's just as bad as man: each of us, even without any special effort of the imagination, can imagine a world a hundred times better than this one. Why don't we have perpetual warmth, light, and an abundant garden, always green and delightful? What's the sense?—There is sense, of course . . . it must exist simply because a goal determines the course of things; without one there can only be chaos. But this goal lies outside our lives, in the foundations of the whole world. . . . This is understandable. We can't be its beginning, and consequently we can't be its end. Our role is merely subsidiary and, obviously, passive. Our purpose is accomplished by the fact that we live. . . . Our life is necessary, and consequently our death is necessary too."

"For whom?"

"How should I know?" Sanin said with a laugh. "What business is it of mine? My life consists of pleasant and unpleasant sensations; as to what lies beyond its limits—to hell with it! Whatever hypothesis we advance, it will remain a mere hypothesis; and it would be foolish to build one's life upon it. Let whoever wants to worry about it do so, while I live my life."

"Let's all drink to that!" Ivanov proposed.

"And do you believe in God?" Peter Ilich asked, turning his lackluster eyes to Sanin. "These days no one believes . . . not even in the possibility of belief."

"I do believe in God," Sanin said with another laugh. "A belief in God has remained with me since childhood, and I see no reason either to struggle against it or to reinforce it. This is the most advantageous situation: if God exists, I offer him my sincere faith; if He doesn't, then all the better for me."

"But life is built on a foundation of faith or lack of faith," Yury observed.

"No," Sanin said, shaking his head, his face displaying a nonchalant, lighthearted smile. "I don't build my life on that foundation."

"Well, on what, then?" Yury asked lackadaisically.

Ah-ah-ah . . . I shouldn't drink any more, he thought drearily, wiping his hand across his cold, clammy forehead.

Sanin may or may not have said anything in reply, but Yury didn't hear it. His head was spinning and for a moment he felt faint.

"I believe there is a God, but faith exists in me of its own accord," Sanin continued. "He exists or He doesn't, but I don't know Him or know what He requires of me. How could I possibly know this, even if I possessed the most ardent faith? God is God, not a human being, and it's impossible to apply human standards to Him. His works that we behold encompass everything: good, evil, life, death, beauty, ugliness . . . everything . . . and since all certainty, all meaning disappear in it, and chaos emerges, then, as a result, its meaning isn't the same as human meaning, and its good and evil aren't the same as human good and evil. Our conception of God will always be a form of idol worship, and we'll always bestow on our fetish the physiognomy and clothing suitable to local climatic conditions. What absurdity!"

elaboration of Sanin's phil

"So it is!" Ivanov cried. "Right you are!"

"Then why go on living?" asked Yury, pushing his glass away in disgust. "And why die?"

"I know one thing," replied Sanin. "I live life and I don't want it to be miserable. For that, first and foremost, it's necessary to satisfy one's natural desire. Desire is everything: if desire dies in a person, life dies; and if he kills desire, he kills himself."

"But can desires be evil?"

"Perhaps."

"What then?"

"It's all the same," Sanin replied sympathetically, and turned his bright, unblinking eyes to look into Yury's face.

Ivanov arched his eyebrows, glanced at Sanin incredulously, and remained silent. Yury was also quiet and found it frightening to stare into those bright, clear eyes; yet for some reason he tried not to avert his gaze.

For a few moments it was quiet and one could distinctly hear a solitary moth desperately beating its wings against the inside of a windowpane. Peter Ilich shook his head gloomily and lowered his drunken face toward the dirty, stained newspaper. Sanin kept smiling.

Yury was both irritated and attracted by this constant smile.

What crystal-clear eyes he has! he thought to himself.

Sanin suddenly stood up, opened the window, and let the moth out. An astonishingly pleasant wave of cool, fresh air swept lightly through the room like a large, soft wing.

"Yes," Ivanov said, responding to his own thoughts. "There are all sorts of people; let's drink to that."

"No." Yury shook his head. "I won't drink any more."

"Why not?

"I'm not much of a drinker."

Yury's head was already aching from the vodka and the heat, and he wanted to get some fresh air.

"Well, I'm going," he said, getting up.

"Where to? Let's have some more to drink!"

"No, really, I have to . . ." Yury answered absent-mindedly, looking for his cap.

"Well, good-bye!"

As Yury was closing the door, he heard Sanin reply to Peter Ilich:

"Yes, if you don't behave like children, but children don't distinguish good and evil; they're sincere in their . . ."

Yury closed the door and it became quiet again.

The moon was high in the sky, light and bright. Yury was fanned by a breeze, cool and moist from the dew. Everything was woven together by the moonlight, splendid and dreamy. As he walked alone through streets that all looked alike in the moonlight, Yury found it difficult and strange to think that somewhere there was a silent, black room where, sallow and stiff, Semyonov was lying on a table dead.

But for some reason he couldn't recall those painful, terrible thoughts that had so recently burdened his soul, enveloping his whole world in a black mist. He felt only still and sad, and didn't want to avert his gaze from the distant moon.

Walking across the empty square, seemingly so broad and smooth in the moonlight, Yury began to think about Sanin.

What sort of man is he? he wondered, feeling deeply perplexed.

He wasn't pleased that a person had turned up whom he, Yury, couldn't define immediately; as a result, he absolutely wanted to define him in an unflattering way.

A phrasemonger, he thought with malicious enjoyment. At one time people posed as if they were disgusted with life and possessed sublime, obscure spiritual needs; now they pose as animalists.[11]

Having polished off Sanin, Yury began thinking about himself, how he wasn't posing as anything, and that everything about him, his suffering and his thoughts, all were original, unlike anyone else's. That was fine, but something was missing, and Yury began to recall the late Semyonov.

He felt sad to realize that he'd never see the sick student again and that Semyonov, whom he'd never really liked all that much, had become close and dear to him to the point of tears. Yury imagined him lying in a grave with his face rotting, his body full of maggots slowly and sickeningly swarming in a decomposing mass, under his greenish, damp, greasy uniform.

"You'll walk past my grave and stop to relieve yourself on it. . . ."

But this is all people! Yury thought in horror, staring fixedly at the thick dust on the road. I'm walking and trampling over brains, hearts, eyes . . . ugh!

He felt a wretched weakness in his knees.

I too will die. . . . I'll die and people will walk over me and will think just what I'm thinking now. . . . Yes, while it's still not too late, one must live and live! And live well, and in such a way that not one moment of my life will be wasted. But how do I do that?

It was deserted and bright in the square; a delicate, enigmatic moonlit silence had settled over the whole town.

[11] Animalism is a theory that regards human beings basically as brutes and little or nothing more. It is characterized by an extreme preoccupation with the satisfaction of physical desires.

"And the loud strings of Boyan will say nothing about him . . ." Yury sang softly.[12]

"Dreary, gloomy, terrible!" he said aloud, as if complaining, but he was afraid of the sound of his own voice and looked around to see if anyone else had heard him.

I'm drunk, he thought.

The night was bright and still.

XIII

While Karsavina and Dubova were away somewhere on a visit, Yury Svarozhich's life continued smoothly and monotonously.

Nikolai Yegorovich was busy with his household or his club, while Lyalya and Ryazantsev were so obviously burdened by anyone else's presence that Yury found it awkward to be with them. Of its own accord it became his practice to go to bed early and get up late, just before dinner. He spent the whole day sitting either in the garden or in his room, brooding intensely and waiting for a powerful burst of energy to undertake some great task.

Every day this "great task" assumed a new form: it was either a painting or a series of articles that, without Yury's awareness, would demonstrate to the whole world how serious a mistake the Social Democrats had made in not offering Yury Svarozhich the leading role in their party;[13] sometimes it was forging links with the people and dynamic, spontaneous work with them; but it was always something important and effective.

But the day ended just as it had begun, and brought with it nothing but boredom. Once or twice Novikov and Shafrov came to see him, or Yury attended a reading or went out visiting, but all this seemed extraneous to him, unfocused, and bore no relation to what was languishing within him.

One day Yury went to visit Ryazantsev. The doctor lived in a large, roomy apartment and had numerous items intended to amuse a strong, healthy man: gymnastic equipment, dumbbells, rubber resistance bands, fencing foils, fishing rods, nets for catching quail, cigarette holders, and pipes. Everything proclaimed healthy, masculine physicality and self-satisfaction.

[12] Boyan was a bard of ancient times whose songs are referred to in the medieval epic "The Song of Igor's Campaign."

[13] The Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, formed in 1898, united orthodox Marxists, revisionists, and trade unionists; it split into two factions in 1903, formally reunited, and then split into more factions after 1905.

Ryazantsev greeted him cordially and informally, showed him all his things, laughed, told stories, offered him a smoke and a drink, and finally invited him to go hunting.

"I don't have a gun," Yury said.

"Take one of mine: I've got five," Ryazantsev replied.

He viewed Yury as Lyalya's brother and wanted to get to know him better and to be liked by him. Therefore he warmly and insistently offered Yury his guns, cheerfully and willingly brought them all in, took them apart, explained their mechanisms, and even fired at a target in the courtyard; finally even Yury felt a desire to laugh just as heartily, to set off and go hunting; so he agreed to take a gun and cartridges.

"Well, that's splendid," Ryazantsev rejoiced sincerely. "It just so happens that I'm planning to hunt quail tomorrow. Now we can go together, right?"

"With pleasure," Yury agreed.

After returning home, Yury, without even noticing, spent over two hours fiddling with his gun, examining it, and adjusting the strap to his shoulders; he grasped it by the butt, took aim at a lamp, and then carefully oiled his old hunting boots.

The next day, toward evening, a cheerful and fresh-faced Ryazantsev arrived to fetch him in a racing carriage pulled by a well-fed bay horse.

"Ready?" he called through Yury's window.

Yury, who'd already fastened on his gun, cartridge belt, and game bag, and was awkwardly tangled up in all of them, smiled in embarrassment and came out of the house.

"Ready, ready," he said.

Ryazantsev was comfortably and lightly dressed, and looked at Yury's outfit with some astonishment.

"It's going to be difficult for you wearing all that," he said, smiling. "Take it all off and put it over here. When we get out there, you can put it all back on."

He helped Yury take off his gear and stow it under the carriage seat. Then they set off briskly, as fast as the good horse could gallop. The day was drawing to a close, but it was still hot and dusty. The wheels jolted the cart vigorously, and Yury had to hold on to the seat. Ryazantsev talked and laughed all the time, while with good-natured enjoyment Yury looked at his broad back covered in a tussah jacket with sweaty stains under the armpits and involuntarily imitated his laughter and jokes. When they emerged into a field and the stiff grass brushed lightly against their legs, it became cooler, easier, and the dust subsided.

When they reached an endless flat field covered with white watermelons, Ryazantsev stopped his sweating horse; cupping his hands around his mouth, he cried in his modulated baritone:

"Kuzma-a-a. . . . Kuzma-a-a. . . ."

Some tiny people, barely visible at the other end of the watermelon field, raised their heads and gazed at the source of this sound for a long time; then one figure moved away from the rest and walked along the rows until it became clear that it was a tall, gray-haired old man with a bushy beard, his arms dangling clumsily in front of him.

Slowly he approached; smiling broadly, he said:

"You certainly know how to shout, Anatoly Pavlovich."

"Hello, Kuzma, how are you? Can I leave the horse with you?"

"You certainly can," the old man said calmly and politely, taking hold of the horse by the bridle. "Going hunting? And just who might this be?" he asked, glancing kindly at Yury.

"Nikolai Yegorovich's son," Ryazantsev replied cheerfully.

"Ah. . . . Now I can see, he looks just like Lyudmila Nikolaevna. Yes, indeed."

Yury felt pleased somehow that this affable old man knew his sister and had mentioned her so simply and affectionately.

"Well, let's go," Ryazantsev said cheerfully and excitedly, getting his gun and bags from the front of the carriage and putting them on.

"All the best," Kuzma said as they left. They could hear how he coaxed the horse as he led her toward his hut.

They had to walk about a verst to the marsh;[14] the sun had long since set when the ground became soggy and covered with fresh swamp grass, sedge, and reeds. The water shimmered; it smelled damp and began to grow dark. Ryazantsev stopped smoking, planted his feet wide apart, and suddenly became completely serious, as if about to undertake a very important and demanding task. Yury moved away from him to the right, trying to find a less boggy and more comfortable place to stand beyond the reeds. Directly in front of him lay the water, pure and deep from the bright twilight reflected in it; beyond it lay the other bank, merging into a black stripe.

Almost immediately, rising unexpectedly from somewhere and flapping their wings with difficulty, groups of two or three ducks took flight. They'd appeared suddenly from behind the reeds and, turning their heads to and fro, were clearly visible against the bright sky over the men's heads. Ryazantsev fired first and was successful. A wounded drake fell from the air and plopped down clumsily somewhere to one side, splashing into the water and loudly crushing the reeds.

"Happy hunting!" Ryazantsev shouted in satisfaction and then burst out laughing.

He's really a splendid fellow! thought Yury for some reason.

Then Yury fired, also successfully, but the duck he shot fell somewhere far away; he couldn't find it, even though he scratched his hands on the sedge and waded out into the water up to his knees. But his failure merely encouraged him: now anything that happened seemed fine.

[14] About 3,500 feet, or a little more than a kilometer.