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Title: The Idiot

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Translator: Eva Martin

Release date: May 1, 2001 [eBook #2638]

Most recently updated: June 21, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Martin Adamson, David Widger, with corrections by Andrew Sly

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The Idiot

by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Translated by Eva Martin

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PART I

I.

Towards the end of November, during a thaw, at nine o’clock one

morning, a train on the Warsaw and Petersburg railway was approaching

the latter city at full speed. The morning was so damp and misty that

it was only with great difficulty that the day succeeded in breaking;

and it was impossible to distinguish anything more than a few yards

away from the carriage windows.

Some of the passengers by this particular train were returning from

abroad; but the third-class carriages were the best filled, chiefly

with insignificant persons of various occupations and degrees, picked

up at the different stations nearer town. All of them seemed weary, and

most of them had sleepy eyes and a shivering expression, while their

complexions generally appeared to have taken on the colour of the fog

outside.

When day dawned, two passengers in one of the third-class carriages

found themselves opposite each other. Both were young fellows, both

were rather poorly dressed, both had remarkable faces, and both were

evidently anxious to start a conversation. If they had but known why,

at this particular moment, they were both remarkable persons, they

would undoubtedly have wondered at the strange chance which had set

them down opposite to one another in a third-class carriage of the

Warsaw Railway Company.

One of them was a young fellow of about twenty-seven, not tall, with

black curling hair, and small, grey, fiery eyes. His nose was broad and

flat, and he had high cheek bones; his thin lips were constantly

compressed into an impudent, ironical—it might almost be called a

malicious—smile; but his forehead was high and well formed, and atoned

for a good deal of the ugliness of the lower part of his face. A

special feature of this physiognomy was its death-like pallor, which

gave to the whole man an indescribably emaciated appearance in spite of

his hard look, and at the same time a sort of passionate and suffering

expression which did not harmonize with his impudent, sarcastic smile

and keen, self-satisfied bearing. He wore a large fur—or rather

astrachan—overcoat, which had kept him warm all night, while his

neighbour had been obliged to bear the full severity of a Russian

November night entirely unprepared. His wide sleeveless mantle with a

large cape to it—the sort of cloak one sees upon travellers during the

winter months in Switzerland or North Italy—was by no means adapted to

the long cold journey through Russia, from Eydkuhnen to St. Petersburg.

The wearer of this cloak was a young fellow, also of about twenty-six

or twenty-seven years of age, slightly above the middle height, very

fair, with a thin, pointed and very light coloured beard; his eyes were

large and blue, and had an intent look about them, yet that heavy

expression which some people affirm to be a peculiarity as well as

evidence, of an epileptic subject. His face was decidedly a pleasant

one for all that; refined, but quite colourless, except for the

circumstance that at this moment it was blue with cold. He held a

bundle made up of an old faded silk handkerchief that apparently

contained all his travelling wardrobe, and wore thick shoes and

gaiters, his whole appearance being very un-Russian.

His black-haired neighbour inspected these peculiarities, having

nothing better to do, and at length remarked, with that rude enjoyment

of the discomforts of others which the common classes so often show:

“Cold?”

“Very,” said his neighbour, readily, “and this is a thaw, too. Fancy if

it had been a hard frost! I never thought it would be so cold in the

old country. I’ve grown quite out of the way of it.”

“What, been abroad, I suppose?”

“Yes, straight from Switzerland.”

“Wheugh! my goodness!” The black-haired young fellow whistled, and then

laughed.

The conversation proceeded. The readiness of the fair-haired young man

in the cloak to answer all his opposite neighbour’s questions was

surprising. He seemed to have no suspicion of any impertinence or

inappropriateness in the fact of such questions being put to him.

Replying to them, he made known to the inquirer that he certainly had

been long absent from Russia, more than four years; that he had been

sent abroad for his health; that he had suffered from some strange

nervous malady—a kind of epilepsy, with convulsive spasms. His

interlocutor burst out laughing several times at his answers; and more

than ever, when to the question, “whether he had been cured?” the

patient replied:

“No, they did not cure me.”

“Hey! that’s it! You stumped up your money for nothing, and we believe

in those fellows, here!” remarked the black-haired individual,

sarcastically.

“Gospel truth, sir, Gospel truth!” exclaimed another passenger, a

shabbily dressed man of about forty, who looked like a clerk, and

possessed a red nose and a very blotchy face. “Gospel truth! All they

do is to get hold of our good Russian money free, gratis, and for

nothing.”

“Oh, but you’re quite wrong in my particular instance,” said the Swiss

patient, quietly. “Of course I can’t argue the matter, because I know

only my own case; but my doctor gave me money—and he had very little—to

pay my journey back, besides having kept me at his own expense, while

there, for nearly two years.”

“Why? Was there no one else to pay for you?” asked the black-haired

one.

“No—Mr. Pavlicheff, who had been supporting me there, died a couple of

years ago. I wrote to Mrs. General Epanchin at the time (she is a

distant relative of mine), but she did not answer my letter. And so

eventually I came back.”

“And where have you come to?”

“That is—where am I going to stay? I—I really don’t quite know yet, I—”

Both the listeners laughed again.

“I suppose your whole set-up is in that bundle, then?” asked the first.

“I bet anything it is!” exclaimed the red-nosed passenger, with extreme

satisfaction, “and that he has precious little in the luggage

van!—though of course poverty is no crime—we must remember that!”

It appeared that it was indeed as they had surmised. The young fellow

hastened to admit the fact with wonderful readiness.

“Your bundle has some importance, however,” continued the clerk, when

they had laughed their fill (it was observable that the subject of

their mirth joined in the laughter when he saw them laughing); “for

though I dare say it is not stuffed full of friedrichs d’or and louis

d’or—judge from your costume and gaiters—still—if you can add to your

possessions such a valuable property as a relation like Mrs. General

Epanchin, then your bundle becomes a significant object at once. That

is, of course, if you really are a relative of Mrs. Epanchin’s, and

have not made a little error through—well, absence of mind, which is

very common to human beings; or, say—through a too luxuriant fancy?”

“Oh, you are right again,” said the fair-haired traveller, “for I

really am \_almost\_ wrong when I say she and I are related. She is

hardly a relation at all; so little, in fact, that I was not in the

least surprised to have no answer to my letter. I expected as much.”

“H’m! you spent your postage for nothing, then. H’m! you are candid,

however—and that is commendable. H’m! Mrs. Epanchin—oh yes! a most

eminent person. I know her. As for Mr. Pavlicheff, who supported you in

Switzerland, I know him too—at least, if it was Nicolai Andreevitch of

that name? A fine fellow he was—and had a property of four thousand

souls in his day.”

“Yes, Nicolai Andreevitch—that was his name,” and the young fellow

looked earnestly and with curiosity at the all-knowing gentleman with

the red nose.

This sort of character is met with pretty frequently in a certain

class. They are people who know everyone—that is, they know where a man

is employed, what his salary is, whom he knows, whom he married, what

money his wife had, who are his cousins, and second cousins, etc., etc.

These men generally have about a hundred pounds a year to live on, and

they spend their whole time and talents in the amassing of this style

of knowledge, which they reduce—or raise—to the standard of a science.

During the latter part of the conversation the black-haired young man

had become very impatient. He stared out of the window, and fidgeted,

and evidently longed for the end of the journey. He was very absent; he

would appear to listen—and heard nothing; and he would laugh of a

sudden, evidently with no idea of what he was laughing about.

“Excuse me,” said the red-nosed man to the young fellow with the

bundle, rather suddenly; “whom have I the honour to be talking to?”

“Prince Lef Nicolaievitch Muishkin,” replied the latter, with perfect

readiness.

“Prince Muishkin? Lef Nicolaievitch? H’m! I don’t know, I’m sure! I may

say I have never heard of such a person,” said the clerk, thoughtfully.

“At least, the name, I admit, is historical. Karamsin must mention the

family name, of course, in his history—but as an individual—one never

hears of any Prince Muishkin nowadays.”

“Of course not,” replied the prince; “there are none, except myself. I

believe I am the last and only one. As to my forefathers, they have

always been a poor lot; my own father was a sublieutenant in the army.

I don’t know how Mrs. Epanchin comes into the Muishkin family, but she

is descended from the Princess Muishkin, and she, too, is the last of

her line.”

“And did you learn science and all that, with your professor over

there?” asked the black-haired passenger.

“Oh yes—I did learn a little, but—”

“I’ve never learned anything whatever,” said the other.

“Oh, but I learned very little, you know!” added the prince, as though

excusing himself. “They could not teach me very much on account of my

illness.”

“Do you know the Rogojins?” asked his questioner, abruptly.

“No, I don’t—not at all! I hardly know anyone in Russia. Why, is that

your name?”

“Yes, I am Rogojin, Parfen Rogojin.”

“Parfen Rogojin? dear me—then don’t you belong to those very Rogojins,

perhaps—” began the clerk, with a very perceptible increase of civility

in his tone.

“Yes—those very ones,” interrupted Rogojin, impatiently, and with scant

courtesy. I may remark that he had not once taken any notice of the

blotchy-faced passenger, and had hitherto addressed all his remarks

direct to the prince.

“Dear me—is it possible?” observed the clerk, while his face assumed an

expression of great deference and servility—if not of absolute alarm:

“what, a son of that very Semen Rogojin—hereditary honourable

citizen—who died a month or so ago and left two million and a half of

roubles?”

“And how do \_you\_ know that he left two million and a half of roubles?”

asked Rogojin, disdainfully, and not deigning so much as to look at the

other. “However, it’s true enough that my father died a month ago, and

that here am I returning from Pskoff, a month after, with hardly a boot

to my foot. They’ve treated me like a dog! I’ve been ill of fever at

Pskoff the whole time, and not a line, nor farthing of money, have I

received from my mother or my confounded brother!”

“And now you’ll have a million roubles, at least—goodness gracious me!”

exclaimed the clerk, rubbing his hands.

“Five weeks since, I was just like yourself,” continued Rogojin,

addressing the prince, “with nothing but a bundle and the clothes I

wore. I ran away from my father and came to Pskoff to my aunt’s house,

where I caved in at once with fever, and he went and died while I was

away. All honour to my respected father’s memory—but he uncommonly

nearly killed me, all the same. Give you my word, prince, if I hadn’t

cut and run then, when I did, he’d have murdered me like a dog.”

“I suppose you angered him somehow?” asked the prince, looking at the

millionaire with considerable curiosity. But though there may have been

something remarkable in the fact that this man was heir to millions of

roubles there was something about him which surprised and interested

the prince more than that. Rogojin, too, seemed to have taken up the

conversation with unusual alacrity it appeared that he was still in a

considerable state of excitement, if not absolutely feverish, and was

in real need of someone to talk to for the mere sake of talking, as

safety-valve to his agitation.

As for his red-nosed neighbour, the latter—since the information as to

the identity of Rogojin—hung over him, seemed to be living on the honey

of his words and in the breath of his nostrils, catching at every

syllable as though it were a pearl of great price.

“Oh, yes; I angered him—I certainly did anger him,” replied Rogojin.

“But what puts me out so is my brother. Of course my mother couldn’t do

anything—she’s too old—and whatever brother Senka says is law for her!

But why couldn’t he let me know? He sent a telegram, they say. What’s

the good of a telegram? It frightened my aunt so that she sent it back

to the office unopened, and there it’s been ever since! It’s only

thanks to Konief that I heard at all; he wrote me all about it. He says

my brother cut off the gold tassels from my father’s coffin, at night

‘because they’re worth a lot of money!’ says he. Why, I can get him

sent off to Siberia for that alone, if I like; it’s sacrilege. Here,

you—scarecrow!” he added, addressing the clerk at his side, “is it

sacrilege or not, by law?”

“Sacrilege, certainly—certainly sacrilege,” said the latter.

“And it’s Siberia for sacrilege, isn’t it?”

“Undoubtedly so; Siberia, of course!”

“They will think that I’m still ill,” continued Rogojin to the prince,

“but I sloped off quietly, seedy as I was, took the train and came

away. Aha, brother Senka, you’ll have to open your gates and let me in,

my boy! I know he told tales about me to my father—I know that well

enough but I certainly did rile my father about Nastasia Philipovna

that’s very sure, and that was my own doing.”

“Nastasia Philipovna?” said the clerk, as though trying to think out

something.

“Come, you know nothing about \_her\_,” said Rogojin, impatiently.

“And supposing I do know something?” observed the other, triumphantly.

“Bosh! there are plenty of Nastasia Philipovnas. And what an

impertinent beast you are!” he added angrily. “I thought some creature

like you would hang on to me as soon as I got hold of my money.”

“Oh, but I do know, as it happens,” said the clerk in an aggravating

manner. “Lebedeff knows all about her. You are pleased to reproach me,

your excellency, but what if I prove that I am right after all?

Nastasia Philipovna’s family name is Barashkoff—I know, you see—and she

is a very well known lady, indeed, and comes of a good family, too. She

is connected with one Totski, Afanasy Ivanovitch, a man of considerable

property, a director of companies, and so on, and a great friend of

General Epanchin, who is interested in the same matters as he is.”

“My eyes!” said Rogojin, really surprised at last. “The devil take the

fellow, how does he know that?”

“Why, he knows everything—Lebedeff knows everything! I was a month or

two with Lihachof after his father died, your excellency, and while he

was knocking about—he’s in the debtor’s prison now—I was with him, and

he couldn’t do a thing without Lebedeff; and I got to know Nastasia

Philipovna and several people at that time.”

“Nastasia Philipovna? Why, you don’t mean to say that she and

Lihachof—” cried Rogojin, turning quite pale.

“No, no, no, no, no! Nothing of the sort, I assure you!” said Lebedeff,

hastily. “Oh dear no, not for the world! Totski’s the only man with any

chance there. Oh, no! He takes her to his box at the opera at the

French theatre of an evening, and the officers and people all look at

her and say, ‘By Jove, there’s the famous Nastasia Philipovna!’ but no

one ever gets any further than that, for there is nothing more to say.”

“Yes, it’s quite true,” said Rogojin, frowning gloomily; “so Zaleshoff

told me. I was walking about the Nefsky one fine day, prince, in my

father’s old coat, when she suddenly came out of a shop and stepped

into her carriage. I swear I was all of a blaze at once. Then I met

Zaleshoff—looking like a hair-dresser’s assistant, got up as fine as I

don’t know who, while I looked like a tinker. ‘Don’t flatter yourself,

my boy,’ said he; ‘she’s not for such as you; she’s a princess, she is,

and her name is Nastasia Philipovna Barashkoff, and she lives with

Totski, who wishes to get rid of her because he’s growing rather

old—fifty-five or so—and wants to marry a certain beauty, the loveliest

woman in all Petersburg.’ And then he told me that I could see Nastasia

Philipovna at the opera-house that evening, if I liked, and described

which was her box. Well, I’d like to see my father allowing any of us

to go to the theatre; he’d sooner have killed us, any day. However, I

went for an hour or so and saw Nastasia Philipovna, and I never slept a

wink all night after. Next morning my father happened to give me two

government loan bonds to sell, worth nearly five thousand roubles each.

‘Sell them,’ said he, ‘and then take seven thousand five hundred

roubles to the office, give them to the cashier, and bring me back the

rest of the ten thousand, without looking in anywhere on the way; look

sharp, I shall be waiting for you.’ Well, I sold the bonds, but I

didn’t take the seven thousand roubles to the office; I went straight

to the English shop and chose a pair of earrings, with a diamond the

size of a nut in each. They cost four hundred roubles more than I had,

so I gave my name, and they trusted me. With the earrings I went at

once to Zaleshoff’s. ‘Come on!’ I said, ‘come on to Nastasia

Philipovna’s,’ and off we went without more ado. I tell you I hadn’t a

notion of what was about me or before me or below my feet all the way;

I saw nothing whatever. We went straight into her drawing-room, and

then she came out to us.

“I didn’t say right out who I was, but Zaleshoff said: ‘From Parfen

Rogojin, in memory of his first meeting with you yesterday; be so kind

as to accept these!’

“She opened the parcel, looked at the earrings, and laughed.

“‘Thank your friend Mr. Rogojin for his kind attention,’ says she, and

bowed and went off. Why didn’t I die there on the spot? The worst of it

all was, though, that the beast Zaleshoff got all the credit of it! I

was short and abominably dressed, and stood and stared in her face and

never said a word, because I was shy, like an ass! And there was he all

in the fashion, pomaded and dressed out, with a smart tie on, bowing

and scraping; and I bet anything she took him for me all the while!

“‘Look here now,’ I said, when we came out, ‘none of your interference

here after this—do you understand?’ He laughed: ‘And how are you going

to settle up with your father?’ says he. I thought I might as well jump

into the Neva at once without going home first; but it struck me that I

wouldn’t, after all, and I went home feeling like one of the damned.”

“My goodness!” shivered the clerk. “And his father,” he added, for the

prince’s instruction, “and his father would have given a man a ticket

to the other world for ten roubles any day—not to speak of ten

thousand!”

The prince observed Rogojin with great curiosity; he seemed paler than

ever at this moment.

“What do you know about it?” cried the latter. “Well, my father learned

the whole story at once, and Zaleshoff blabbed it all over the town

besides. So he took me upstairs and locked me up, and swore at me for

an hour. ‘This is only a foretaste,’ says he; ‘wait a bit till night

comes, and I’ll come back and talk to you again.’

“Well, what do you think? The old fellow went straight off to Nastasia

Philipovna, touched the floor with his forehead, and began blubbering

and beseeching her on his knees to give him back the diamonds. So after

awhile she brought the box and flew out at him. ‘There,’ she says,

‘take your earrings, you wretched old miser; although they are ten

times dearer than their value to me now that I know what it must have

cost Parfen to get them! Give Parfen my compliments,’ she says, ‘and

thank him very much!’ Well, I meanwhile had borrowed twenty-five

roubles from a friend, and off I went to Pskoff to my aunt’s. The old

woman there lectured me so that I left the house and went on a drinking

tour round the public-houses of the place. I was in a high fever when I

got to Pskoff, and by nightfall I was lying delirious in the streets

somewhere or other!”

“Oho! we’ll make Nastasia Philipovna sing another song now!” giggled

Lebedeff, rubbing his hands with glee. “Hey, my boy, we’ll get her some

proper earrings now! We’ll get her such earrings that—”

“Look here,” cried Rogojin, seizing him fiercely by the arm, “look

here, if you so much as name Nastasia Philipovna again, I’ll tan your

hide as sure as you sit there!”

“Aha! do—by all means! if you tan my hide you won’t turn me away from

your society. You’ll bind me to you, with your lash, for ever. Ha, ha!

here we are at the station, though.”

Sure enough, the train was just steaming in as he spoke.

Though Rogojin had declared that he left Pskoff secretly, a large

collection of friends had assembled to greet him, and did so with

profuse waving of hats and shouting.

“Why, there’s Zaleshoff here, too!” he muttered, gazing at the scene

with a sort of triumphant but unpleasant smile. Then he suddenly turned

to the prince: “Prince, I don’t know why I have taken a fancy to you;

perhaps because I met you just when I did. But no, it can’t be that,

for I met this fellow” (nodding at Lebedeff) “too, and I have not taken

a fancy to him by any means. Come to see me, prince; we’ll take off

those gaiters of yours and dress you up in a smart fur coat, the best

we can buy. You shall have a dress coat, best quality, white waistcoat,

anything you like, and your pocket shall be full of money. Come, and

you shall go with me to Nastasia Philipovna’s. Now then will you come

or no?”

“Accept, accept, Prince Lef Nicolaievitch” said Lebedef solemnly;

“don’t let it slip! Accept, quick!”

Prince Muishkin rose and stretched out his hand courteously, while he

replied with some cordiality:

“I will come with the greatest pleasure, and thank you very much for

taking a fancy to me. I dare say I may even come today if I have time,

for I tell you frankly that I like you very much too. I liked you

especially when you told us about the diamond earrings; but I liked you

before that as well, though you have such a dark-clouded sort of face.

Thanks very much for the offer of clothes and a fur coat; I certainly

shall require both clothes and coat very soon. As for money, I have

hardly a copeck about me at this moment.”

“You shall have lots of money; by the evening I shall have plenty; so

come along!”

“That’s true enough, he’ll have lots before evening!” put in Lebedeff.

“But, look here, are you a great hand with the ladies? Let’s know that

first?” asked Rogojin.

“Oh no, oh no!” said the prince; “I couldn’t, you know—my illness—I

hardly ever saw a soul.”

“H’m! well—here, you fellow—you can come along with me now if you

like!” cried Rogojin to Lebedeff, and so they all left the carriage.

Lebedeff had his desire. He went off with the noisy group of Rogojin’s

friends towards the Voznesensky, while the prince’s route lay towards

the Litaynaya. It was damp and wet. The prince asked his way of

passers-by, and finding that he was a couple of miles or so from his

destination, he determined to take a droshky.

II.

General Epanchin lived in his own house near the Litaynaya. Besides

this large residence—five-sixths of which was let in flats and

lodgings—the general was owner of another enormous house in the

Sadovaya bringing in even more rent than the first. Besides these

houses he had a delightful little estate just out of town, and some

sort of factory in another part of the city. General Epanchin, as

everyone knew, had a good deal to do with certain government

monopolies; he was also a voice, and an important one, in many rich

public companies of various descriptions; in fact, he enjoyed the

reputation of being a well-to-do man of busy habits, many ties, and

affluent means. He had made himself indispensable in several quarters,

amongst others in his department of the government; and yet it was a

known fact that Fedor Ivanovitch Epanchin was a man of no education

whatever, and had absolutely risen from the ranks.

This last fact could, of course, reflect nothing but credit upon the

general; and yet, though unquestionably a sagacious man, he had his own

little weaknesses—very excusable ones,—one of which was a dislike to

any allusion to the above circumstance. He was undoubtedly clever. For

instance, he made a point of never asserting himself when he would gain

more by keeping in the background; and in consequence many exalted

personages valued him principally for his humility and simplicity, and

because “he knew his place.” And yet if these good people could only

have had a peep into the mind of this excellent fellow who “knew his

place” so well! The fact is that, in spite of his knowledge of the

world and his really remarkable abilities, he always liked to appear to

be carrying out other people’s ideas rather than his own. And also, his

luck seldom failed him, even at cards, for which he had a passion that

he did not attempt to conceal. He played for high stakes, and moved,

altogether, in very varied society.

As to age, General Epanchin was in the very prime of life; that is,

about fifty-five years of age,—the flowering time of existence, when

real enjoyment of life begins. His healthy appearance, good colour,

sound, though discoloured teeth, sturdy figure, preoccupied air during

business hours, and jolly good humour during his game at cards in the

evening, all bore witness to his success in life, and combined to make

existence a bed of roses to his excellency. The general was lord of a

flourishing family, consisting of his wife and three grown-up

daughters. He had married young, while still a lieutenant, his wife

being a girl of about his own age, who possessed neither beauty nor

education, and who brought him no more than fifty souls of landed

property, which little estate served, however, as a nest-egg for far

more important accumulations. The general never regretted his early

marriage, or regarded it as a foolish youthful escapade; and he so

respected and feared his wife that he was very near loving her. Mrs.

Epanchin came of the princely stock of Muishkin, which if not a

brilliant, was, at all events, a decidedly ancient family; and she was

extremely proud of her descent.

With a few exceptions, the worthy couple had lived through their long

union very happily. While still young the wife had been able to make

important friends among the aristocracy, partly by virtue of her family

descent, and partly by her own exertions; while, in after life, thanks

to their wealth and to the position of her husband in the service, she

took her place among the higher circles as by right.

During these last few years all three of the general’s

daughters—Alexandra, Adelaida, and Aglaya—had grown up and matured. Of

course they were only Epanchins, but their mother’s family was noble;

they might expect considerable fortunes; their father had hopes of

attaining to very high rank indeed in his country’s service—all of

which was satisfactory. All three of the girls were decidedly pretty,

even the eldest, Alexandra, who was just twenty-five years old. The

middle daughter was now twenty-three, while the youngest, Aglaya, was

twenty. This youngest girl was absolutely a beauty, and had begun of

late to attract considerable attention in society. But this was not

all, for every one of the three was clever, well educated, and

accomplished.

It was a matter of general knowledge that the three girls were very

fond of one another, and supported each other in every way; it was even

said that the two elder ones had made certain sacrifices for the sake

of the idol of the household, Aglaya. In society they not only disliked

asserting themselves, but were actually retiring. Certainly no one

could blame them for being too arrogant or haughty, and yet everybody

was well aware that they were proud and quite understood their own

value. The eldest was musical, while the second was a clever artist,

which fact she had concealed until lately. In a word, the world spoke

well of the girls; but they were not without their enemies, and

occasionally people talked with horror of the number of books they had

read.

They were in no hurry to marry. They liked good society, but were not

too keen about it. All this was the more remarkable, because everyone

was well aware of the hopes and aims of their parents.

It was about eleven o’clock in the forenoon when the prince rang the

bell at General Epanchin’s door. The general lived on the first floor

or flat of the house, as modest a lodging as his position permitted. A

liveried servant opened the door, and the prince was obliged to enter

into long explanations with this gentleman, who, from the first glance,

looked at him and his bundle with grave suspicion. At last, however, on

the repeated positive assurance that he really was Prince Muishkin, and

must absolutely see the general on business, the bewildered domestic

showed him into a little ante-chamber leading to a waiting-room that

adjoined the general’s study, there handing him over to another

servant, whose duty it was to be in this ante-chamber all the morning,

and announce visitors to the general. This second individual wore a

dress coat, and was some forty years of age; he was the general’s

special study servant, and well aware of his own importance.

“Wait in the next room, please; and leave your bundle here,” said the

door-keeper, as he sat down comfortably in his own easy-chair in the

ante-chamber. He looked at the prince in severe surprise as the latter

settled himself in another chair alongside, with his bundle on his

knees.

“If you don’t mind, I would rather sit here with you,” said the prince;

“I should prefer it to sitting in there.”

“Oh, but you can’t stay here. You are a visitor—a guest, so to speak.

Is it the general himself you wish to see?”

The man evidently could not take in the idea of such a shabby-looking

visitor, and had decided to ask once more.

“Yes—I have business—” began the prince.

“I do not ask you what your business may be, all I have to do is to

announce you; and unless the secretary comes in here I cannot do that.”

The man’s suspicions seemed to increase more and more. The prince was

too unlike the usual run of daily visitors; and although the general

certainly did receive, on business, all sorts and conditions of men,

yet in spite of this fact the servant felt great doubts on the subject

of this particular visitor. The presence of the secretary as an

intermediary was, he judged, essential in this case.

“Surely you—are from abroad?” he inquired at last, in a confused sort

of way. He had begun his sentence intending to say, “Surely you are not

Prince Muishkin, are you?”

“Yes, straight from the train! Did not you intend to say, ‘Surely you

are not Prince Muishkin?’ just now, but refrained out of politeness?”

“H’m!” grunted the astonished servant.

“I assure you I am not deceiving you; you shall not have to answer for

me. As to my being dressed like this, and carrying a bundle, there’s

nothing surprising in that—the fact is, my circumstances are not

particularly rosy at this moment.”

“H’m!—no, I’m not afraid of that, you see; I have to announce you,

that’s all. The secretary will be out directly—that is, unless you—yes,

that’s the rub—unless you—come, you must allow me to ask you—you’ve not

come to beg, have you?”

“Oh dear no, you can be perfectly easy on that score. I have quite

another matter on hand.”

“You must excuse my asking, you know. Your appearance led me to

think—but just wait for the secretary; the general is busy now, but the

secretary is sure to come out.”

“Oh—well, look here, if I have some time to wait, would you mind

telling me, is there any place about where I could have a smoke? I have

my pipe and tobacco with me.”

“\_Smoke?\_” said the man, in shocked but disdainful surprise, blinking

his eyes at the prince as though he could not believe his senses. “No,

sir, you cannot smoke here, and I wonder you are not ashamed of the

very suggestion. Ha, ha! a cool idea that, I declare!”

“Oh, I didn’t mean in this room! I know I can’t smoke here, of course.

I’d adjourn to some other room, wherever you like to show me to. You

see, I’m used to smoking a good deal, and now I haven’t had a puff for

three hours; however, just as you like.”

“Now how on earth am I to announce a man like that?” muttered the

servant. “In the first place, you’ve no right in here at all; you ought

to be in the waiting-room, because you’re a sort of visitor—a guest, in

fact—and I shall catch it for this. Look here, do you intend to take up

you abode with us?” he added, glancing once more at the prince’s

bundle, which evidently gave him no peace.

“No, I don’t think so. I don’t think I should stay even if they were to

invite me. I’ve simply come to make their acquaintance, and nothing

more.”

“Make their acquaintance?” asked the man, in amazement, and with

redoubled suspicion. “Then why did you say you had business with the

general?”

“Oh well, very little business. There is one little matter—some advice

I am going to ask him for; but my principal object is simply to

introduce myself, because I am Prince Muishkin, and Madame Epanchin is

the last of her branch of the house, and besides herself and me there

are no other Muishkins left.”

“What—you’re a relation then, are you?” asked the servant, so

bewildered that he began to feel quite alarmed.

“Well, hardly so. If you stretch a point, we are relations, of course,

but so distant that one cannot really take cognizance of it. I once

wrote to your mistress from abroad, but she did not reply. However, I

have thought it right to make acquaintance with her on my arrival. I am

telling you all this in order to ease your mind, for I see you are

still far from comfortable on my account. All you have to do is to

announce me as Prince Muishkin, and the object of my visit will be

plain enough. If I am received—very good; if not, well, very good

again. But they are sure to receive me, I should think; Madame Epanchin

will naturally be curious to see the only remaining representative of

her family. She values her Muishkin descent very highly, if I am

rightly informed.”

The prince’s conversation was artless and confiding to a degree, and

the servant could not help feeling that as from visitor to common

serving-man this state of things was highly improper. His conclusion

was that one of two things must be the explanation—either that this was

a begging impostor, or that the prince, if prince he were, was simply a

fool, without the slightest ambition; for a sensible prince with any

ambition would certainly not wait about in ante-rooms with servants,

and talk of his own private affairs like this. In either case, how was

he to announce this singular visitor?

“I really think I must request you to step into the next room!” he

said, with all the insistence he could muster.

“Why? If I had been sitting there now, I should not have had the

opportunity of making these personal explanations. I see you are still

uneasy about me and keep eyeing my cloak and bundle. Don’t you think

you might go in yourself now, without waiting for the secretary to come

out?”

“No, no! I can’t announce a visitor like yourself without the

secretary. Besides the general said he was not to be disturbed—he is

with the Colonel C—. Gavrila Ardalionovitch goes in without

announcing.”

“Who may that be? a clerk?”

“What? Gavrila Ardalionovitch? Oh no; he belongs to one of the

companies. Look here, at all events put your bundle down, here.”

“Yes, I will if I may; and—can I take off my cloak”

“Of course; you can’t go in \_there\_ with it on, anyhow.”

The prince rose and took off his mantle, revealing a neat enough

morning costume—a little worn, but well made. He wore a steel watch

chain and from this chain there hung a silver Geneva watch. Fool the

prince might be, still, the general’s servant felt that it was not

correct for him to continue to converse thus with a visitor, in spite

of the fact that the prince pleased him somehow.

“And what time of day does the lady receive?” the latter asked,

reseating himself in his old place.

“Oh, that’s not in \_my\_ province! I believe she receives at any time;

it depends upon the visitors. The dressmaker goes in at eleven. Gavrila

Ardalionovitch is allowed much earlier than other people, too; he is

even admitted to early lunch now and then.”

“It is much warmer in the rooms here than it is abroad at this season,”

observed the prince; “but it is much warmer there out of doors. As for

the houses—a Russian can’t live in them in the winter until he gets

accustomed to them.”

“Don’t they heat them at all?”

“Well, they do heat them a little; but the houses and stoves are so

different to ours.”

“H’m! were you long away?”

“Four years! and I was in the same place nearly all the time,—in one

village.”

“You must have forgotten Russia, hadn’t you?”

“Yes, indeed I had—a good deal; and, would you believe it, I often

wonder at myself for not having forgotten how to speak Russian? Even

now, as I talk to you, I keep saying to myself ‘how well I am speaking

it.’ Perhaps that is partly why I am so talkative this morning. I

assure you, ever since yesterday evening I have had the strongest

desire to go on and on talking Russian.”

“H’m! yes; did you live in Petersburg in former years?”

This good flunkey, in spite of his conscientious scruples, really could

not resist continuing such a very genteel and agreeable conversation.

“In Petersburg? Oh no! hardly at all, and now they say so much is

changed in the place that even those who did know it well are obliged

to relearn what they knew. They talk a good deal about the new law

courts, and changes there, don’t they?”

“H’m! yes, that’s true enough. Well now, how is the law over there, do

they administer it more justly than here?”

“Oh, I don’t know about that! I’ve heard much that is good about our

legal administration, too. There is no capital punishment here for one

thing.”

“Is there over there?”

“Yes—I saw an execution in France—at Lyons. Schneider took me over with

him to see it.”

“What, did they hang the fellow?”

“No, they cut off people’s heads in France.”

“What did the fellow do?—yell?”

“Oh no—it’s the work of an instant. They put a man inside a frame and a

sort of broad knife falls by machinery—they call the thing a

guillotine—it falls with fearful force and weight—the head springs off

so quickly that you can’t wink your eye in between. But all the

preparations are so dreadful. When they announce the sentence, you

know, and prepare the criminal and tie his hands, and cart him off to

the scaffold—that’s the fearful part of the business. The people all

crowd round—even women—though they don’t at all approve of women

looking on.”

“No, it’s not a thing for women.”

“Of course not—of course not!—bah! The criminal was a fine intelligent

fearless man; Le Gros was his name; and I may tell you—believe it or

not, as you like—that when that man stepped upon the scaffold he

\_cried\_, he did indeed,—he was as white as a bit of paper. Isn’t it a

dreadful idea that he should have cried—cried! Whoever heard of a grown

man crying from fear—not a child, but a man who never had cried

before—a grown man of forty-five years. Imagine what must have been

going on in that man’s mind at such a moment; what dreadful convulsions

his whole spirit must have endured; it is an outrage on the soul that’s

what it is. Because it is said ‘thou shalt not kill,’ is he to be

killed because he murdered some one else? No, it is not right, it’s an

impossible theory. I assure you, I saw the sight a month ago and it’s

dancing before my eyes to this moment. I dream of it, often.”

The prince had grown animated as he spoke, and a tinge of colour

suffused his pale face, though his way of talking was as quiet as ever.

The servant followed his words with sympathetic interest. Clearly he

was not at all anxious to bring the conversation to an end. Who knows?

Perhaps he too was a man of imagination and with some capacity for

thought.

“Well, at all events it is a good thing that there’s no pain when the

poor fellow’s head flies off,” he remarked.

“Do you know, though,” cried the prince warmly, “you made that remark

now, and everyone says the same thing, and the machine is designed with

the purpose of avoiding pain, this guillotine I mean; but a thought

came into my head then: what if it be a bad plan after all? You may

laugh at my idea, perhaps—but I could not help its occurring to me all

the same. Now with the rack and tortures and so on—you suffer terrible

pain of course; but then your torture is bodily pain only (although no

doubt you have plenty of that) until you die. But \_here\_ I should

imagine the most terrible part of the whole punishment is, not the

bodily pain at all—but the certain knowledge that in an hour,—then in

ten minutes, then in half a minute, then now—this very \_instant\_—your

soul must quit your body and that you will no longer be a man—and that

this is certain, \_certain!\_ That’s the point—the certainty of it. Just

that instant when you place your head on the block and hear the iron

grate over your head—then—that quarter of a second is the most awful of

all.

“This is not my own fantastical opinion—many people have thought the

same; but I feel it so deeply that I’ll tell you what I think. I

believe that to execute a man for murder is to punish him immeasurably

more dreadfully than is equivalent to his crime. A murder by sentence

is far more dreadful than a murder committed by a criminal. The man who

is attacked by robbers at night, in a dark wood, or anywhere,

undoubtedly hopes and hopes that he may yet escape until the very

moment of his death. There are plenty of instances of a man running

away, or imploring for mercy—at all events hoping on in some

degree—even after his throat was cut. But in the case of an execution,

that last hope—having which it is so immeasurably less dreadful to

die,—is taken away from the wretch and \_certainty\_ substituted in its

place! There is his sentence, and with it that terrible certainty that

he cannot possibly escape death—which, I consider, must be the most

dreadful anguish in the world. You may place a soldier before a

cannon’s mouth in battle, and fire upon him—and he will still hope. But

read to that same soldier his death-sentence, and he will either go mad

or burst into tears. Who dares to say that any man can suffer this

without going mad? No, no! it is an abuse, a shame, it is

unnecessary—why should such a thing exist? Doubtless there may be men

who have been sentenced, who have suffered this mental anguish for a

while and then have been reprieved; perhaps such men may have been able

to relate their feelings afterwards. Our Lord Christ spoke of this

anguish and dread. No! no! no! No man should be treated so, no man, no

man!”

The servant, though of course he could not have expressed all this as

the prince did, still clearly entered into it and was greatly

conciliated, as was evident from the increased amiability of his

expression. “If you are really very anxious for a smoke,” he remarked,

“I think it might possibly be managed, if you are very quick about it.

You see they might come out and inquire for you, and you wouldn’t be on

the spot. You see that door there? Go in there and you’ll find a little

room on the right; you can smoke there, only open the window, because I

ought not to allow it really, and—.” But there was no time, after all.

A young fellow entered the ante-room at this moment, with a bundle of

papers in his hand. The footman hastened to help him take off his

overcoat. The new arrival glanced at the prince out of the corners of

his eyes.

“This gentleman declares, Gavrila Ardalionovitch,” began the man,

confidentially and almost familiarly, “that he is Prince Muishkin and a

relative of Madame Epanchin’s. He has just arrived from abroad, with

nothing but a bundle by way of luggage—.”

The prince did not hear the rest, because at this point the servant

continued his communication in a whisper.

Gavrila Ardalionovitch listened attentively, and gazed at the prince

with great curiosity. At last he motioned the man aside and stepped

hurriedly towards the prince.

“Are you Prince Muishkin?” he asked, with the greatest courtesy and

amiability.

He was a remarkably handsome young fellow of some twenty-eight summers,

fair and of middle height; he wore a small beard, and his face was most

intelligent. Yet his smile, in spite of its sweetness, was a little

thin, if I may so call it, and showed his teeth too evenly; his gaze

though decidedly good-humoured and ingenuous, was a trifle too

inquisitive and intent to be altogether agreeable.

“Probably when he is alone he looks quite different, and hardly smiles

at all!” thought the prince.

He explained about himself in a few words, very much the same as he had

told the footman and Rogojin beforehand.

Gavrila Ardalionovitch meanwhile seemed to be trying to recall

something.

“Was it not you, then, who sent a letter a year or less ago—from

Switzerland, I think it was—to Elizabetha Prokofievna (Mrs. Epanchin)?”

“It was.”

“Oh, then, of course they will remember who you are. You wish to see

the general? I’ll tell him at once—he will be free in a minute; but

you—you had better wait in the ante-chamber,—hadn’t you? Why is he

here?” he added, severely, to the man.

“I tell you, sir, he wished it himself!”

At this moment the study door opened, and a military man, with a

portfolio under his arm, came out talking loudly, and after bidding

good-bye to someone inside, took his departure.

“You there, Gania?” cried a voice from the study, “come in here, will

you?”

Gavrila Ardalionovitch nodded to the prince and entered the room

hastily.

A couple of minutes later the door opened again and the affable voice

of Gania cried:

“Come in please, prince!”

III.

General Ivan Fedorovitch Epanchin was standing in the middle of the

room, and gazed with great curiosity at the prince as he entered. He

even advanced a couple of steps to meet him.

The prince came forward and introduced himself.

“Quite so,” replied the general, “and what can I do for you?”

“Oh, I have no special business; my principal object was to make your

acquaintance. I should not like to disturb you. I do not know your

times and arrangements here, you see, but I have only just arrived. I

came straight from the station. I am come direct from Switzerland.”

The general very nearly smiled, but thought better of it and kept his

smile back. Then he reflected, blinked his eyes, stared at his guest

once more from head to foot; then abruptly motioned him to a chair, sat

down himself, and waited with some impatience for the prince to speak.

Gania stood at his table in the far corner of the room, turning over

papers.

“I have not much time for making acquaintances, as a rule,” said the

general, “but as, of course, you have your object in coming, I—”

“I felt sure you would think I had some object in view when I resolved

to pay you this visit,” the prince interrupted; “but I give you my

word, beyond the pleasure of making your acquaintance I had no personal

object whatever.”

“The pleasure is, of course, mutual; but life is not all pleasure, as

you are aware. There is such a thing as business, and I really do not

see what possible reason there can be, or what we have in common to—”

“Oh, there is no reason, of course, and I suppose there is nothing in

common between us, or very little; for if I am Prince Muishkin, and

your wife happens to be a member of my house, that can hardly be called

a ‘reason.’ I quite understand that. And yet that was my whole motive

for coming. You see I have not been in Russia for four years, and knew

very little about anything when I left. I had been very ill for a long

time, and I feel now the need of a few good friends. In fact, I have a

certain question upon which I much need advice, and do not know whom to

go to for it. I thought of your family when I was passing through

Berlin. ‘They are almost relations,’ I said to myself, ‘so I’ll begin

with them; perhaps we may get on with each other, I with them and they

with me, if they are kind people;’ and I have heard that you are very

kind people!”

“Oh, thank you, thank you, I’m sure,” replied the general, considerably

taken aback. “May I ask where you have taken up your quarters?”

“Nowhere, as yet.”

“What, straight from the station to my house? And how about your

luggage?”

“I only had a small bundle, containing linen, with me, nothing more. I

can carry it in my hand, easily. There will be plenty of time to take a

room in some hotel by the evening.”

“Oh, then you \_do\_ intend to take a room?”

“Of course.”

“To judge from your words, you came straight to my house with the

intention of staying there.”

“That could only have been on your invitation. I confess, however, that

I should not have stayed here even if you had invited me, not for any

particular reason, but because it is—well, contrary to my practice and

nature, somehow.”

“Oh, indeed! Then it is perhaps as well that I neither \_did\_ invite

you, nor \_do\_ invite you now. Excuse me, prince, but we had better make

this matter clear, once for all. We have just agreed that with regard

to our relationship there is not much to be said, though, of course, it

would have been very delightful to us to feel that such relationship

did actually exist; therefore, perhaps—”

“Therefore, perhaps I had better get up and go away?” said the prince,

laughing merrily as he rose from his place; just as merrily as though

the circumstances were by no means strained or difficult. “And I give

you my word, general, that though I know nothing whatever of manners

and customs of society, and how people live and all that, yet I felt

quite sure that this visit of mine would end exactly as it has ended

now. Oh, well, I suppose it’s all right; especially as my letter was

not answered. Well, good-bye, and forgive me for having disturbed you!”

The prince’s expression was so good-natured at this moment, and so

entirely free from even a suspicion of unpleasant feeling was the smile

with which he looked at the general as he spoke, that the latter

suddenly paused, and appeared to gaze at his guest from quite a new

point of view, all in an instant.

“Do you know, prince,” he said, in quite a different tone, “I do not

know you at all, yet, and after all, Elizabetha Prokofievna would very

likely be pleased to have a peep at a man of her own name. Wait a

little, if you don’t mind, and if you have time to spare?”

“Oh, I assure you I’ve lots of time, my time is entirely my own!” And

the prince immediately replaced his soft, round hat on the table. “I

confess, I thought Elizabetha Prokofievna would very likely remember

that I had written her a letter. Just now your servant—outside

there—was dreadfully suspicious that I had come to beg of you. I

noticed that! Probably he has very strict instructions on that score;

but I assure you I did not come to beg. I came to make some friends.

But I am rather bothered at having disturbed you; that’s all I care

about.—”

“Look here, prince,” said the general, with a cordial smile, “if you

really are the sort of man you appear to be, it may be a source of

great pleasure to us to make your better acquaintance; but, you see, I

am a very busy man, and have to be perpetually sitting here and signing

papers, or off to see his excellency, or to my department, or

somewhere; so that though I should be glad to see more of people, nice

people—you see, I—however, I am sure you are so well brought up that

you will see at once, and—but how old are you, prince?”

“Twenty-six.”

“No? I thought you very much younger.”

“Yes, they say I have a ‘young’ face. As to disturbing you I shall soon

learn to avoid doing that, for I hate disturbing people. Besides, you

and I are so differently constituted, I should think, that there must

be very little in common between us. Not that I will ever believe there

is \_nothing\_ in common between any two people, as some declare is the

case. I am sure people make a great mistake in sorting each other into

groups, by appearances; but I am boring you, I see, you—”

“Just two words: have you any means at all? Or perhaps you may be

intending to undertake some sort of employment? Excuse my questioning

you, but—”

“Oh, my dear sir, I esteem and understand your kindness in putting the

question. No; at present I have no means whatever, and no employment

either, but I hope to find some. I was living on other people abroad.

Schneider, the professor who treated me and taught me, too, in

Switzerland, gave me just enough money for my journey, so that now I

have but a few copecks left. There certainly is one question upon which

I am anxious to have advice, but—”

“Tell me, how do you intend to live now, and what are your plans?”

interrupted the general.

“I wish to work, somehow or other.”

“Oh yes, but then, you see, you are a philosopher. Have you any

talents, or ability in any direction—that is, any that would bring in

money and bread? Excuse me again—”

“Oh, don’t apologize. No, I don’t think I have either talents or

special abilities of any kind; on the contrary. I have always been an

invalid and unable to learn much. As for bread, I should think—”

The general interrupted once more with questions; while the prince

again replied with the narrative we have heard before. It appeared that

the general had known Pavlicheff; but why the latter had taken an

interest in the prince, that young gentleman could not explain;

probably by virtue of the old friendship with his father, he thought.

The prince had been left an orphan when quite a little child, and

Pavlicheff had entrusted him to an old lady, a relative of his own,

living in the country, the child needing the fresh air and exercise of

country life. He was educated, first by a governess, and afterwards by

a tutor, but could not remember much about this time of his life. His

fits were so frequent then, that they made almost an idiot of him (the

prince used the expression “idiot” himself). Pavlicheff had met

Professor Schneider in Berlin, and the latter had persuaded him to send

the boy to Switzerland, to Schneider’s establishment there, for the

cure of his epilepsy, and, five years before this time, the prince was

sent off. But Pavlicheff had died two or three years since, and

Schneider had himself supported the young fellow, from that day to

this, at his own expense. Although he had not quite cured him, he had

greatly improved his condition; and now, at last, at the prince’s own

desire, and because of a certain matter which came to the ears of the

latter, Schneider had despatched the young man to Russia.

The general was much astonished.

“Then you have no one, absolutely \_no\_ one in Russia?” he asked.

“No one, at present; but I hope to make friends; and then I have a

letter from—”

“At all events,” put in the general, not listening to the news about

the letter, “at all events, you must have learned \_something\_, and your

malady would not prevent your undertaking some easy work, in one of the

departments, for instance?”

“Oh dear no, oh no! As for a situation, I should much like to find one

for I am anxious to discover what I really am fit for. I have learned a

good deal in the last four years, and, besides, I read a great many

Russian books.”

“Russian books, indeed? Then, of course, you can read and write quite

correctly?”

“Oh dear, yes!”

“Capital! And your handwriting?”

“Ah, there I am \_really\_ talented! I may say I am a real caligraphist.

Let me write you something, just to show you,” said the prince, with

some excitement.

“With pleasure! In fact, it is very necessary. I like your readiness,

prince; in fact, I must say—I—I—like you very well, altogether,” said

the general.

“What delightful writing materials you have here, such a lot of pencils

and things, and what beautiful paper! It’s a charming room altogether.

I know that picture, it’s a Swiss view. I’m sure the artist painted it

from nature, and that I have seen the very place—”

“Quite likely, though I bought it here. Gania, give the prince some

paper. Here are pens and paper; now then, take this table. What’s

this?” the general continued to Gania, who had that moment taken a

large photograph out of his portfolio, and shown it to his senior.

“Halloa! Nastasia Philipovna! Did she send it you herself? Herself?” he

inquired, with much curiosity and great animation.

“She gave it me just now, when I called in to congratulate her. I asked

her for it long ago. I don’t know whether she meant it for a hint that

I had come empty-handed, without a present for her birthday, or what,”

added Gania, with an unpleasant smile.

“Oh, nonsense, nonsense,” said the general, with decision. “What

extraordinary ideas you have, Gania! As if she would hint; that’s not

her way at all. Besides, what could \_you\_ give her, without having

thousands at your disposal? You might have given her your portrait,

however. Has she ever asked you for it?”

“No, not yet. Very likely she never will. I suppose you haven’t

forgotten about tonight, have you, Ivan Fedorovitch? You were one of

those specially invited, you know.”

“Oh no, I remember all right, and I shall go, of course. I should think

so! She’s twenty-five years old today! And, you know, Gania, you must

be ready for great things; she has promised both myself and Afanasy

Ivanovitch that she will give a decided answer tonight, yes or no. So

be prepared!”

Gania suddenly became so ill at ease that his face grew paler than

ever.

“Are you sure she said that?” he asked, and his voice seemed to quiver

as he spoke.

“Yes, she promised. We both worried her so that she gave in; but she

wished us to tell you nothing about it until the day.”

The general watched Gania’s confusion intently, and clearly did not

like it.

“Remember, Ivan Fedorovitch,” said Gania, in great agitation, “that I

was to be free too, until her decision; and that even then I was to

have my ‘yes or no’ free.”

“Why, don’t you, aren’t you—” began the general, in alarm.

“Oh, don’t misunderstand—”

“But, my dear fellow, what are you doing, what do you mean?”

“Oh, I’m not rejecting her. I may have expressed myself badly, but I

didn’t mean that.”

“Reject her! I should think not!” said the general with annoyance, and

apparently not in the least anxious to conceal it. “Why, my dear

fellow, it’s not a question of your rejecting her, it is whether you

are prepared to receive her consent joyfully, and with proper

satisfaction. How are things going on at home?”

“At home? Oh, I can do as I like there, of course; only my father will

make a fool of himself, as usual. He is rapidly becoming a general

nuisance. I don’t ever talk to him now, but I hold him in check, safe

enough. I swear if it had not been for my mother, I should have shown

him the way out, long ago. My mother is always crying, of course, and

my sister sulks. I had to tell them at last that I intended to be

master of my own destiny, and that I expect to be obeyed at home. At

least, I gave my sister to understand as much, and my mother was

present.”

“Well, I must say, I cannot understand it!” said the general, shrugging

his shoulders and dropping his hands. “You remember your mother, Nina

Alexandrovna, that day she came and sat here and groaned—and when I

asked her what was the matter, she says, ‘Oh, it’s such a \_dishonour\_

to us!’ dishonour! Stuff and nonsense! I should like to know who can

reproach Nastasia Philipovna, or who can say a word of any kind against

her. Did she mean because Nastasia had been living with Totski? What

nonsense it is! You would not let her come near your daughters, says

Nina Alexandrovna. What next, I wonder? I don’t see how she can fail

to—to understand—”

“Her own position?” prompted Gania. “She does understand. Don’t be

annoyed with her. I have warned her not to meddle in other people’s

affairs. However, although there’s comparative peace at home at

present, the storm will break if anything is finally settled tonight.”

The prince heard the whole of the foregoing conversation, as he sat at

the table, writing. He finished at last, and brought the result of his

labour to the general’s desk.

“So this is Nastasia Philipovna,” he said, looking attentively and

curiously at the portrait. “How wonderfully beautiful!” he immediately

added, with warmth. The picture was certainly that of an unusually

lovely woman. She was photographed in a black silk dress of simple

design, her hair was evidently dark and plainly arranged, her eyes were

deep and thoughtful, the expression of her face passionate, but proud.

She was rather thin, perhaps, and a little pale. Both Gania and the

general gazed at the prince in amazement.

“How do you know it’s Nastasia Philipovna?” asked the general; “you

surely don’t know her already, do you?”

“Yes, I do! I have only been one day in Russia, but I have heard of the

great beauty!” And the prince proceeded to narrate his meeting with

Rogojin in the train and the whole of the latter’s story.

“There’s news!” said the general in some excitement, after listening to

the story with engrossed attention.

“Oh, of course it’s nothing but humbug!” cried Gania, a little

disturbed, however. “It’s all humbug; the young merchant was pleased to

indulge in a little innocent recreation! I have heard something of

Rogojin!”

“Yes, so have I!” replied the general. “Nastasia Philipovna told us all

about the earrings that very day. But now it is quite a different

matter. You see the fellow really has a million of roubles, and he is

passionately in love. The whole story smells of passion, and we all

know what this class of gentry is capable of when infatuated. I am much

afraid of some disagreeable scandal, I am indeed!”

“You are afraid of the million, I suppose,” said Gania, grinning and

showing his teeth.

“And you are \_not\_, I presume, eh?”

“How did he strike you, prince?” asked Gania, suddenly. “Did he seem to

be a serious sort of a man, or just a common rowdy fellow? What was

your own opinion about the matter?”

While Gania put this question, a new idea suddenly flashed into his

brain, and blazed out, impatiently, in his eyes. The general, who was

really agitated and disturbed, looked at the prince too, but did not

seem to expect much from his reply.

“I really don’t quite know how to tell you,” replied the prince, “but

it certainly did seem to me that the man was full of passion, and not,

perhaps, quite healthy passion. He seemed to be still far from well.

Very likely he will be in bed again in a day or two, especially if he

lives fast.”

“No! do you think so?” said the general, catching at the idea.

“Yes, I do think so!”

“Yes, but the sort of scandal I referred to may happen at any moment.

It may be this very evening,” remarked Gania to the general, with a

smile.

“Of course; quite so. In that case it all depends upon what is going on

in her brain at this moment.”

“You know the kind of person she is at times.”

“How? What kind of person is she?” cried the general, arrived at the

limits of his patience. “Look here, Gania, don’t you go annoying her

tonight. What you are to do is to be as agreeable towards her as ever

you can. Well, what are you smiling at? You must understand, Gania,

that I have no interest whatever in speaking like this. Whichever way

the question is settled, it will be to my advantage. Nothing will move

Totski from his resolution, so I run no risk. If there is anything I

desire, you must know that it is your benefit only. Can’t you trust me?

You are a sensible fellow, and I have been counting on you; for, in

this matter, that, that—”

“Yes, that’s the chief thing,” said Gania, helping the general out of

his difficulties again, and curling his lips in an envenomed smile,

which he did not attempt to conceal. He gazed with his fevered eyes

straight into those of the general, as though he were anxious that the

latter might read his thoughts.

The general grew purple with anger.

“Yes, of course it is the chief thing!” he cried, looking sharply at

Gania. “What a very curious man you are, Gania! You actually seem to be

\_glad\_ to hear of this millionaire fellow’s arrival—just as though you

wished for an excuse to get out of the whole thing. This is an affair

in which you ought to act honestly with both sides, and give due

warning, to avoid compromising others. But, even now, there is still

time. Do you understand me? I wish to know whether you desire this

arrangement or whether you do not? If not, say so,—and—and welcome! No

one is trying to force you into the snare, Gavrila Ardalionovitch, if

you see a snare in the matter, at least.”

“I do desire it,” murmured Gania, softly but firmly, lowering his eyes;

and he relapsed into gloomy silence.

The general was satisfied. He had excited himself, and was evidently

now regretting that he had gone so far. He turned to the prince, and

suddenly the disagreeable thought of the latter’s presence struck him,

and the certainty that he must have heard every word of the

conversation. But he felt at ease in another moment; it only needed one

glance at the prince to see that in that quarter there was nothing to

fear.

“Oh!” cried the general, catching sight of the prince’s specimen of

caligraphy, which the latter had now handed him for inspection. “Why,

this is simply beautiful; look at that, Gania, there’s real talent

there!”

On a sheet of thick writing-paper the prince had written in medieval

characters the legend:

“The gentle Abbot Pafnute signed this.”

“There,” explained the prince, with great delight and animation,

“there, that’s the abbot’s real signature—from a manuscript of the

fourteenth century. All these old abbots and bishops used to write most

beautifully, with such taste and so much care and diligence. Have you

no copy of Pogodin, general? If you had one I could show you another

type. Stop a bit—here you have the large round writing common in France

during the eighteenth century. Some of the letters are shaped quite

differently from those now in use. It was the writing current then, and

employed by public writers generally. I copied this from one of them,

and you can see how good it is. Look at the well-rounded a and d. I

have tried to translate the French character into the Russian letters—a

difficult thing to do, but I think I have succeeded fairly. Here is a

fine sentence, written in a good, original hand—‘Zeal triumphs over

all.’ That is the script of the Russian War Office. That is how

official documents addressed to important personages should be written.

The letters are round, the type black, and the style somewhat

remarkable. A stylist would not allow these ornaments, or attempts at

flourishes—just look at these unfinished tails!—but it has distinction

and really depicts the soul of the writer. He would like to give play

to his imagination, and follow the inspiration of his genius, but a

soldier is only at ease in the guard-room, and the pen stops half-way,

a slave to discipline. How delightful! The first time I met an example

of this handwriting, I was positively astonished, and where do you

think I chanced to find it? In Switzerland, of all places! Now that is

an ordinary English hand. It can hardly be improved, it is so refined

and exquisite—almost perfection. This is an example of another kind, a

mixture of styles. The copy was given me by a French commercial

traveller. It is founded on the English, but the downstrokes are a

little blacker, and more marked. Notice that the oval has some slight

modification—it is more rounded. This writing allows for flourishes;

now a flourish is a dangerous thing! Its use requires such taste, but,

if successful, what a distinction it gives to the whole! It results in

an incomparable type—one to fall in love with!”

“Dear me! How you have gone into all the refinements and details of the

question! Why, my dear fellow, you are not a caligraphist, you are an

artist! Eh, Gania?”

“Wonderful!” said Gania. “And he knows it too,” he added, with a

sarcastic smile.

“You may smile,—but there’s a career in this,” said the general. “You

don’t know what a great personage I shall show this to, prince. Why,

you can command a situation at thirty-five roubles per month to start

with. However, it’s half-past twelve,” he concluded, looking at his

watch; “so to business, prince, for I must be setting to work and shall

not see you again today. Sit down a minute. I have told you that I

cannot receive you myself very often, but I should like to be of some

assistance to you, some small assistance, of a kind that would give you

satisfaction. I shall find you a place in one of the State departments,

an easy place—but you will require to be accurate. Now, as to your

plans—in the house, or rather in the family of Gania here—my young

friend, whom I hope you will know better—his mother and sister have

prepared two or three rooms for lodgers, and let them to highly

recommended young fellows, with board and attendance. I am sure Nina

Alexandrovna will take you in on my recommendation. There you will be

comfortable and well taken care of; for I do not think, prince, that

you are the sort of man to be left to the mercy of Fate in a town like

Petersburg. Nina Alexandrovna, Gania’s mother, and Varvara

Alexandrovna, are ladies for whom I have the highest possible esteem

and respect. Nina Alexandrovna is the wife of General Ardalion

Alexandrovitch, my old brother in arms, with whom, I regret to say, on

account of certain circumstances, I am no longer acquainted. I give you

all this information, prince, in order to make it clear to you that I

am personally recommending you to this family, and that in so doing, I

am more or less taking upon myself to answer for you. The terms are

most reasonable, and I trust that your salary will very shortly prove

amply sufficient for your expenditure. Of course pocket-money is a

necessity, if only a little; do not be angry, prince, if I strongly

recommend you to avoid carrying money in your pocket. But as your purse

is quite empty at the present moment, you must allow me to press these

twenty-five roubles upon your acceptance, as something to begin with.

Of course we will settle this little matter another time, and if you

are the upright, honest man you look, I anticipate very little trouble

between us on that score. Taking so much interest in you as you may

perceive I do, I am not without my object, and you shall know it in

good time. You see, I am perfectly candid with you. I hope, Gania, you

have nothing to say against the prince’s taking up his abode in your

house?”

“Oh, on the contrary! my mother will be very glad,” said Gania,

courteously and kindly.

“I think only one of your rooms is engaged as yet, is it not? That

fellow Ferd-Ferd—”

“Ferdishenko.”

“Yes—I don’t like that Ferdishenko. I can’t understand why Nastasia

Philipovna encourages him so. Is he really her cousin, as he says?”

“Oh dear no, it’s all a joke. No more cousin than I am.”

“Well, what do you think of the arrangement, prince?”

“Thank you, general; you have behaved very kindly to me; all the more

so since I did not ask you to help me. I don’t say that out of pride. I

certainly did not know where to lay my head tonight. Rogojin asked me

to come to his house, of course, but—”

“Rogojin? No, no, my good fellow. I should strongly recommend you,

paternally,—or, if you prefer it, as a friend,—to forget all about

Rogojin, and, in fact, to stick to the family into which you are about

to enter.”

“Thank you,” began the prince; “and since you are so very kind there is

just one matter which I—”

“You must really excuse me,” interrupted the general, “but I positively

haven’t another moment now. I shall just tell Elizabetha Prokofievna

about you, and if she wishes to receive you at once—as I shall advise

her—I strongly recommend you to ingratiate yourself with her at the

first opportunity, for my wife may be of the greatest service to you in

many ways. If she cannot receive you now, you must be content to wait

till another time. Meanwhile you, Gania, just look over these accounts,

will you? We mustn’t forget to finish off that matter—”

The general left the room, and the prince never succeeded in broaching

the business which he had on hand, though he had endeavoured to do so

four times.

Gania lit a cigarette and offered one to the prince. The latter

accepted the offer, but did not talk, being unwilling to disturb

Gania’s work. He commenced to examine the study and its contents. But

Gania hardly so much as glanced at the papers lying before him; he was

absent and thoughtful, and his smile and general appearance struck the

prince still more disagreeably now that the two were left alone

together.

Suddenly Gania approached our hero who was at the moment standing over

Nastasia Philipovna’s portrait, gazing at it.

“Do you admire that sort of woman, prince?” he asked, looking intently

at him. He seemed to have some special object in the question.

“It’s a wonderful face,” said the prince, “and I feel sure that her

destiny is not by any means an ordinary, uneventful one. Her face is

smiling enough, but she must have suffered terribly—hasn’t she? Her

eyes show it—those two bones there, the little points under her eyes,

just where the cheek begins. It’s a proud face too, terribly proud! And

I—I can’t say whether she is good and kind, or not. Oh, if she be but

good! That would make all well!”

“And would you marry a woman like that, now?” continued Gania, never

taking his excited eyes off the prince’s face.

“I cannot marry at all,” said the latter. “I am an invalid.”

“Would Rogojin marry her, do you think?”

“Why not? Certainly he would, I should think. He would marry her

tomorrow!—marry her tomorrow and murder her in a week!”

Hardly had the prince uttered the last word when Gania gave such a

fearful shudder that the prince almost cried out.

“What’s the matter?” said he, seizing Gania’s hand.

“Your highness! His excellency begs your presence in her excellency’s

apartments!” announced the footman, appearing at the door.

The prince immediately followed the man out of the room.

IV.

All three of the Miss Epanchins were fine, healthy girls, well-grown,

with good shoulders and busts, and strong—almost masculine—hands; and,

of course, with all the above attributes, they enjoyed capital

appetites, of which they were not in the least ashamed.

Elizabetha Prokofievna sometimes informed the girls that they were a

little too candid in this matter, but in spite of their outward

deference to their mother these three young women, in solemn conclave,

had long agreed to modify the unquestioning obedience which they had

been in the habit of according to her; and Mrs. General Epanchin had

judged it better to say nothing about it, though, of course, she was

well aware of the fact.

It is true that her nature sometimes rebelled against these dictates of

reason, and that she grew yearly more capricious and impatient; but

having a respectful and well-disciplined husband under her thumb at all

times, she found it possible, as a rule, to empty any little

accumulations of spleen upon his head, and therefore the harmony of the

family was kept duly balanced, and things went as smoothly as family

matters can.

Mrs. Epanchin had a fair appetite herself, and generally took her share

of the capital mid-day lunch which was always served for the girls, and

which was nearly as good as a dinner. The young ladies used to have a

cup of coffee each before this meal, at ten o’clock, while still in

bed. This was a favourite and unalterable arrangement with them. At

half-past twelve, the table was laid in the small dining-room, and

occasionally the general himself appeared at the family gathering, if

he had time.

Besides tea and coffee, cheese, honey, butter, pan-cakes of various

kinds (the lady of the house loved these best), cutlets, and so on,

there was generally strong beef soup, and other substantial delicacies.

On the particular morning on which our story has opened, the family had

assembled in the dining-room, and were waiting the general’s

appearance, the latter having promised to come this day. If he had been

one moment late, he would have been sent for at once; but he turned up

punctually.

As he came forward to wish his wife good-morning and kiss her hands, as

his custom was, he observed something in her look which boded ill. He

thought he knew the reason, and had expected it, but still, he was not

altogether comfortable. His daughters advanced to kiss him, too, and

though they did not look exactly angry, there was something strange in

their expression as well.

The general was, owing to certain circumstances, a little inclined to

be too suspicious at home, and needlessly nervous; but, as an

experienced father and husband, he judged it better to take measures at

once to protect himself from any dangers there might be in the air.

However, I hope I shall not interfere with the proper sequence of my

narrative too much, if I diverge for a moment at this point, in order

to explain the mutual relations between General Epanchin’s family and

others acting a part in this history, at the time when we take up the

thread of their destiny. I have already stated that the general, though

he was a man of lowly origin, and of poor education, was, for all that,

an experienced and talented husband and father. Among other things, he

considered it undesirable to hurry his daughters to the matrimonial

altar and to worry them too much with assurances of his paternal wishes

for their happiness, as is the custom among parents of many grown-up

daughters. He even succeeded in ranging his wife on his side on this

question, though he found the feat very difficult to accomplish,

because unnatural; but the general’s arguments were conclusive, and

founded upon obvious facts. The general considered that the girls’

taste and good sense should be allowed to develop and mature

deliberately, and that the parents’ duty should merely be to keep

watch, in order that no strange or undesirable choice be made; but that

the selection once effected, both father and mother were bound from

that moment to enter heart and soul into the cause, and to see that the

matter progressed without hindrance until the altar should be happily

reached.

Besides this, it was clear that the Epanchins’ position gained each

year, with geometrical accuracy, both as to financial solidity and

social weight; and, therefore, the longer the girls waited, the better

was their chance of making a brilliant match.

But again, amidst the incontrovertible facts just recorded, one more,

equally significant, rose up to confront the family; and this was, that

the eldest daughter, Alexandra, had imperceptibly arrived at her

twenty-fifth birthday. Almost at the same moment, Afanasy Ivanovitch

Totski, a man of immense wealth, high connections, and good standing,

announced his intention of marrying. Afanasy Ivanovitch was a gentleman

of fifty-five years of age, artistically gifted, and of most refined

tastes. He wished to marry well, and, moreover, he was a keen admirer

and judge of beauty.

Now, since Totski had, of late, been upon terms of great cordiality

with Epanchin, which excellent relations were intensified by the fact

that they were, so to speak, partners in several financial enterprises,

it so happened that the former now put in a friendly request to the

general for counsel with regard to the important step he meditated.

Might he suggest, for instance, such a thing as a marriage between

himself and one of the general’s daughters?

Evidently the quiet, pleasant current of the family life of the

Epanchins was about to undergo a change.

The undoubted beauty of the family, \_par excellence\_, was the youngest,

Aglaya, as aforesaid. But Totski himself, though an egotist of the

extremest type, realized that he had no chance there; Aglaya was

clearly not for such as he.

Perhaps the sisterly love and friendship of the three girls had more or

less exaggerated Aglaya’s chances of happiness. In their opinion, the

latter’s destiny was not merely to be very happy; she was to live in a

heaven on earth. Aglaya’s husband was to be a compendium of all the

virtues, and of all success, not to speak of fabulous wealth. The two

elder sisters had agreed that all was to be sacrificed by them, if need

be, for Aglaya’s sake; her dowry was to be colossal and unprecedented.

The general and his wife were aware of this agreement, and, therefore,

when Totski suggested himself for one of the sisters, the parents made

no doubt that one of the two elder girls would probably accept the

offer, since Totski would certainly make no difficulty as to dowry. The

general valued the proposal very highly. He knew life, and realized

what such an offer was worth.

The answer of the sisters to the communication was, if not conclusive,

at least consoling and hopeful. It made known that the eldest,

Alexandra, would very likely be disposed to listen to a proposal.

Alexandra was a good-natured girl, though she had a will of her own.

She was intelligent and kind-hearted, and, if she were to marry Totski,

she would make him a good wife. She did not care for a brilliant

marriage; she was eminently a woman calculated to soothe and sweeten

the life of any man; decidedly pretty, if not absolutely handsome. What

better could Totski wish?

So the matter crept slowly forward. The general and Totski had agreed

to avoid any hasty and irrevocable step. Alexandra’s parents had not

even begun to talk to their daughters freely upon the subject, when

suddenly, as it were, a dissonant chord was struck amid the harmony of

the proceedings. Mrs. Epanchin began to show signs of discontent, and

that was a serious matter. A certain circumstance had crept in, a

disagreeable and troublesome factor, which threatened to overturn the

whole business.

This circumstance had come into existence eighteen years before. Close

to an estate of Totski’s, in one of the central provinces of Russia,

there lived, at that time, a poor gentleman whose estate was of the

wretchedest description. This gentleman was noted in the district for

his persistent ill-fortune; his name was Barashkoff, and, as regards

family and descent, he was vastly superior to Totski, but his estate

was mortgaged to the last acre. One day, when he had ridden over to the

town to see a creditor, the chief peasant of his village followed him

shortly after, with the news that his house had been burnt down, and

that his wife had perished with it, but his children were safe.

Even Barashkoff, inured to the storms of evil fortune as he was, could

not stand this last stroke. He went mad and died shortly after in the

town hospital. His estate was sold for the creditors; and the little

girls—two of them, of seven and eight years of age respectively,—were

adopted by Totski, who undertook their maintenance and education in the

kindness of his heart. They were brought up together with the children

of his German bailiff. Very soon, however, there was only one of them

left—Nastasia Philipovna—for the other little one died of

whooping-cough. Totski, who was living abroad at this time, very soon

forgot all about the child; but five years after, returning to Russia,

it struck him that he would like to look over his estate and see how

matters were going there, and, arrived at his bailiff’s house, he was

not long in discovering that among the children of the latter there now

dwelt a most lovely little girl of twelve, sweet and intelligent, and

bright, and promising to develop beauty of most unusual quality—as to

which last Totski was an undoubted authority.

He only stayed at his country seat a few days on this occasion, but he

had time to make his arrangements. Great changes took place in the

child’s education; a good governess was engaged, a Swiss lady of

experience and culture. For four years this lady resided in the house

with little Nastia, and then the education was considered complete. The

governess took her departure, and another lady came down to fetch

Nastia, by Totski’s instructions. The child was now transported to

another of Totski’s estates in a distant part of the country. Here she

found a delightful little house, just built, and prepared for her

reception with great care and taste; and here she took up her abode

together with the lady who had accompanied her from her old home. In

the house there were two experienced maids, musical instruments of all

sorts, a charming “young lady’s library,” pictures, paint-boxes, a

lap-dog, and everything to make life agreeable. Within a fortnight

Totski himself arrived, and from that time he appeared to have taken a

great fancy to this part of the world and came down each summer,

staying two and three months at a time. So passed four years peacefully

and happily, in charming surroundings.

At the end of that time, and about four months after Totski’s last

visit (he had stayed but a fortnight on this occasion), a report

reached Nastasia Philipovna that he was about to be married in St.

Petersburg, to a rich, eminent, and lovely woman. The report was only

partially true, the marriage project being only in an embryo condition;

but a great change now came over Nastasia Philipovna. She suddenly

displayed unusual decision of character; and without wasting time in

thought, she left her country home and came up to St. Petersburg,

straight to Totski’s house, all alone.

The latter, amazed at her conduct, began to express his displeasure;

but he very soon became aware that he must change his voice, style, and

everything else, with this young lady; the good old times were gone. An

entirely new and different woman sat before him, between whom and the

girl he had left in the country last July there seemed nothing in

common.

In the first place, this new woman understood a good deal more than was

usual for young people of her age; so much indeed, that Totski could

not help wondering where she had picked up her knowledge. Surely not

from her “young lady’s library”? It even embraced legal matters, and

the “world” in general, to a considerable extent.

Her character was absolutely changed. No more of the girlish

alternations of timidity and petulance, the adorable naivete, the

reveries, the tears, the playfulness... It was an entirely new and

hitherto unknown being who now sat and laughed at him, and informed him

to his face that she had never had the faintest feeling for him of any

kind, except loathing and contempt—contempt which had followed closely

upon her sensations of surprise and bewilderment after her first

acquaintance with him.

This new woman gave him further to understand that though it was

absolutely the same to her whom he married, yet she had decided to

prevent this marriage—for no particular reason, but that she \_chose\_ to

do so, and because she wished to amuse herself at his expense for that

it was “quite her turn to laugh a little now!”

Such were her words—very likely she did not give her real reason for

this eccentric conduct; but, at all events, that was all the

explanation she deigned to offer.

Meanwhile, Totski thought the matter over as well as his scattered

ideas would permit. His meditations lasted a fortnight, however, and at

the end of that time his resolution was taken. The fact was, Totski was

at that time a man of fifty years of age; his position was solid and

respectable; his place in society had long been firmly fixed upon safe

foundations; he loved himself, his personal comforts, and his position

better than all the world, as every respectable gentleman should!

At the same time his grasp of things in general soon showed Totski that

he now had to deal with a being who was outside the pale of the

ordinary rules of traditional behaviour, and who would not only

threaten mischief but would undoubtedly carry it out, and stop for no

one.

There was evidently, he concluded, something at work here; some storm

of the mind, some paroxysm of romantic anger, goodness knows against

whom or what, some insatiable contempt—in a word, something altogether

absurd and impossible, but at the same time most dangerous to be met

with by any respectable person with a position in society to keep up.

For a man of Totski’s wealth and standing, it would, of course, have

been the simplest possible matter to take steps which would rid him at

once from all annoyance; while it was obviously impossible for Nastasia

Philipovna to harm him in any way, either legally or by stirring up a

scandal, for, in case of the latter danger, he could so easily remove

her to a sphere of safety. However, these arguments would only hold

good in case of Nastasia acting as others might in such an emergency.

She was much more likely to overstep the bounds of reasonable conduct

by some extraordinary eccentricity.

Here the sound judgment of Totski stood him in good stead. He realized

that Nastasia Philipovna must be well aware that she could do nothing

by legal means to injure him, and that her flashing eyes betrayed some

entirely different intention.

Nastasia Philipovna was quite capable of ruining herself, and even of

perpetrating something which would send her to Siberia, for the mere

pleasure of injuring a man for whom she had developed so inhuman a

sense of loathing and contempt. He had sufficient insight to understand

that she valued nothing in the world—herself least of all—and he made

no attempt to conceal the fact that he was a coward in some respects.

For instance, if he had been told that he would be stabbed at the

altar, or publicly insulted, he would undoubtedly have been frightened;

but not so much at the idea of being murdered, or wounded, or insulted,

as at the thought that if such things were to happen he would be made

to look ridiculous in the eyes of society.

He knew well that Nastasia thoroughly understood him and where to wound

him and how, and therefore, as the marriage was still only in embryo,

Totski decided to conciliate her by giving it up. His decision was

strengthened by the fact that Nastasia Philipovna had curiously altered

of late. It would be difficult to conceive how different she was

physically, at the present time, to the girl of a few years ago. She

was pretty then... but now!... Totski laughed angrily when he thought

how short-sighted he had been. In days gone by he remembered how he had

looked at her beautiful eyes, how even then he had marvelled at their

dark mysterious depths, and at their wondering gaze which seemed to

seek an answer to some unknown riddle. Her complexion also had altered.

She was now exceedingly pale, but, curiously, this change only made her

more beautiful. Like most men of the world, Totski had rather despised

such a cheaply-bought conquest, but of late years he had begun to think

differently about it. It had struck him as long ago as last spring that

he ought to be finding a good match for Nastasia; for instance, some

respectable and reasonable young fellow serving in a government office

in another part of the country. How maliciously Nastasia laughed at the

idea of such a thing, now!

However, it appeared to Totski that he might make use of her in another

way; and he determined to establish her in St. Petersburg, surrounding

her with all the comforts and luxuries that his wealth could command.

In this way he might gain glory in certain circles.

Five years of this Petersburg life went by, and, of course, during that

time a great deal happened. Totski’s position was very uncomfortable;

having “funked” once, he could not totally regain his ease. He was

afraid, he did not know why, but he was simply \_afraid\_ of Nastasia

Philipovna. For the first two years or so he had suspected that she

wished to marry him herself, and that only her vanity prevented her

telling him so. He thought that she wanted him to approach her with a

humble proposal from his own side. But to his great, and not entirely

pleasurable amazement, he discovered that this was by no means the

case, and that were he to offer himself he would be refused. He could

not understand such a state of things, and was obliged to conclude that

it was pride, the pride of an injured and imaginative woman, which had

gone to such lengths that it preferred to sit and nurse its contempt

and hatred in solitude rather than mount to heights of hitherto

unattainable splendour. To make matters worse, she was quite impervious

to mercenary considerations, and could not be bribed in any way.

Finally, Totski took cunning means to try to break his chains and be

free. He tried to tempt her in various ways to lose her heart; he

invited princes, hussars, secretaries of embassies, poets, novelists,

even Socialists, to see her; but not one of them all made the faintest

impression upon Nastasia. It was as though she had a pebble in place of

a heart, as though her feelings and affections were dried up and

withered for ever.

She lived almost entirely alone; she read, she studied, she loved

music. Her principal acquaintances were poor women of various grades, a

couple of actresses, and the family of a poor schoolteacher. Among

these people she was much beloved.

She received four or five friends sometimes, of an evening. Totski

often came. Lately, too, General Epanchin had been enabled with great

difficulty to introduce himself into her circle. Gania made her

acquaintance also, and others were Ferdishenko, an ill-bred, and

would-be witty, young clerk, and Ptitsin, a money-lender of modest and

polished manners, who had risen from poverty. In fact, Nastasia

Philipovna’s beauty became a thing known to all the town; but not a

single man could boast of anything more than his own admiration for

her; and this reputation of hers, and her wit and culture and grace,

all confirmed Totski in the plan he had now prepared.

And it was at this moment that General Epanchin began to play so large

and important a part in the story.

When Totski had approached the general with his request for friendly

counsel as to a marriage with one of his daughters, he had made a full

and candid confession. He had said that he intended to stop at no means

to obtain his freedom; even if Nastasia were to promise to leave him

entirely alone in future, he would not (he said) believe and trust her;

words were not enough for him; he must have solid guarantees of some

sort. So he and the general determined to try what an attempt to appeal

to her heart would effect. Having arrived at Nastasia’s house one day,

with Epanchin, Totski immediately began to speak of the intolerable

torment of his position. He admitted that he was to blame for all, but

candidly confessed that he could not bring himself to feel any remorse

for his original guilt towards herself, because he was a man of sensual

passions which were inborn and ineradicable, and that he had no power

over himself in this respect; but that he wished, seriously, to marry

at last, and that the whole fate of the most desirable social union

which he contemplated, was in her hands; in a word, he confided his all

to her generosity of heart.

General Epanchin took up his part and spoke in the character of father

of a family; he spoke sensibly, and without wasting words over any

attempt at sentimentality, he merely recorded his full admission of her

right to be the arbiter of Totski’s destiny at this moment. He then

pointed out that the fate of his daughter, and very likely of both his

other daughters, now hung upon her reply.

To Nastasia’s question as to what they wished her to do, Totski

confessed that he had been so frightened by her, five years ago, that

he could never now be entirely comfortable until she herself married.

He immediately added that such a suggestion from him would, of course,

be absurd, unless accompanied by remarks of a more pointed nature. He

very well knew, he said, that a certain young gentleman of good family,

namely, Gavrila Ardalionovitch Ivolgin, with whom she was acquainted,

and whom she received at her house, had long loved her passionately,

and would give his life for some response from her. The young fellow

had confessed this love of his to him (Totski) and had also admitted it

in the hearing of his benefactor, General Epanchin. Lastly, he could

not help being of opinion that Nastasia must be aware of Gania’s love

for her, and if he (Totski) mistook not, she had looked with some

favour upon it, being often lonely, and rather tired of her present

life. Having remarked how difficult it was for him, of all people, to

speak to her of these matters, Totski concluded by saying that he

trusted Nastasia Philipovna would not look with contempt upon him if he

now expressed his sincere desire to guarantee her future by a gift of

seventy-five thousand roubles. He added that the sum would have been

left her all the same in his will, and that therefore she must not

consider the gift as in any way an indemnification to her for anything,

but that there was no reason, after all, why a man should not be

allowed to entertain a natural desire to lighten his conscience, etc.,

etc.; in fact, all that would naturally be said under the

circumstances. Totski was very eloquent all through, and, in

conclusion, just touched on the fact that not a soul in the world, not

even General Epanchin, had ever heard a word about the above

seventy-five thousand roubles, and that this was the first time he had

ever given expression to his intentions in respect to them.

Nastasia Philipovna’s reply to this long rigmarole astonished both the

friends considerably.

Not only was there no trace of her former irony, of her old hatred and

enmity, and of that dreadful laughter, the very recollection of which

sent a cold chill down Totski’s back to this very day; but she seemed

charmed and really glad to have the opportunity of talking seriously

with him for once in a way. She confessed that she had long wished to

have a frank and free conversation and to ask for friendly advice, but

that pride had hitherto prevented her; now, however, that the ice was

broken, nothing could be more welcome to her than this opportunity.

First, with a sad smile, and then with a twinkle of merriment in her

eyes, she admitted that such a storm as that of five years ago was now

quite out of the question. She said that she had long since changed her

views of things, and recognized that facts must be taken into

consideration in spite of the feelings of the heart. What was done was

done and ended, and she could not understand why Totski should still

feel alarmed.

She next turned to General Epanchin and observed, most courteously,

that she had long since known of his daughters, and that she had heard

none but good report; that she had learned to think of them with deep

and sincere respect. The idea alone that she could in any way serve

them, would be to her both a pride and a source of real happiness.

It was true that she was lonely in her present life; Totski had judged

her thoughts aright. She longed to rise, if not to love, at least to

family life and new hopes and objects, but as to Gavrila

Ardalionovitch, she could not as yet say much. She thought it must be

the case that he loved her; she felt that she too might learn to love

him, if she could be sure of the firmness of his attachment to herself;

but he was very young, and it was a difficult question to decide. What

she specially liked about him was that he worked, and supported his

family by his toil.

She had heard that he was proud and ambitious; she had heard much that

was interesting of his mother and sister, she had heard of them from

Mr. Ptitsin, and would much like to make their acquaintance,

but—another question!—would they like to receive her into their house?

At all events, though she did not reject the idea of this marriage, she

desired not to be hurried. As for the seventy-five thousand roubles,

Mr. Totski need not have found any difficulty or awkwardness about the

matter; she quite understood the value of money, and would, of course,

accept the gift. She thanked him for his delicacy, however, but saw no

reason why Gavrila Ardalionovitch should not know about it.

She would not marry the latter, she said, until she felt persuaded that

neither on his part nor on the part of his family did there exist any

sort of concealed suspicions as to herself. She did not intend to ask

forgiveness for anything in the past, which fact she desired to be

known. She did not consider herself to blame for anything that had

happened in former years, and she thought that Gavrila Ardalionovitch

should be informed as to the relations which had existed between

herself and Totski during the last five years. If she accepted this

money it was not to be considered as indemnification for her misfortune

as a young girl, which had not been in any degree her own fault, but

merely as compensation for her ruined life.

She became so excited and agitated during all these explanations and

confessions that General Epanchin was highly gratified, and considered

the matter satisfactorily arranged once for all. But the once bitten

Totski was twice shy, and looked for hidden snakes among the flowers.

However, the special point to which the two friends particularly

trusted to bring about their object (namely, Gania’s attractiveness for

Nastasia Philipovna), stood out more and more prominently; the

pourparlers had commenced, and gradually even Totski began to believe

in the possibility of success.

Before long Nastasia and Gania had talked the matter over. Very little

was said—her modesty seemed to suffer under the infliction of

discussing such a question. But she recognized his love, on the

understanding that she bound herself to nothing whatever, and that she

reserved the right to say “no” up to the very hour of the marriage

ceremony. Gania was to have the same right of refusal at the last

moment.

It soon became clear to Gania, after scenes of wrath and quarrellings

at the domestic hearth, that his family were seriously opposed to the

match, and that Nastasia was aware of this fact was equally evident.

She said nothing about it, though he daily expected her to do so.

There were several rumours afloat, before long, which upset Totski’s

equanimity a good deal, but we will not now stop to describe them;

merely mentioning an instance or two. One was that Nastasia had entered

into close and secret relations with the Epanchin girls—a most unlikely

rumour; another was that Nastasia had long satisfied herself of the

fact that Gania was merely marrying her for money, and that his nature

was gloomy and greedy, impatient and selfish, to an extraordinary

degree; and that although he had been keen enough in his desire to

achieve a conquest before, yet since the two friends had agreed to

exploit his passion for their own purposes, it was clear enough that he

had begun to consider the whole thing a nuisance and a nightmare.

In his heart passion and hate seemed to hold divided sway, and although

he had at last given his consent to marry the woman (as he said), under

the stress of circumstances, yet he promised himself that he would

“take it out of her,” after marriage.

Nastasia seemed to Totski to have divined all this, and to be preparing

something on her own account, which frightened him to such an extent

that he did not dare communicate his views even to the general. But at

times he would pluck up his courage and be full of hope and good

spirits again, acting, in fact, as weak men do act in such

circumstances.

However, both the friends felt that the thing looked rosy indeed when

one day Nastasia informed them that she would give her final answer on

the evening of her birthday, which anniversary was due in a very short

time.

A strange rumour began to circulate, meanwhile; no less than that the

respectable and highly respected General Epanchin was himself so

fascinated by Nastasia Philipovna that his feeling for her amounted

almost to passion. What he thought to gain by Gania’s marriage to the

girl it was difficult to imagine. Possibly he counted on Gania’s

complaisance; for Totski had long suspected that there existed some

secret understanding between the general and his secretary. At all

events the fact was known that he had prepared a magnificent present of

pearls for Nastasia’s birthday, and that he was looking forward to the

occasion when he should present his gift with the greatest excitement

and impatience. The day before her birthday he was in a fever of

agitation.

Mrs. Epanchin, long accustomed to her husband’s infidelities, had heard

of the pearls, and the rumour excited her liveliest curiosity and

interest. The general remarked her suspicions, and felt that a grand

explanation must shortly take place—which fact alarmed him much.

This is the reason why he was so unwilling to take lunch (on the

morning upon which we took up this narrative) with the rest of his

family. Before the prince’s arrival he had made up his mind to plead

business, and “cut” the meal; which simply meant running away.

He was particularly anxious that this one day should be

passed—especially the evening—without unpleasantness between himself

and his family; and just at the right moment the prince turned up—“as

though Heaven had sent him on purpose,” said the general to himself, as

he left the study to seek out the wife of his bosom.

V.

Mrs. General Epanchin was a proud woman by nature. What must her

feelings have been when she heard that Prince Muishkin, the last of his

and her line, had arrived in beggar’s guise, a wretched idiot, a

recipient of charity—all of which details the general gave out for

greater effect! He was anxious to steal her interest at the first

swoop, so as to distract her thoughts from other matters nearer home.

Mrs. Epanchin was in the habit of holding herself very straight, and

staring before her, without speaking, in moments of excitement.

She was a fine woman of the same age as her husband, with a slightly

hooked nose, a high, narrow forehead, thick hair turning a little grey,

and a sallow complexion. Her eyes were grey and wore a very curious

expression at times. She believed them to be most effective—a belief

that nothing could alter.

“What, receive him! Now, at once?” asked Mrs. Epanchin, gazing vaguely

at her husband as he stood fidgeting before her.

“Oh, dear me, I assure you there is no need to stand on ceremony with

him,” the general explained hastily. “He is quite a child, not to say a

pathetic-looking creature. He has fits of some sort, and has just

arrived from Switzerland, straight from the station, dressed like a

German and without a farthing in his pocket. I gave him twenty-five

roubles to go on with, and am going to find him some easy place in one

of the government offices. I should like you to ply him well with the

victuals, my dears, for I should think he must be very hungry.”

“You astonish me,” said the lady, gazing as before. “Fits, and hungry

too! What sort of fits?”

“Oh, they don’t come on frequently, besides, he’s a regular child,

though he seems to be fairly educated. I should like you, if possible,

my dears,” the general added, making slowly for the door, “to put him

through his paces a bit, and see what he is good for. I think you

should be kind to him; it is a good deed, you know—however, just as you

like, of course—but he is a sort of relation, remember, and I thought

it might interest you to see the young fellow, seeing that this is so.”

“Oh, of course, mamma, if we needn’t stand on ceremony with him, we

must give the poor fellow something to eat after his journey;

especially as he has not the least idea where to go to,” said

Alexandra, the eldest of the girls.

“Besides, he’s quite a child; we can entertain him with a little

hide-and-seek, in case of need,” said Adelaida.

“Hide-and-seek? What do you mean?” inquired Mrs. Epanchin.

“Oh, do stop pretending, mamma,” cried Aglaya, in vexation. “Send him

up, father; mother allows.”

The general rang the bell and gave orders that the prince should be

shown in.

“Only on condition that he has a napkin under his chin at lunch, then,”

said Mrs. Epanchin, “and let Fedor, or Mavra, stand behind him while he

eats. Is he quiet when he has these fits? He doesn’t show violence,

does he?”

“On the contrary, he seems to be very well brought up. His manners are

excellent—but here he is himself. Here you are, prince—let me introduce

you, the last of the Muishkins, a relative of your own, my dear, or at

least of the same name. Receive him kindly, please. They’ll bring in

lunch directly, prince; you must stop and have some, but you must

excuse me. I’m in a hurry, I must be off—”

“We all know where \_you\_ must be off to!” said Mrs. Epanchin, in a

meaning voice.

“Yes, yes—I must hurry away, I’m late! Look here, dears, let him write

you something in your albums; you’ve no idea what a wonderful

caligraphist he is, wonderful talent! He has just written out ‘Abbot

Pafnute signed this’ for me. Well, \_au revoir!\_”

“Stop a minute; where are you off to? Who is this abbot?” cried Mrs.

Epanchin to her retreating husband in a tone of excited annoyance.

“Yes, my dear, it was an old abbot of that name—I must be off to see

the count, he’s waiting for me, I’m late—Good-bye! \_Au revoir\_,

prince!”—and the general bolted at full speed.

“Oh, yes—I know what count you’re going to see!” remarked his wife in a

cutting manner, as she turned her angry eyes on the prince. “Now then,

what’s all this about?—What abbot—Who’s Pafnute?” she added, brusquely.

“Mamma!” said Alexandra, shocked at her rudeness.

Aglaya stamped her foot.

“Nonsense! Let me alone!” said the angry mother. “Now then, prince, sit

down here, no, nearer, come nearer the light! I want to have a good

look at you. So, now then, who is this abbot?”

“Abbot Pafnute,” said our friend, seriously and with deference.

“Pafnute, yes. And who was he?”

Mrs. Epanchin put these questions hastily and brusquely, and when the

prince answered she nodded her head sagely at each word he said.

“The Abbot Pafnute lived in the fourteenth century,” began the prince;

“he was in charge of one of the monasteries on the Volga, about where

our present Kostroma government lies. He went to Oreol and helped in

the great matters then going on in the religious world; he signed an

edict there, and I have seen a print of his signature; it struck me, so

I copied it. When the general asked me, in his study, to write

something for him, to show my handwriting, I wrote ‘The Abbot Pafnute

signed this,’ in the exact handwriting of the abbot. The general liked

it very much, and that’s why he recalled it just now.”

“Aglaya, make a note of ‘Pafnute,’ or we shall forget him. H’m! and

where is this signature?”

“I think it was left on the general’s table.”

“Let it be sent for at once!”

“Oh, I’ll write you a new one in half a minute,” said the prince, “if

you like!”

“Of course, mamma!” said Alexandra. “But let’s have lunch now, we are

all hungry!”

“Yes; come along, prince,” said the mother, “are you very hungry?”

“Yes; I must say that I am pretty hungry, thanks very much.”

“H’m! I like to see that you know your manners; and you are by no means

such a person as the general thought fit to describe you. Come along;

you sit here, opposite to me,” she continued, “I wish to be able to see

your face. Alexandra, Adelaida, look after the prince! He doesn’t seem

so very ill, does he? I don’t think he requires a napkin under his

chin, after all; are you accustomed to having one on, prince?”

“Formerly, when I was seven years old or so. I believe I wore one; but

now I usually hold my napkin on my knee when I eat.”

“Of course, of course! And about your fits?”

“Fits?” asked the prince, slightly surprised. “I very seldom have fits

nowadays. I don’t know how it may be here, though; they say the climate

may be bad for me.”

“He talks very well, you know!” said Mrs. Epanchin, who still continued

to nod at each word the prince spoke. “I really did not expect it at

all; in fact, I suppose it was all stuff and nonsense on the general’s

part, as usual. Eat away, prince, and tell me where you were born, and

where you were brought up. I wish to know all about you, you interest

me very much!”

The prince expressed his thanks once more, and eating heartily the

while, recommenced the narrative of his life in Switzerland, all of

which we have heard before. Mrs. Epanchin became more and more pleased

with her guest; the girls, too, listened with considerable attention.

In talking over the question of relationship it turned out that the

prince was very well up in the matter and knew his pedigree off by

heart. It was found that scarcely any connection existed between

himself and Mrs. Epanchin, but the talk, and the opportunity of

conversing about her family tree, gratified the latter exceedingly, and

she rose from the table in great good humour.

“Let’s all go to my boudoir,” she said, “and they shall bring some

coffee in there. That’s the room where we all assemble and busy

ourselves as we like best,” she explained. “Alexandra, my eldest, here,

plays the piano, or reads or sews; Adelaida paints landscapes and

portraits (but never finishes any); and Aglaya sits and does nothing. I

don’t work too much, either. Here we are, now; sit down, prince, near

the fire and talk to us. I want to hear you relate something. I wish to

make sure of you first and then tell my old friend, Princess

Bielokonski, about you. I wish you to know all the good people and to

interest them. Now then, begin!”

“Mamma, it’s rather a strange order, that!” said Adelaida, who was

fussing among her paints and paint-brushes at the easel. Aglaya and

Alexandra had settled themselves with folded hands on a sofa, evidently

meaning to be listeners. The prince felt that the general attention was

concentrated upon himself.

“I should refuse to say a word if \_I\_ were ordered to tell a story like

that!” observed Aglaya.

“Why? what’s there strange about it? He has a tongue. Why shouldn’t he

tell us something? I want to judge whether he is a good story-teller;

anything you like, prince—how you liked Switzerland, what was your

first impression, anything. You’ll see, he’ll begin directly and tell

us all about it beautifully.”

“The impression was forcible—” the prince began.

“There, you see, girls,” said the impatient lady, “he \_has\_ begun, you

see.”

“Well, then, \_let\_ him talk, mamma,” said Alexandra. “This prince is a

great humbug and by no means an idiot,” she whispered to Aglaya.

“Oh, I saw that at once,” replied the latter. “I don’t think it at all

nice of him to play a part. What does he wish to gain by it, I wonder?”

“My first impression was a very strong one,” repeated the prince. “When

they took me away from Russia, I remember I passed through many German

towns and looked out of the windows, but did not trouble so much as to

ask questions about them. This was after a long series of fits. I

always used to fall into a sort of torpid condition after such a

series, and lost my memory almost entirely; and though I was not

altogether without reason at such times, yet I had no logical power of

thought. This would continue for three or four days, and then I would

recover myself again. I remember my melancholy was intolerable; I felt

inclined to cry; I sat and wondered and wondered uncomfortably; the

consciousness that everything was strange weighed terribly upon me; I

could understand that it was all foreign and strange. I recollect I

awoke from this state for the first time at Basle, one evening; the

bray of a donkey aroused me, a donkey in the town market. I saw the

donkey and was extremely pleased with it, and from that moment my head

seemed to clear.”

“A donkey? How strange! Yet it is not strange. Anyone of us might fall

in love with a donkey! It happened in mythological times,” said Madame

Epanchin, looking wrathfully at her daughters, who had begun to laugh.

“Go on, prince.”

“Since that evening I have been specially fond of donkeys. I began to

ask questions about them, for I had never seen one before; and I at

once came to the conclusion that this must be one of the most useful of

animals—strong, willing, patient, cheap; and, thanks to this donkey, I

began to like the whole country I was travelling through; and my

melancholy passed away.”

“All this is very strange and interesting,” said Mrs. Epanchin. “Now

let’s leave the donkey and go on to other matters. What are you

laughing at, Aglaya? and you too, Adelaida? The prince told us his

experiences very cleverly; he saw the donkey himself, and what have you

ever seen? \_You\_ have never been abroad.”

“I have seen a donkey though, mamma!” said Aglaya.

“And I’ve heard one!” said Adelaida. All three of the girls laughed out

loud, and the prince laughed with them.

“Well, it’s too bad of you,” said mamma. “You must forgive them,

prince; they are good girls. I am very fond of them, though I often

have to be scolding them; they are all as silly and mad as march

hares.”

“Oh, why shouldn’t they laugh?” said the prince. “I shouldn’t have let

the chance go by in their place, I know. But I stick up for the donkey,

all the same; he’s a patient, good-natured fellow.”

“Are you a patient man, prince? I ask out of curiosity,” said Mrs.

Epanchin.

All laughed again.

“Oh, that wretched donkey again, I see!” cried the lady. “I assure you,

prince, I was not guilty of the least—”

“Insinuation? Oh! I assure you, I take your word for it.” And the

prince continued laughing merrily.

“I must say it’s very nice of you to laugh. I see you really are a

kind-hearted fellow,” said Mrs. Epanchin.

“I’m not always kind, though.”

“I am kind myself, and \_always\_ kind too, if you please!” she retorted,

unexpectedly; “and that is my chief fault, for one ought not to be

always kind. I am often angry with these girls and their father; but

the worst of it is, I am always kindest when I am cross. I was very

angry just before you came, and Aglaya there read me a lesson—thanks,

Aglaya, dear—come and kiss me—there—that’s enough” she added, as Aglaya

came forward and kissed her lips and then her hand. “Now then, go on,

prince. Perhaps you can think of something more exciting than about the

donkey, eh?”

“I must say, again, \_I\_ can’t understand how you can expect anyone to

tell you stories straight away, so,” said Adelaida. “I know I never

could!”

“Yes, but the prince can, because he is clever—cleverer than you are by

ten or twenty times, if you like. There, that’s so, prince; and

seriously, let’s drop the donkey now—what else did you see abroad,

besides the donkey?”

“Yes, but the prince told us about the donkey very cleverly, all the

same,” said Alexandra. “I have always been most interested to hear how

people go mad and get well again, and that sort of thing. Especially

when it happens suddenly.”

“Quite so, quite so!” cried Mrs. Epanchin, delighted. “I see you \_can\_

be sensible now and then, Alexandra. You were speaking of Switzerland,

prince?”

“Yes. We came to Lucerne, and I was taken out in a boat. I felt how

lovely it was, but the loveliness weighed upon me somehow or other, and

made me feel melancholy.”

“Why?” asked Alexandra.

“I don’t know; I always feel like that when I look at the beauties of

nature for the first time; but then, I was ill at that time, of

course!”

“Oh, but I should like to see it!” said Adelaida; “and I don’t know

\_when\_ we shall ever go abroad. I’ve been two years looking out for a

good subject for a picture. I’ve done all I know. ‘The North and South

I know by heart,’ as our poet observes. Do help me to a subject,

prince.”

“Oh, but I know nothing about painting. It seems to me one only has to

look, and paint what one sees.”

“But I don’t know \_how\_ to see!”

“Nonsense, what rubbish you talk!” the mother struck in. “Not know how

to see! Open your eyes and look! If you can’t see here, you won’t see

abroad either. Tell us what you saw yourself, prince!”

“Yes, that’s better,” said Adelaida; “the prince \_learned to see\_

abroad.”

“Oh, I hardly know! You see, I only went to restore my health. I don’t

know whether I learned to see, exactly. I was very happy, however,

nearly all the time.”

“Happy! you can be happy?” cried Aglaya. “Then how can you say you did

not learn to see? I should think you could teach \_us\_ to see!”

“Oh! \_do\_ teach us,” laughed Adelaida.

“Oh! I can’t do that,” said the prince, laughing too. “I lived almost

all the while in one little Swiss village; what can I teach you? At

first I was only just not absolutely dull; then my health began to

improve—then every day became dearer and more precious to me, and the

longer I stayed, the dearer became the time to me; so much so that I

could not help observing it; but why this was so, it would be difficult

to say.”

“So that you didn’t care to go away anywhere else?”

“Well, at first I did; I was restless; I didn’t know however I should

manage to support life—you know there are such moments, especially in

solitude. There was a waterfall near us, such a lovely thin streak of

water, like a thread but white and moving. It fell from a great height,

but it looked quite low, and it was half a mile away, though it did not

seem fifty paces. I loved to listen to it at night, but it was then

that I became so restless. Sometimes I went and climbed the mountain

and stood there in the midst of the tall pines, all alone in the

terrible silence, with our little village in the distance, and the sky

so blue, and the sun so bright, and an old ruined castle on the

mountain-side, far away. I used to watch the line where earth and sky

met, and longed to go and seek there the key of all mysteries, thinking

that I might find there a new life, perhaps some great city where life

should be grander and richer—and then it struck me that life may be

grand enough even in a prison.”

“I read that last most praiseworthy thought in my manual, when I was

twelve years old,” said Aglaya.

“All this is pure philosophy,” said Adelaida. “You are a philosopher,

prince, and have come here to instruct us in your views.”

“Perhaps you are right,” said the prince, smiling. “I think I am a

philosopher, perhaps, and who knows, perhaps I do wish to teach my

views of things to those I meet with?”

“Your philosophy is rather like that of an old woman we know, who is

rich and yet does nothing but try how little she can spend. She talks

of nothing but money all day. Your great philosophical idea of a grand

life in a prison and your four happy years in that Swiss village are

like this, rather,” said Aglaya.

“As to life in a prison, of course there may be two opinions,” said the

prince. “I once heard the story of a man who lived twelve years in a

prison—I heard it from the man himself. He was one of the persons under

treatment with my professor; he had fits, and attacks of melancholy,

then he would weep, and once he tried to commit suicide. \_His\_ life in

prison was sad enough; his only acquaintances were spiders and a tree

that grew outside his grating—but I think I had better tell you of

another man I met last year. There was a very strange feature in this

case, strange because of its extremely rare occurrence. This man had

once been brought to the scaffold in company with several others, and

had had the sentence of death by shooting passed upon him for some

political crime. Twenty minutes later he had been reprieved and some

other punishment substituted; but the interval between the two

sentences, twenty minutes, or at least a quarter of an hour, had been

passed in the certainty that within a few minutes he must die. I was

very anxious to hear him speak of his impressions during that dreadful

time, and I several times inquired of him as to what he thought and

felt. He remembered everything with the most accurate and extraordinary

distinctness, and declared that he would never forget a single iota of

the experience.

“About twenty paces from the scaffold, where he had stood to hear the

sentence, were three posts, fixed in the ground, to which to fasten the

criminals (of whom there were several). The first three criminals were

taken to the posts, dressed in long white tunics, with white caps drawn

over their faces, so that they could not see the rifles pointed at

them. Then a group of soldiers took their stand opposite to each post.

My friend was the eighth on the list, and therefore he would have been

among the third lot to go up. A priest went about among them with a

cross: and there was about five minutes of time left for him to live.

“He said that those five minutes seemed to him to be a most

interminable period, an enormous wealth of time; he seemed to be

living, in these minutes, so many lives that there was no need as yet

to think of that last moment, so that he made several arrangements,

dividing up the time into portions—one for saying farewell to his

companions, two minutes for that; then a couple more for thinking over

his own life and career and all about himself; and another minute for a

last look around. He remembered having divided his time like this quite

well. While saying good-bye to his friends he recollected asking one of

them some very usual everyday question, and being much interested in

the answer. Then having bade farewell, he embarked upon those two

minutes which he had allotted to looking into himself; he knew

beforehand what he was going to think about. He wished to put it to

himself as quickly and clearly as possible, that here was he, a living,

thinking man, and that in three minutes he would be nobody; or if

somebody or something, then what and where? He thought he would decide

this question once for all in these last three minutes. A little way

off there stood a church, and its gilded spire glittered in the sun. He

remembered staring stubbornly at this spire, and at the rays of light

sparkling from it. He could not tear his eyes from these rays of light;

he got the idea that these rays were his new nature, and that in three

minutes he would become one of them, amalgamated somehow with them.

“The repugnance to what must ensue almost immediately, and the

uncertainty, were dreadful, he said; but worst of all was the idea,

‘What should I do if I were not to die now? What if I were to return to

life again? What an eternity of days, and all mine! How I should grudge

and count up every minute of it, so as to waste not a single instant!’

He said that this thought weighed so upon him and became such a

terrible burden upon his brain that he could not bear it, and wished

they would shoot him quickly and have done with it.”

The prince paused and all waited, expecting him to go on again and

finish the story.

“Is that all?” asked Aglaya.

“All? Yes,” said the prince, emerging from a momentary reverie.

“And why did you tell us this?”

“Oh, I happened to recall it, that’s all! It fitted into the

conversation—”

“You probably wish to deduce, prince,” said Alexandra, “that moments of

time cannot be reckoned by money value, and that sometimes five minutes

are worth priceless treasures. All this is very praiseworthy; but may I

ask about this friend of yours, who told you the terrible experience of

his life? He was reprieved, you say; in other words, they did restore

to him that ‘eternity of days.’ What did he do with these riches of

time? Did he keep careful account of his minutes?”

“Oh no, he didn’t! I asked him myself. He said that he had not lived a

bit as he had intended, and had wasted many, and many a minute.”

“Very well, then there’s an experiment, and the thing is proved; one

cannot live and count each moment; say what you like, but one

\_cannot\_.”

“That is true,” said the prince, “I have thought so myself. And yet,

why shouldn’t one do it?”

“You think, then, that you could live more wisely than other people?”

said Aglaya.

“I have had that idea.”

“And you have it still?”

“Yes—I have it still,” the prince replied.

He had contemplated Aglaya until now, with a pleasant though rather

timid smile, but as the last words fell from his lips he began to

laugh, and looked at her merrily.

“You are not very modest!” said she.

“But how brave you are!” said he. “You are laughing, and I—that man’s

tale impressed me so much, that I dreamt of it afterwards; yes, I

dreamt of those five minutes...”

He looked at his listeners again with that same serious, searching

expression.

“You are not angry with me?” he asked suddenly, and with a kind of

nervous hurry, although he looked them straight in the face.

“Why should we be angry?” they cried.

“Only because I seem to be giving you a lecture, all the time!”

At this they laughed heartily.

“Please don’t be angry with me,” continued the prince. “I know very

well that I have seen less of life than other people, and have less

knowledge of it. I must appear to speak strangely sometimes...”

He said the last words nervously.

“You say you have been happy, and that proves you have lived, not less,

but more than other people. Why make all these excuses?” interrupted

Aglaya in a mocking tone of voice. “Besides, you need not mind about

lecturing us; you have nothing to boast of. With your quietism, one

could live happily for a hundred years at least. One might show you the

execution of a felon, or show you one’s little finger. You could draw a

moral from either, and be quite satisfied. That sort of existence is

easy enough.”

“I can’t understand why you always fly into a temper,” said Mrs.

Epanchin, who had been listening to the conversation and examining the

faces of the speakers in turn. “I do not understand what you mean. What

has your little finger to do with it? The prince talks well, though he

is not amusing. He began all right, but now he seems sad.”

“Never mind, mamma! Prince, I wish you had seen an execution,” said

Aglaya. “I should like to ask you a question about that, if you had.”

“I have seen an execution,” said the prince.

“You have!” cried Aglaya. “I might have guessed it. That’s a fitting

crown to the rest of the story. If you have seen an execution, how can

you say you lived happily all the while?”

“But is there capital punishment where you were?” asked Adelaida.

“I saw it at Lyons. Schneider took us there, and as soon as we arrived

we came in for that.”

“Well, and did you like it very much? Was it very edifying and

instructive?” asked Aglaya.

“No, I didn’t like it at all, and was ill after seeing it; but I

confess I stared as though my eyes were fixed to the sight. I could not

tear them away.”

“I, too, should have been unable to tear my eyes away,” said Aglaya.

“They do not at all approve of women going to see an execution there.

The women who do go are condemned for it afterwards in the newspapers.”

“That is, by contending that it is not a sight for women they admit

that it is a sight for men. I congratulate them on the deduction. I

suppose you quite agree with them, prince?”

“Tell us about the execution,” put in Adelaida.

“I would much rather not, just now,” said the prince, a little

disturbed and frowning slightly.

“You don’t seem to want to tell us,” said Aglaya, with a mocking air.

“No,—the thing is, I was telling all about the execution a little while

ago, and—”

“Whom did you tell about it?”

“The man-servant, while I was waiting to see the general.”

“Our man-servant?” exclaimed several voices at once.

“Yes, the one who waits in the entrance hall, a greyish, red-faced

man—”

“The prince is clearly a democrat,” remarked Aglaya.

“Well, if you could tell Aleksey about it, surely you can tell us too.”

“I do so want to hear about it,” repeated Adelaida.

“Just now, I confess,” began the prince, with more animation, “when you

asked me for a subject for a picture, I confess I had serious thoughts

of giving you one. I thought of asking you to draw the face of a

criminal, one minute before the fall of the guillotine, while the

wretched man is still standing on the scaffold, preparatory to placing

his neck on the block.”

“What, his face? only his face?” asked Adelaida. “That would be a

strange subject indeed. And what sort of a picture would that make?”

“Oh, why not?” the prince insisted, with some warmth. “When I was in

Basle I saw a picture very much in that style—I should like to tell you

about it; I will some time or other; it struck me very forcibly.”

“Oh, you shall tell us about the Basle picture another time; now we

must have all about the execution,” said Adelaida. “Tell us about that

face as it appeared to your imagination—how should it be drawn?—just

the face alone, do you mean?”

“It was just a minute before the execution,” began the prince, readily,

carried away by the recollection and evidently forgetting everything

else in a moment; “just at the instant when he stepped off the ladder

on to the scaffold. He happened to look in my direction: I saw his eyes

and understood all, at once—but how am I to describe it? I do so wish

you or somebody else could draw it, you, if possible. I thought at the

time what a picture it would make. You must imagine all that went

before, of course, all—all. He had lived in the prison for some time

and had not expected that the execution would take place for at least a

week yet—he had counted on all the formalities and so on taking time;

but it so happened that his papers had been got ready quickly. At five

o’clock in the morning he was asleep—it was October, and at five in the

morning it was cold and dark. The governor of the prison comes in on

tip-toe and touches the sleeping man’s shoulder gently. He starts up.

‘What is it?’ he says. ‘The execution is fixed for ten o’clock.’ He was

only just awake, and would not believe at first, but began to argue

that his papers would not be out for a week, and so on. When he was

wide awake and realized the truth, he became very silent and argued no

more—so they say; but after a bit he said: ‘It comes very hard on one

so suddenly’ and then he was silent again and said nothing.

“The three or four hours went by, of course, in necessary

preparations—the priest, breakfast, (coffee, meat, and some wine they

gave him; doesn’t it seem ridiculous?) And yet I believe these people

give them a good breakfast out of pure kindness of heart, and believe

that they are doing a good action. Then he is dressed, and then begins

the procession through the town to the scaffold. I think he, too, must

feel that he has an age to live still while they cart him along.

Probably he thought, on the way, ‘Oh, I have a long, long time yet.

Three streets of life yet! When we’ve passed this street there’ll be

that other one; and then that one where the baker’s shop is on the

right; and when shall we get there? It’s ages, ages!’ Around him are

crowds shouting, yelling—ten thousand faces, twenty thousand eyes. All

this has to be endured, and especially the thought: ‘Here are ten

thousand men, and not one of them is going to be executed, and yet I am

to die.’ Well, all that is preparatory.

“At the scaffold there is a ladder, and just there he burst into

tears—and this was a strong man, and a terribly wicked one, they say!

There was a priest with him the whole time, talking; even in the cart

as they drove along, he talked and talked. Probably the other heard

nothing; he would begin to listen now and then, and at the third word

or so he had forgotten all about it.

“At last he began to mount the steps; his legs were tied, so that he

had to take very small steps. The priest, who seemed to be a wise man,

had stopped talking now, and only held the cross for the wretched

fellow to kiss. At the foot of the ladder he had been pale enough; but

when he set foot on the scaffold at the top, his face suddenly became

the colour of paper, positively like white notepaper. His legs must

have become suddenly feeble and helpless, and he felt a choking in his

throat—you know the sudden feeling one has in moments of terrible fear,

when one does not lose one’s wits, but is absolutely powerless to move?

If some dreadful thing were suddenly to happen; if a house were just

about to fall on one;—don’t you know how one would long to sit down and

shut one’s eyes and wait, and wait? Well, when this terrible feeling

came over him, the priest quickly pressed the cross to his lips,

without a word—a little silver cross it was—and he kept on pressing it

to the man’s lips every second. And whenever the cross touched his

lips, the eyes would open for a moment, and the legs moved once, and he

kissed the cross greedily, hurriedly—just as though he were anxious to

catch hold of something in case of its being useful to him afterwards,

though he could hardly have had any connected religious thoughts at the

time. And so up to the very block.

“How strange that criminals seldom swoon at such a moment! On the

contrary, the brain is especially active, and works

incessantly—probably hard, hard, hard—like an engine at full pressure.

I imagine that various thoughts must beat loud and fast through his

head—all unfinished ones, and strange, funny thoughts, very

likely!—like this, for instance: ‘That man is looking at me, and he has

a wart on his forehead! and the executioner has burst one of his

buttons, and the lowest one is all rusty!’ And meanwhile he notices and

remembers everything. There is one point that cannot be forgotten,

round which everything else dances and turns about; and because of this

point he cannot faint, and this lasts until the very final quarter of a

second, when the wretched neck is on the block and the victim listens

and waits and \_knows\_—that’s the point, he \_knows\_ that he is just

\_now\_ about to die, and listens for the rasp of the iron over his head.

If I lay there, I should certainly listen for that grating sound, and

hear it, too! There would probably be but the tenth part of an instant

left to hear it in, but one would certainly hear it. And imagine, some

people declare that when the head flies off it is \_conscious\_ of having

flown off! Just imagine what a thing to realize! Fancy if consciousness

were to last for even five seconds!

“Draw the scaffold so that only the top step of the ladder comes in

clearly. The criminal must be just stepping on to it, his face as white

as note-paper. The priest is holding the cross to his blue lips, and

the criminal kisses it, and knows and sees and understands everything.

The cross and the head—there’s your picture; the priest and the

executioner, with his two assistants, and a few heads and eyes below.

Those might come in as subordinate accessories—a sort of mist. There’s

a picture for you.” The prince paused, and looked around.

“Certainly that isn’t much like quietism,” murmured Alexandra, half to

herself.

“Now tell us about your love affairs,” said Adelaida, after a moment’s

pause.

The prince gazed at her in amazement.

“You know,” Adelaida continued, “you owe us a description of the Basle

picture; but first I wish to hear how you fell in love. Don’t deny the

fact, for you did, of course. Besides, you stop philosophizing when you

are telling about anything.”

“Why are you ashamed of your stories the moment after you have told

them?” asked Aglaya, suddenly.

“How silly you are!” said Mrs. Epanchin, looking indignantly towards

the last speaker.

“Yes, that wasn’t a clever remark,” said Alexandra.

“Don’t listen to her, prince,” said Mrs. Epanchin; “she says that sort

of thing out of mischief. Don’t think anything of their nonsense, it

means nothing. They love to chaff, but they like you. I can see it in

their faces—I know their faces.”

“I know their faces, too,” said the prince, with a peculiar stress on

the words.

“How so?” asked Adelaida, with curiosity.

“What do \_you\_ know about our faces?” exclaimed the other two, in

chorus.

But the prince was silent and serious. All awaited his reply.

“I’ll tell you afterwards,” he said quietly.

“Ah, you want to arouse our curiosity!” said Aglaya. “And how terribly

solemn you are about it!”

“Very well,” interrupted Adelaida, “then if you can read faces so well,

you \_must\_ have been in love. Come now; I’ve guessed—let’s have the

secret!”

“I have not been in love,” said the prince, as quietly and seriously as

before. “I have been happy in another way.”

“How, how?”

“Well, I’ll tell you,” said the prince, apparently in a deep reverie.

VI.

“Here you all are,” began the prince, “settling yourselves down to

listen to me with so much curiosity, that if I do not satisfy you you

will probably be angry with me. No, no! I’m only joking!” he added,

hastily, with a smile.

“Well, then—they were all children there, and I was always among

children and only with children. They were the children of the village

in which I lived, and they went to the school there—all of them. I did

not teach them, oh no; there was a master for that, one Jules Thibaut.

I may have taught them some things, but I was among them just as an

outsider, and I passed all four years of my life there among them. I

wished for nothing better; I used to tell them everything and hid

nothing from them. Their fathers and relations were very angry with me,

because the children could do nothing without me at last, and used to

throng after me at all times. The schoolmaster was my greatest enemy in

the end! I had many enemies, and all because of the children. Even

Schneider reproached me. What were they afraid of? One can tell a child

everything, anything. I have often been struck by the fact that parents

know their children so little. They should not conceal so much from

them. How well even little children understand that their parents

conceal things from them, because they consider them too young to

understand! Children are capable of giving advice in the most important

matters. How can one deceive these dear little birds, when they look at

one so sweetly and confidingly? I call them birds because there is

nothing in the world better than birds!

“However, most of the people were angry with me about one and the same

thing; but Thibaut simply was jealous of me. At first he had wagged his

head and wondered how it was that the children understood what I told

them so well, and could not learn from him; and he laughed like

anything when I replied that neither he nor I could teach them very

much, but that \_they\_ might teach us a good deal.

“How he could hate me and tell scandalous stories about me, living

among children as he did, is what I cannot understand. Children soothe

and heal the wounded heart. I remember there was one poor fellow at our

professor’s who was being treated for madness, and you have no idea

what those children did for him, eventually. I don’t think he was mad,

but only terribly unhappy. But I’ll tell you all about him another day.

Now I must get on with this story.

“The children did not love me at first; I was such a sickly, awkward

kind of a fellow then—and I know I am ugly. Besides, I was a foreigner.

The children used to laugh at me, at first; and they even went so far

as to throw stones at me, when they saw me kiss Marie. I only kissed

her once in my life—no, no, don’t laugh!” The prince hastened to

suppress the smiles of his audience at this point. “It was not a matter

of \_love\_ at all! If only you knew what a miserable creature she was,

you would have pitied her, just as I did. She belonged to our village.

Her mother was an old, old woman, and they used to sell string and

thread, and soap and tobacco, out of the window of their little house,

and lived on the pittance they gained by this trade. The old woman was

ill and very old, and could hardly move. Marie was her daughter, a girl

of twenty, weak and thin and consumptive; but still she did heavy work

at the houses around, day by day. Well, one fine day a commercial

traveller betrayed her and carried her off; and a week later he

deserted her. She came home dirty, draggled, and shoeless; she had

walked for a whole week without shoes; she had slept in the fields, and

caught a terrible cold; her feet were swollen and sore, and her hands

torn and scratched all over. She never had been pretty even before; but

her eyes were quiet, innocent, kind eyes.

“She was very quiet always—and I remember once, when she had suddenly

begun singing at her work, everyone said, ‘Marie tried to sing today!’

and she got so chaffed that she was silent for ever after. She had been

treated kindly in the place before; but when she came back now—ill and

shunned and miserable—not one of them all had the slightest sympathy

for her. Cruel people! Oh, what hazy understandings they have on such

matters! Her mother was the first to show the way. She received her

wrathfully, unkindly, and with contempt. ‘You have disgraced me,’ she

said. She was the first to cast her into ignominy; but when they all

heard that Marie had returned to the village, they ran out to see her

and crowded into the little cottage—old men, children, women,

girls—such a hurrying, stamping, greedy crowd. Marie was lying on the

floor at the old woman’s feet, hungry, torn, draggled, crying,

miserable.

“When everyone crowded into the room she hid her face in her

dishevelled hair and lay cowering on the floor. Everyone looked at her

as though she were a piece of dirt off the road. The old men scolded

and condemned, and the young ones laughed at her. The women condemned

her too, and looked at her contemptuously, just as though she were some

loathsome insect.

“Her mother allowed all this to go on, and nodded her head and

encouraged them. The old woman was very ill at that time, and knew she

was dying (she really did die a couple of months later), and though she

felt the end approaching she never thought of forgiving her daughter,

to the very day of her death. She would not even speak to her. She made

her sleep on straw in a shed, and hardly gave her food enough to

support life.

“Marie was very gentle to her mother, and nursed her, and did

everything for her; but the old woman accepted all her services without

a word and never showed her the slightest kindness. Marie bore all

this; and I could see when I got to know her that she thought it quite

right and fitting, considering herself the lowest and meanest of

creatures.

“When the old woman took to her bed finally, the other old women in the

village sat with her by turns, as the custom is there; and then Marie

was quite driven out of the house. They gave her no food at all, and

she could not get any work in the village; none would employ her. The

men seemed to consider her no longer a woman, they said such dreadful

things to her. Sometimes on Sundays, if they were drunk enough, they

used to throw her a penny or two, into the mud, and Marie would

silently pick up the money. She had began to spit blood at that time.

“At last her rags became so tattered and torn that she was ashamed of

appearing in the village any longer. The children used to pelt her with

mud; so she begged to be taken on as assistant cowherd, but the cowherd

would not have her. Then she took to helping him without leave; and he

saw how valuable her assistance was to him, and did not drive her away

again; on the contrary, he occasionally gave her the remnants of his

dinner, bread and cheese. He considered that he was being very kind.

When the mother died, the village parson was not ashamed to hold Marie

up to public derision and shame. Marie was standing at the coffin’s

head, in all her rags, crying.

“A crowd of people had collected to see how she would cry. The parson,

a young fellow ambitious of becoming a great preacher, began his sermon

and pointed to Marie. ‘There,’ he said, ‘there is the cause of the

death of this venerable woman’—(which was a lie, because she had been

ill for at least two years)—‘there she stands before you, and dares not

lift her eyes from the ground, because she knows that the finger of God

is upon her. Look at her tatters and rags—the badge of those who lose

their virtue. Who is she? her daughter!’ and so on to the end.

“And just fancy, this infamy pleased them, all of them, nearly. Only

the children had altered—for then they were all on my side and had

learned to love Marie.

“This is how it was: I had wished to do something for Marie; I longed

to give her some money, but I never had a farthing while I was there.

But I had a little diamond pin, and this I sold to a travelling pedlar;

he gave me eight francs for it—it was worth at least forty.

“I long sought to meet Marie alone; and at last I did meet her, on the

hillside beyond the village. I gave her the eight francs and asked her

to take care of the money because I could get no more; and then I

kissed her and said that she was not to suppose I kissed her with any

evil motives or because I was in love with her, for that I did so

solely out of pity for her, and because from the first I had not

accounted her as guilty so much as unfortunate. I longed to console and

encourage her somehow, and to assure her that she was not the low, base

thing which she and others strove to make out; but I don’t think she

understood me. She stood before me, dreadfully ashamed of herself, and

with downcast eyes; and when I had finished she kissed my hand. I would

have kissed hers, but she drew it away. Just at this moment the whole

troop of children saw us. (I found out afterwards that they had long

kept a watch upon me.) They all began whistling and clapping their

hands, and laughing at us. Marie ran away at once; and when I tried to

talk to them, they threw stones at me. All the village heard of it the

same day, and Marie’s position became worse than ever. The children

would not let her pass now in the streets, but annoyed her and threw

dirt at her more than before. They used to run after her—she racing

away with her poor feeble lungs panting and gasping, and they pelting

her and shouting abuse at her.

“Once I had to interfere by force; and after that I took to speaking to

them every day and whenever I could. Occasionally they stopped and

listened; but they teased Marie all the same.

“I told them how unhappy Marie was, and after a while they stopped

their abuse of her, and let her go by silently. Little by little we got

into the way of conversing together, the children and I. I concealed

nothing from them, I told them all. They listened very attentively and

soon began to be sorry for Marie. At last some of them took to saying

‘Good-morning’ to her, kindly, when they met her. It is the custom

there to salute anyone you meet with ‘Good-morning’ whether acquainted

or not. I can imagine how astonished Marie was at these first greetings

from the children.

“Once two little girls got hold of some food and took it to her, and

came back and told me. They said she had burst into tears, and that

they loved her very much now. Very soon after that they all became fond

of Marie, and at the same time they began to develop the greatest

affection for myself. They often came to me and begged me to tell them

stories. I think I must have told stories well, for they did so love to

hear them. At last I took to reading up interesting things on purpose

to pass them on to the little ones, and this went on for all the rest

of my time there, three years. Later, when everyone—even Schneider—was

angry with me for hiding nothing from the children, I pointed out how

foolish it was, for they always knew things, only they learnt them in a

way that soiled their minds but not so from me. One has only to

remember one’s own childhood to admit the truth of this. But nobody was

convinced... It was two weeks before her mother died that I had kissed

Marie; and when the clergyman preached that sermon the children were

all on my side.

“When I told them what a shame it was of the parson to talk as he had

done, and explained my reason, they were so angry that some of them

went and broke his windows with stones. Of course I stopped them, for

that was not right, but all the village heard of it, and how I caught

it for spoiling the children! Everyone discovered now that the little

ones had taken to being fond of Marie, and their parents were terribly

alarmed; but Marie was so happy. The children were forbidden to meet

her; but they used to run out of the village to the herd and take her

food and things; and sometimes just ran off there and kissed her, and

said, ‘\_Je vous aime, Marie!\_’ and then trotted back again. They

imagined that I was in love with Marie, and this was the only point on

which I did not undeceive them, for they got such enjoyment out of it.

And what delicacy and tenderness they showed!

“In the evening I used to walk to the waterfall. There was a spot there

which was quite closed in and hidden from view by large trees; and to

this spot the children used to come to me. They could not bear that

their dear Leon should love a poor girl without shoes to her feet and

dressed all in rags and tatters. So, would you believe it, they

actually clubbed together, somehow, and bought her shoes and stockings,

and some linen, and even a dress! I can’t understand how they managed

it, but they did it, all together. When I asked them about it they only

laughed and shouted, and the little girls clapped their hands and

kissed me. I sometimes went to see Marie secretly, too. She had become

very ill, and could hardly walk. She still went with the herd, but

could not help the herdsman any longer. She used to sit on a stone

near, and wait there almost motionless all day, till the herd went

home. Her consumption was so advanced, and she was so weak, that she

used to sit with closed eyes, breathing heavily. Her face was as thin

as a skeleton’s, and sweat used to stand on her white brow in large

drops. I always found her sitting just like that. I used to come up

quietly to look at her; but Marie would hear me, open her eyes, and

tremble violently as she kissed my hands. I did not take my hand away

because it made her happy to have it, and so she would sit and cry

quietly. Sometimes she tried to speak; but it was very difficult to

understand her. She was almost like a madwoman, with excitement and

ecstasy, whenever I came. Occasionally the children came with me; when

they did so, they would stand some way off and keep guard over us, so

as to tell me if anybody came near. This was a great pleasure to them.

“When we left her, Marie used to relapse at once into her old

condition, and sit with closed eyes and motionless limbs. One day she

could not go out at all, and remained at home all alone in the empty

hut; but the children very soon became aware of the fact, and nearly

all of them visited her that day as she lay alone and helpless in her

miserable bed.

“For two days the children looked after her, and then, when the village

people got to know that Marie was really dying, some of the old women

came and took it in turns to sit by her and look after her a bit. I

think they began to be a little sorry for her in the village at last;

at all events they did not interfere with the children any more, on her

account.

“Marie lay in a state of uncomfortable delirium the whole while; she

coughed dreadfully. The old women would not let the children stay in

the room; but they all collected outside the window each morning, if

only for a moment, and shouted ‘\_Bon jour, notre bonne Marie!\_’ and

Marie no sooner caught sight of, or heard them, and she became quite

animated at once, and, in spite of the old women, would try to sit up

and nod her head and smile at them, and thank them. The little ones

used to bring her nice things and sweets to eat, but she could hardly

touch anything. Thanks to them, I assure you, the girl died almost

perfectly happy. She almost forgot her misery, and seemed to accept

their love as a sort of symbol of pardon for her offence, though she

never ceased to consider herself a dreadful sinner. They used to

flutter at her window just like little birds, calling out: ‘\_Nous

t’aimons, Marie!\_’

“She died very soon; I had thought she would live much longer. The day

before her death I went to see her for the last time, just before

sunset. I think she recognized me, for she pressed my hand.

“Next morning they came and told me that Marie was dead. The children

could not be restrained now; they went and covered her coffin with

flowers, and put a wreath of lovely blossoms on her head. The pastor

did not throw any more shameful words at the poor dead woman; but there

were very few people at the funeral. However, when it came to carrying

the coffin, all the children rushed up, to carry it themselves. Of

course they could not do it alone, but they insisted on helping, and

walked alongside and behind, crying.

“They have planted roses all round her grave, and every year they look

after the flowers and make Marie’s resting-place as beautiful as they

can. I was in ill odour after all this with the parents of the

children, and especially with the parson and schoolmaster. Schneider

was obliged to promise that I should not meet them and talk to them;

but we conversed from a distance by signs, and they used to write me

sweet little notes. Afterwards I came closer than ever to those little

souls, but even then it was very dear to me, to have them so fond of

me.

“Schneider said that I did the children great harm by my pernicious

‘system’; what nonsense that was! And what did he mean by my system? He

said afterwards that he believed I was a child myself—just before I

came away. ‘You have the form and face of an adult’ he said, ‘but as

regards soul, and character, and perhaps even intelligence, you are a

child in the completest sense of the word, and always will be, if you

live to be sixty.’ I laughed very much, for of course that is nonsense.

But it is a fact that I do not care to be among grown-up people and

much prefer the society of children. However kind people may be to me,

I never feel quite at home with them, and am always glad to get back to

my little companions. Now my companions have always been children, not

because I was a child myself once, but because young things attract me.

On one of the first days of my stay in Switzerland, I was strolling

about alone and miserable, when I came upon the children rushing

noisily out of school, with their slates and bags, and books, their

games, their laughter and shouts—and my soul went out to them. I

stopped and laughed happily as I watched their little feet moving so

quickly. Girls and boys, laughing and crying; for as they went home

many of them found time to fight and make peace, to weep and play. I

forgot my troubles in looking at them. And then, all those three years,

I tried to understand why men should be for ever tormenting themselves.

I lived the life of a child there, and thought I should never leave the

little village; indeed, I was far from thinking that I should ever

return to Russia. But at last I recognized the fact that Schneider

could not keep me any longer. And then something so important happened,

that Schneider himself urged me to depart. I am going to see now if can

get good advice about it. Perhaps my lot in life will be changed; but

that is not the principal thing. The principal thing is the entire

change that has already come over me. I left many things behind me—too

many. They have gone. On the journey I said to myself, ‘I am going into

the world of men. I don’t know much, perhaps, but a new life has begun

for me.’ I made up my mind to be honest, and steadfast in accomplishing

my task. Perhaps I shall meet with troubles and many disappointments,

but I have made up my mind to be polite and sincere to everyone; more

cannot be asked of me. People may consider me a child if they like. I

am often called an idiot, and at one time I certainly was so ill that I

was nearly as bad as an idiot; but I am not an idiot now. How can I

possibly be so when I know myself that I am considered one?

“When I received a letter from those dear little souls, while passing

through Berlin, I only then realized how much I loved them. It was

very, very painful, getting that first little letter. How melancholy

they had been when they saw me off! For a month before, they had been

talking of my departure and sorrowing over it; and at the waterfall, of

an evening, when we parted for the night, they would hug me so tight

and kiss me so warmly, far more so than before. And every now and then

they would turn up one by one when I was alone, just to give me a kiss

and a hug, to show their love for me. The whole flock went with me to

the station, which was about a mile from the village, and every now and

then one of them would stop to throw his arms round me, and all the

little girls had tears in their voices, though they tried hard not to

cry. As the train steamed out of the station, I saw them all standing

on the platform waving to me and crying ‘Hurrah!’ till they were lost

in the distance.

“I assure you, when I came in here just now and saw your kind faces (I

can read faces well) my heart felt light for the first time since that

moment of parting. I think I must be one of those who are born to be in

luck, for one does not often meet with people whom one feels he can

love from the first sight of their faces; and yet, no sooner do I step

out of the railway carriage than I happen upon you!

“I know it is more or less a shamefaced thing to speak of one’s

feelings before others; and yet here am I talking like this to you, and

am not a bit ashamed or shy. I am an unsociable sort of fellow and

shall very likely not come to see you again for some time; but don’t

think the worse of me for that. It is not that I do not value your

society; and you must never suppose that I have taken offence at

anything.

“You asked me about your faces, and what I could read in them; I will

tell you with the greatest pleasure. You, Adelaida Ivanovna, have a

very happy face; it is the most sympathetic of the three. Not to speak

of your natural beauty, one can look at your face and say to one’s

self, ‘She has the face of a kind sister.’ You are simple and merry,

but you can see into another’s heart very quickly. That’s what I read

in your face.

“You too, Alexandra Ivanovna, have a very lovely face; but I think you

may have some secret sorrow. Your heart is undoubtedly a kind, good

one, but you are not merry. There is a certain suspicion of ‘shadow’ in

your face, like in that of Holbein’s Madonna in Dresden. So much for

your face. Have I guessed right?

“As for your face, Lizabetha Prokofievna, I not only think, but am

perfectly \_sure\_, that you are an absolute child—in all, in all, mind,

both good and bad—and in spite of your years. Don’t be angry with me

for saying so; you know what my feelings for children are. And do not

suppose that I am so candid out of pure simplicity of soul. Oh dear no,

it is by no means the case! Perhaps I have my own very profound object

in view.”

VII.

When the prince ceased speaking all were gazing merrily at him—even

Aglaya; but Lizabetha Prokofievna looked the jolliest of all.

“Well!” she cried, “we \_have\_ ‘put him through his paces,’ with a

vengeance! My dears, you imagined, I believe, that you were about to

patronize this young gentleman, like some poor \_protégé\_ picked up

somewhere, and taken under your magnificent protection. What fools we

were, and what a specially big fool is your father! Well done, prince!

I assure you the general actually asked me to put you through your

paces, and examine you. As to what you said about my face, you are

absolutely correct in your judgment. I am a child, and know it. I knew

it long before you said so; you have expressed my own thoughts. I think

your nature and mine must be extremely alike, and I am very glad of it.

We are like two drops of water, only you are a man and I a woman, and

I’ve not been to Switzerland, and that is all the difference between

us.”

“Don’t be in a hurry, mother; the prince says that he has some motive

behind his simplicity,” cried Aglaya.

“Yes, yes, so he does,” laughed the others.

“Oh, don’t you begin bantering him,” said mamma. “He is probably a good

deal cleverer than all three of you girls put together. We shall see.

Only you haven’t told us anything about Aglaya yet, prince; and Aglaya

and I are both waiting to hear.”

“I cannot say anything at present. I’ll tell you afterwards.”

“Why? Her face is clear enough, isn’t it?”

“Oh yes, of course. You are very beautiful, Aglaya Ivanovna, so

beautiful that one is afraid to look at you.”

“Is that all? What about her character?” persisted Mrs. Epanchin.

“It is difficult to judge when such beauty is concerned. I have not

prepared my judgment. Beauty is a riddle.”

“That means that you have set Aglaya a riddle!” said Adelaida. “Guess

it, Aglaya! But she’s pretty, prince, isn’t she?”

“Most wonderfully so,” said the latter, warmly, gazing at Aglaya with

admiration. “Almost as lovely as Nastasia Philipovna, but quite a

different type.”

All present exchanged looks of surprise.

“As lovely as \_who?\_” said Mrs. Epanchin. “As \_Nastasia Philipovna?\_

Where have you seen Nastasia Philipovna? What Nastasia Philipovna?”

“Gavrila Ardalionovitch showed the general her portrait just now.”

“How so? Did he bring the portrait for my husband?”

“Only to show it. Nastasia Philipovna gave it to Gavrila Ardalionovitch

today, and the latter brought it here to show to the general.”

“I must see it!” cried Mrs. Epanchin. “Where is the portrait? If she

gave it to him, he must have it; and he is still in the study. He never

leaves before four o’clock on Wednesdays. Send for Gavrila

Ardalionovitch at once. No, I don’t long to see \_him\_ so much. Look

here, dear prince, \_be\_ so kind, will you? Just step to the study and

fetch this portrait! Say we want to look at it. Please do this for me,

will you?”

“He is a nice fellow, but a little too simple,” said Adelaida, as the

prince left the room.

“He is, indeed,” said Alexandra; “almost laughably so at times.”

Neither one nor the other seemed to give expression to her full

thoughts.

“He got out of it very neatly about our faces, though,” said Aglaya.

“He flattered us all round, even mamma.”

“Nonsense!” cried the latter. “He did not flatter me. It was I who

found his appreciation flattering. I think you are a great deal more

foolish than he is. He is simple, of course, but also very knowing.

Just like myself.”

“How stupid of me to speak of the portrait,” thought the prince as he

entered the study, with a feeling of guilt at his heart, “and yet,

perhaps I was right after all.” He had an idea, unformed as yet, but a

strange idea.

Gavrila Ardalionovitch was still sitting in the study, buried in a mass

of papers. He looked as though he did not take his salary from the

public company, whose servant he was, for a sinecure.

He grew very wroth and confused when the prince asked for the portrait,

and explained how it came about that he had spoken of it.

“Oh, curse it all,” he said; “what on earth must you go blabbing for?

You know nothing about the thing, and yet—idiot!” he added, muttering

the last word to himself in irrepressible rage.

“I am very sorry; I was not thinking at the time. I merely said that

Aglaya was almost as beautiful as Nastasia Philipovna.”

Gania asked for further details; and the prince once more repeated the

conversation. Gania looked at him with ironical contempt the while.

“Nastasia Philipovna,” he began, and there paused; he was clearly much

agitated and annoyed. The prince reminded him of the portrait.

“Listen, prince,” said Gania, as though an idea had just struck him, “I

wish to ask you a great favour, and yet I really don’t know—”

He paused again, he was trying to make up his mind to something, and

was turning the matter over. The prince waited quietly. Once more Gania

fixed him with intent and questioning eyes.

“Prince,” he began again, “they are rather angry with me, in there,

owing to a circumstance which I need not explain, so that I do not care

to go in at present without an invitation. I particularly wish to speak

to Aglaya, but I have written a few words in case I shall not have the

chance of seeing her” (here the prince observed a small note in his

hand), “and I do not know how to get my communication to her. Don’t you

think you could undertake to give it to her at once, but only to her,

mind, and so that no one else should see you give it? It isn’t much of

a secret, but still—Well, will you do it?”

“I don’t quite like it,” replied the prince.

“Oh, but it is absolutely necessary for me,” Gania entreated. “Believe

me, if it were not so, I would not ask you; how else am I to get it to

her? It is most important, dreadfully important!”

Gania was evidently much alarmed at the idea that the prince would not

consent to take his note, and he looked at him now with an expression

of absolute entreaty.

“Well, I will take it then.”

“But mind, nobody is to see!” cried the delighted Gania “And of course

I may rely on your word of honour, eh?”

“I won’t show it to anyone,” said the prince.

“The letter is not sealed—” continued Gania, and paused in confusion.

“Oh, I won’t read it,” said the prince, quite simply.

He took up the portrait, and went out of the room.

Gania, left alone, clutched his head with his hands.

“One word from her,” he said, “one word from her, and I may yet be

free.”

He could not settle himself to his papers again, for agitation and

excitement, but began walking up and down the room from corner to

corner.

The prince walked along, musing. He did not like his commission, and

disliked the idea of Gania sending a note to Aglaya at all; but when he

was two rooms distant from the drawing-room, where they all were, he

stopped as though recalling something; went to the window, nearer the

light, and began to examine the portrait in his hand.

He longed to solve the mystery of something in the face of Nastasia

Philipovna, something which had struck him as he looked at the portrait

for the first time; the impression had not left him. It was partly the

fact of her marvellous beauty that struck him, and partly something

else. There was a suggestion of immense pride and disdain in the face

almost of hatred, and at the same time something confiding and very

full of simplicity. The contrast aroused a deep sympathy in his heart

as he looked at the lovely face. The blinding loveliness of it was

almost intolerable, this pale thin face with its flaming eyes; it was a

strange beauty.

The prince gazed at it for a minute or two, then glanced around him,

and hurriedly raised the portrait to his lips. When, a minute after, he

reached the drawing-room door, his face was quite composed. But just as

he reached the door he met Aglaya coming out alone.

“Gavrila Ardalionovitch begged me to give you this,” he said, handing

her the note.

Aglaya stopped, took the letter, and gazed strangely into the prince’s

eyes. There was no confusion in her face; a little surprise, perhaps,

but that was all. By her look she seemed merely to challenge the prince

to an explanation as to how he and Gania happened to be connected in

this matter. But her expression was perfectly cool and quiet, and even

condescending.

So they stood for a moment or two, confronting one another. At length a

faint smile passed over her face, and she passed by him without a word.

Mrs. Epanchin examined the portrait of Nastasia Philipovna for some

little while, holding it critically at arm’s length.

“Yes, she is pretty,” she said at last, “even very pretty. I have seen

her twice, but only at a distance. So you admire this kind of beauty,

do you?” she asked the prince, suddenly.

“Yes, I do—this kind.”

“Do you mean especially this kind?”

“Yes, especially this kind.”

“Why?”

“There is much suffering in this face,” murmured the prince, more as

though talking to himself than answering the question.

“I think you are wandering a little, prince,” Mrs. Epanchin decided,

after a lengthened survey of his face; and she tossed the portrait on

to the table, haughtily.

Alexandra took it, and Adelaida came up, and both the girls examined

the photograph. Just then Aglaya entered the room.

“What a power!” cried Adelaida suddenly, as she earnestly examined the

portrait over her sister’s shoulder.

“Whom? What power?” asked her mother, crossly.

“Such beauty is real power,” said Adelaida. “With such beauty as that

one might overthrow the world.” She returned to her easel thoughtfully.

Aglaya merely glanced at the portrait—frowned, and put out her

underlip; then went and sat down on the sofa with folded hands. Mrs.

Epanchin rang the bell.

“Ask Gavrila Ardalionovitch to step this way,” said she to the man who

answered.

“Mamma!” cried Alexandra, significantly.

“I shall just say two words to him, that’s all,” said her mother,

silencing all objection by her manner; she was evidently seriously put

out. “You see, prince, it is all secrets with us, just now—all secrets.

It seems to be the etiquette of the house, for some reason or other.

Stupid nonsense, and in a matter which ought to be approached with all

candour and open-heartedness. There is a marriage being talked of, and

I don’t like this marriage—”

“Mamma, what are you saying?” said Alexandra again, hurriedly.

“Well, what, my dear girl? As if you can possibly like it yourself? The

heart is the great thing, and the rest is all rubbish—though one must

have sense as well. Perhaps sense is really the great thing. Don’t

smile like that, Aglaya. I don’t contradict myself. A fool with a heart

and no brains is just as unhappy as a fool with brains and no heart. I

am one and you are the other, and therefore both of us suffer, both of

us are unhappy.”

“Why are you so unhappy, mother?” asked Adelaida, who alone of all the

company seemed to have preserved her good temper and spirits up to now.

“In the first place, because of my carefully brought-up daughters,”

said Mrs. Epanchin, cuttingly; “and as that is the best reason I can

give you we need not bother about any other at present. Enough of

words, now! We shall see how both of you (I don’t count Aglaya) will

manage your business, and whether you, most revered Alexandra Ivanovna,

will be happy with your fine mate.”

“Ah!” she added, as Gania suddenly entered the room, “here’s another

marrying subject. How do you do?” she continued, in response to Gania’s

bow; but she did not invite him to sit down. “You are going to be

married?”

“Married? how—what marriage?” murmured Gania, overwhelmed with

confusion.

“Are you about to take a wife? I ask,—if you prefer that expression.”

“No, no I—I—no!” said Gania, bringing out his lie with a tell-tale

blush of shame. He glanced keenly at Aglaya, who was sitting some way

off, and dropped his eyes immediately.

Aglaya gazed coldly, intently, and composedly at him, without taking

her eyes off his face, and watched his confusion.

“No? You say no, do you?” continued the pitiless Mrs. General. “Very

well, I shall remember that you told me this Wednesday morning, in

answer to my question, that you are not going to be married. What day

is it, Wednesday, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I think so!” said Adelaida.

“You never know the day of the week; what’s the day of the month?”

“Twenty-seventh!” said Gania.

“Twenty-seventh; very well. Good-bye now; you have a good deal to do,

I’m sure, and I must dress and go out. Take your portrait. Give my

respects to your unfortunate mother, Nina Alexandrovna. \_Au revoir\_,

dear prince, come in and see us often, do; and I shall tell old

Princess Bielokonski about you. I shall go and see her on purpose. And

listen, my dear boy, I feel sure that God has sent you to Petersburg

from Switzerland on purpose for me. Maybe you will have other things to

do, besides, but you are sent chiefly for my sake, I feel sure of it.

God sent you to me! \_Au revoir!\_ Alexandra, come with me, my dear.”

Mrs. Epanchin left the room.

Gania—confused, annoyed, furious—took up his portrait, and turned to

the prince with a nasty smile on his face.

“Prince,” he said, “I am just going home. If you have not changed your

mind as to living with us, perhaps you would like to come with me. You

don’t know the address, I believe?”

“Wait a minute, prince,” said Aglaya, suddenly rising from her seat,

“do write something in my album first, will you? Father says you are a

most talented caligraphist; I’ll bring you my book in a minute.” She

left the room.

“Well, \_au revoir\_, prince,” said Adelaida, “I must be going too.” She

pressed the prince’s hand warmly, and gave him a friendly smile as she

left the room. She did not so much as look at Gania.

“This is your doing, prince,” said Gania, turning on the latter so soon

as the others were all out of the room. “This is your doing, sir! \_You\_

have been telling them that I am going to be married!” He said this in

a hurried whisper, his eyes flashing with rage and his face ablaze.

“You shameless tattler!”

“I assure you, you are under a delusion,” said the prince, calmly and

politely. “I did not even know that you were to be married.”

“You heard me talking about it, the general and me. You heard me say

that everything was to be settled today at Nastasia Philipovna’s, and

you went and blurted it out here. You lie if you deny it. Who else

could have told them? Devil take it, sir, who could have told them

except yourself? Didn’t the old woman as good as hint as much to me?”

“If she hinted to you who told her you must know best, of course; but I

never said a word about it.”

“Did you give my note? Is there an answer?” interrupted Gania,

impatiently.

But at this moment Aglaya came back, and the prince had no time to

reply.

“There, prince,” said she, “there’s my album. Now choose a page and

write me something, will you? There’s a pen, a new one; do you mind a

steel one? I have heard that you caligraphists don’t like steel pens.”

Conversing with the prince, Aglaya did not even seem to notice that

Gania was in the room. But while the prince was getting his pen ready,

finding a page, and making his preparations to write, Gania came up to

the fireplace where Aglaya was standing, to the right of the prince,

and in trembling, broken accents said, almost in her ear:

“One word, just one word from you, and I’m saved.”

The prince turned sharply round and looked at both of them. Gania’s

face was full of real despair; he seemed to have said the words almost

unconsciously and on the impulse of the moment.

Aglaya gazed at him for some seconds with precisely the same composure

and calm astonishment as she had shown a little while before, when the

prince handed her the note, and it appeared that this calm surprise and

seemingly absolute incomprehension of what was said to her, were more

terribly overwhelming to Gania than even the most plainly expressed

disdain would have been.

“What shall I write?” asked the prince.

“I’ll dictate to you,” said Aglaya, coming up to the table. “Now then,

are you ready? Write, ‘I never condescend to bargain!’ Now put your

name and the date. Let me see it.”

The prince handed her the album.

“Capital! How beautifully you have written it! Thanks so much. \_Au

revoir\_, prince. Wait a minute,” she added, “I want to give you

something for a keepsake. Come with me this way, will you?”

The prince followed her. Arrived at the dining-room, she stopped.

“Read this,” she said, handing him Gania’s note.

The prince took it from her hand, but gazed at her in bewilderment.

“Oh! I \_know\_ you haven’t read it, and that you could never be that

man’s accomplice. Read it, I wish you to read it.”

The letter had evidently been written in a hurry:

“My fate is to be decided today” (it ran), “you know how. This day I

must give my word irrevocably. I have no right to ask your help, and I

dare not allow myself to indulge in any hopes; but once you said just

one word, and that word lighted up the night of my life, and became the

beacon of my days. Say one more such word, and save me from utter ruin.

Only tell me, ‘break off the whole thing!’ and I will do so this very

day. Oh! what can it cost you to say just this one word? In doing so

you will but be giving me a sign of your sympathy for me, and of your

pity; only this, only this; nothing more, \_nothing\_. I dare not indulge

in any hope, because I am unworthy of it. But if you say but this word,

I will take up my cross again with joy, and return once more to my

battle with poverty. I shall meet the storm and be glad of it; I shall

rise up with renewed strength.

“Send me back then this one word of sympathy, only sympathy, I

swear to you; and oh! do not be angry with the audacity of despair,

with the drowning man who has dared to make this last effort to

save himself from perishing beneath the waters.

“G.L.”

“This man assures me,” said Aglaya, scornfully, when the prince had

finished reading the letter, “that the words ‘break off everything’ do

not commit me to anything whatever; and himself gives me a written

guarantee to that effect, in this letter. Observe how ingenuously he

underlines certain words, and how crudely he glosses over his hidden

thoughts. He must know that if he ‘broke off everything,’ \_first\_, by

himself, and without telling me a word about it or having the slightest

hope on my account, that in that case I should perhaps be able to

change my opinion of him, and even accept his—friendship. He must know

that, but his soul is such a wretched thing. He knows it and cannot

make up his mind; he knows it and yet asks for guarantees. He cannot

bring himself to \_trust\_, he wants me to give him hopes of myself

before he lets go of his hundred thousand roubles. As to the ‘former

word’ which he declares ‘lighted up the night of his life,’ he is

simply an impudent liar; I merely pitied him once. But he is audacious

and shameless. He immediately began to hope, at that very moment. I saw

it. He has tried to catch me ever since; he is still fishing for me.

Well, enough of this. Take the letter and give it back to him, as soon

as you have left our house; not before, of course.”

“And what shall I tell him by way of answer?”

“Nothing—of course! That’s the best answer. Is it the case that you are

going to live in his house?”

“Yes, your father kindly recommended me to him.”

“Then look out for him, I warn you! He won’t forgive you easily, for

taking back the letter.”

Aglaya pressed the prince’s hand and left the room. Her face was

serious and frowning; she did not even smile as she nodded good-bye to

him at the door.

“I’ll just get my parcel and we’ll go,” said the prince to Gania, as he

re-entered the drawing-room. Gania stamped his foot with impatience.

His face looked dark and gloomy with rage.

At last they left the house behind them, the prince carrying his

bundle.

“The answer—quick—the answer!” said Gania, the instant they were

outside. “What did she say? Did you give the letter?” The prince

silently held out the note. Gania was struck motionless with amazement.

“How, what? my letter?” he cried. “He never delivered it! I might have

guessed it, oh! curse him! Of course she did not understand what I

meant, naturally! Why—why—\_why\_ didn’t you give her the note, you—”

“Excuse me; I was able to deliver it almost immediately after receiving

your commission, and I gave it, too, just as you asked me to. It has

come into my hands now because Aglaya Ivanovna has just returned it to

me.”

“How? When?”

“As soon as I finished writing in her album for her, and when she asked

me to come out of the room with her (you heard?), we went into the

dining-room, and she gave me your letter to read, and then told me to

return it.”

“To \_read?\_” cried Gania, almost at the top of his voice; “to \_read\_,

and you read it?”

And again he stood like a log in the middle of the pavement; so amazed

that his mouth remained open after the last word had left it.

“Yes, I have just read it.”

“And she gave it you to read herself—\_herself?\_”

“Yes, herself; and you may believe me when I tell you that I would not

have read it for anything without her permission.”

Gania was silent for a minute or two, as though thinking out some

problem. Suddenly he cried:

“It’s impossible, she cannot have given it to you to read! You are

lying. You read it yourself!”

“I am telling you the truth,” said the prince in his former composed

tone of voice; “and believe me, I am extremely sorry that the

circumstance should have made such an unpleasant impression upon you!”

“But, you wretched man, at least she must have said something? There

must be \_some\_ answer from her!”

“Yes, of course, she did say something!”

“Out with it then, damn it! Out with it at once!” and Gania stamped his

foot twice on the pavement.

“As soon as I had finished reading it, she told me that you were

fishing for her; that you wished to compromise her so far as to receive

some hopes from her, trusting to which hopes you might break with the

prospect of receiving a hundred thousand roubles. She said that if you

had done this without bargaining with her, if you had broken with the

money prospects without trying to force a guarantee out of her first,

she might have been your friend. That’s all, I think. Oh no, when I

asked her what I was to say, as I took the letter, she replied that ‘no

answer is the best answer.’ I think that was it. Forgive me if I do not

use her exact expressions. I tell you the sense as I understood it

myself.”

Ungovernable rage and madness took entire possession of Gania, and his

fury burst out without the least attempt at restraint.

“Oh! that’s it, is it!” he yelled. “She throws my letters out of the

window, does she! Oh! and she does not condescend to bargain, while I

\_do\_, eh? We shall see, we shall see! I shall pay her out for this.”

He twisted himself about with rage, and grew paler and paler; he shook

his fist. So the pair walked along a few steps. Gania did not stand on

ceremony with the prince; he behaved just as though he were alone in

his room. He clearly counted the latter as a nonentity. But suddenly he

seemed to have an idea, and recollected himself.

“But how was it?” he asked, “how was it that you (idiot that you are),”

he added to himself, “were so very confidential a couple of hours after

your first meeting with these people? How was that, eh?”

Up to this moment jealousy had not been one of his torments; now it

suddenly gnawed at his heart.

“That is a thing I cannot undertake to explain,” replied the prince.

Gania looked at him with angry contempt.

“Oh! I suppose the present she wished to make to you, when she took you

into the dining-room, was her confidence, eh?”

“I suppose that was it; I cannot explain it otherwise.”

“But why, \_why?\_ Devil take it, what did you do in there? Why did they

fancy you? Look here, can’t you remember exactly what you said to them,

from the very beginning? Can’t you remember?”

“Oh, we talked of a great many things. When first I went in we began to

speak of Switzerland.”

“Oh, the devil take Switzerland!”

“Then about executions.”

“Executions?”

“Yes—at least about one. Then I told the whole three years’ story of my

life, and the history of a poor peasant girl—”

“Oh, damn the peasant girl! go on, go on!” said Gania, impatiently.

“Then how Schneider told me about my childish nature, and—”

“Oh, \_curse\_ Schneider and his dirty opinions! Go on.”

“Then I began to talk about faces, at least about the \_expressions\_ of

faces, and said that Aglaya Ivanovna was nearly as lovely as Nastasia

Philipovna. It was then I blurted out about the portrait—”

“But you didn’t repeat what you heard in the study? You didn’t repeat

that—eh?”

“No, I tell you I did \_not\_.”

“Then how did they—look here! Did Aglaya show my letter to the old

lady?”

“Oh, there I can give you my fullest assurance that she did \_not\_. I

was there all the while—she had no time to do it!”

“But perhaps you may not have observed it, oh, you damned idiot, you!”

he shouted, quite beside himself with fury. “You can’t even describe

what went on.”

Gania having once descended to abuse, and receiving no check, very soon

knew no bounds or limit to his licence, as is often the way in such

cases. His rage so blinded him that he had not even been able to detect

that this “idiot,” whom he was abusing to such an extent, was very far

from being slow of comprehension, and had a way of taking in an

impression, and afterwards giving it out again, which was very

un-idiotic indeed. But something a little unforeseen now occurred.

“I think I ought to tell you, Gavrila Ardalionovitch,” said the prince,

suddenly, “that though I once was so ill that I really was little

better than an idiot, yet now I am almost recovered, and that,

therefore, it is not altogether pleasant to be called an idiot to my

face. Of course your anger is excusable, considering the treatment you

have just experienced; but I must remind you that you have twice abused

me rather rudely. I do not like this sort of thing, and especially so

at the first time of meeting a man, and, therefore, as we happen to be

at this moment standing at a crossroad, don’t you think we had better

part, you to the left, homewards, and I to the right, here? I have

twenty-five roubles, and I shall easily find a lodging.”

Gania was much confused, and blushed for shame “Do forgive me, prince!”

he cried, suddenly changing his abusive tone for one of great courtesy.

“For Heaven’s sake, forgive me! You see what a miserable plight I am

in, but you hardly know anything of the facts of the case as yet. If

you did, I am sure you would forgive me, at least partially. Of course

it was inexcusable of me, I know, but—”

“Oh, dear me, I really do not require such profuse apologies,” replied

the prince, hastily. “I quite understand how unpleasant your position

is, and that is what made you abuse me. So come along to your house,

after all. I shall be delighted—”

“I am not going to let him go like this,” thought Gania, glancing

angrily at the prince as they walked along. “The fellow has sucked

everything out of me, and now he takes off his mask—there’s something

more than appears, here we shall see. It shall all be as clear as water

by tonight, everything!”

But by this time they had reached Gania’s house.

VIII.

The flat occupied by Gania and his family was on the third floor of the

house. It was reached by a clean light staircase, and consisted of

seven rooms, a nice enough lodging, and one would have thought a little

too good for a clerk on two thousand roubles a year. But it was

designed to accommodate a few lodgers on board terms, and had been

taken a few months since, much to the disgust of Gania, at the urgent

request of his mother and his sister, Varvara Ardalionovna, who longed

to do something to increase the family income a little, and fixed their

hopes upon letting lodgings. Gania frowned upon the idea. He thought it

\_infra dig\_, and did not quite like appearing in society

afterwards—that society in which he had been accustomed to pose up to

now as a young man of rather brilliant prospects. All these concessions

and rebuffs of fortune, of late, had wounded his spirit severely, and

his temper had become extremely irritable, his wrath being generally

quite out of proportion to the cause. But if he had made up his mind to

put up with this sort of life for a while, it was only on the plain

understanding with his inner self that he would very soon change it

all, and have things as he chose again. Yet the very means by which he

hoped to make this change threatened to involve him in even greater

difficulties than he had had before.

The flat was divided by a passage which led straight out of the

entrance-hall. Along one side of this corridor lay the three rooms

which were designed for the accommodation of the “highly recommended”

lodgers. Besides these three rooms there was another small one at the

end of the passage, close to the kitchen, which was allotted to General

Ivolgin, the nominal master of the house, who slept on a wide sofa, and

was obliged to pass into and out of his room through the kitchen, and

up or down the back stairs. Colia, Gania’s young brother, a school-boy

of thirteen, shared this room with his father. He, too, had to sleep on

an old sofa, a narrow, uncomfortable thing with a torn rug over it; his

chief duty being to look after his father, who needed to be watched

more and more every day.

The prince was given the middle room of the three, the first being

occupied by one Ferdishenko, while the third was empty.

But Gania first conducted the prince to the family apartments. These

consisted of a “salon,” which became the dining-room when required; a

drawing-room, which was only a drawing-room in the morning, and became

Gania’s study in the evening, and his bedroom at night; and lastly Nina

Alexandrovna’s and Varvara’s bedroom, a small, close chamber which they

shared together.

In a word, the whole place was confined, and a “tight fit” for the

party. Gania used to grind his teeth with rage over the state of

affairs; though he was anxious to be dutiful and polite to his mother.

However, it was very soon apparent to anyone coming into the house,

that Gania was the tyrant of the family.

Nina Alexandrovna and her daughter were both seated in the

drawing-room, engaged in knitting, and talking to a visitor, Ivan

Petrovitch Ptitsin.

The lady of the house appeared to be a woman of about fifty years of

age, thin-faced, and with black lines under the eyes. She looked ill

and rather sad; but her face was a pleasant one for all that; and from

the first word that fell from her lips, any stranger would at once

conclude that she was of a serious and particularly sincere nature. In

spite of her sorrowful expression, she gave the idea of possessing

considerable firmness and decision.

Her dress was modest and simple to a degree, dark and elderly in style;

but both her face and appearance gave evidence that she had seen better

days.

Varvara was a girl of some twenty-three summers, of middle height,

thin, but possessing a face which, without being actually beautiful,

had the rare quality of charm, and might fascinate even to the extent

of passionate regard.

She was very like her mother: she even dressed like her, which proved

that she had no taste for smart clothes. The expression of her grey

eyes was merry and gentle, when it was not, as lately, too full of

thought and anxiety. The same decision and firmness was to be observed

in her face as in her mother’s, but her strength seemed to be more

vigorous than that of Nina Alexandrovna. She was subject to outbursts

of temper, of which even her brother was a little afraid.

The present visitor, Ptitsin, was also afraid of her. This was a young

fellow of something under thirty, dressed plainly, but neatly. His

manners were good, but rather ponderously so. His dark beard bore

evidence to the fact that he was not in any government employ. He could

speak well, but preferred silence. On the whole he made a decidedly

agreeable impression. He was clearly attracted by Varvara, and made no

secret of his feelings. She trusted him in a friendly way, but had not

shown him any decided encouragement as yet, which fact did not quell

his ardour in the least.

Nina Alexandrovna was very fond of him, and had grown quite

confidential with him of late. Ptitsin, as was well known, was engaged

in the business of lending out money on good security, and at a good

rate of interest. He was a great friend of Gania’s.

After a formal introduction by Gania (who greeted his mother very

shortly, took no notice of his sister, and immediately marched Ptitsin

out of the room), Nina Alexandrovna addressed a few kind words to the

prince and forthwith requested Colia, who had just appeared at the

door, to show him to the “middle room.”

Colia was a nice-looking boy. His expression was simple and confiding,

and his manners were very polite and engaging.

“Where’s your luggage?” he asked, as he led the prince away to his

room.

“I had a bundle; it’s in the entrance hall.”

“I’ll bring it you directly. We only have a cook and one maid, so I

have to help as much as I can. Varia looks after things, generally, and

loses her temper over it. Gania says you have only just arrived from

Switzerland?”

“Yes.”

“Is it jolly there?”

“Very.”

“Mountains?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll go and get your bundle.”

Here Varvara joined them.

“The maid shall bring your bed-linen directly. Have you a portmanteau?”

“No; a bundle—your brother has just gone to the hall for it.”

“There’s nothing there except this,” said Colia, returning at this

moment. “Where did you put it?”

“Oh! but that’s all I have,” said the prince, taking it.

“Ah! I thought perhaps Ferdishenko had taken it.”

“Don’t talk nonsense,” said Varia, severely. She seemed put out, and

was only just polite with the prince.

“Oho!” laughed the boy, “you can be nicer than that to \_me\_, you

know—I’m not Ptitsin!”

“You ought to be whipped, Colia, you silly boy. If you want anything”

(to the prince) “please apply to the servant. We dine at half-past

four. You can take your dinner with us, or have it in your room, just

as you please. Come along, Colia, don’t disturb the prince.”

At the door they met Gania coming in.

“Is father in?” he asked. Colia whispered something in his ear and went

out.

“Just a couple of words, prince, if you’ll excuse me. Don’t blab over

\_there\_ about what you may see here, or in this house as to all that

about Aglaya and me, you know. Things are not altogether pleasant in

this establishment—devil take it all! You’ll see. At all events keep

your tongue to yourself for \_today\_.”

“I assure you I ‘blabbed’ a great deal less than you seem to suppose,”

said the prince, with some annoyance. Clearly the relations between

Gania and himself were by no means improving.

“Oh well; I caught it quite hot enough today, thanks to you. However, I

forgive you.”

“I think you might fairly remember that I was not in any way bound, I

had no reason to be silent about that portrait. You never asked me not

to mention it.”

“Pfu! what a wretched room this is—dark, and the window looking into

the yard. Your coming to our house is, in no respect, opportune.

However, it’s not \_my\_ affair. I don’t keep the lodgings.”

Ptitsin here looked in and beckoned to Gania, who hastily left the

room, in spite of the fact that he had evidently wished to say

something more and had only made the remark about the room to gain

time. The prince had hardly had time to wash and tidy himself a little

when the door opened once more, and another figure appeared.

This was a gentleman of about thirty, tall, broad-shouldered, and

red-haired; his face was red, too, and he possessed a pair of thick

lips, a wide nose, small eyes, rather bloodshot, and with an ironical

expression in them; as though he were perpetually winking at someone.

His whole appearance gave one the idea of impudence; his dress was

shabby.

He opened the door just enough to let his head in. His head remained so

placed for a few seconds while he quietly scrutinized the room; the

door then opened enough to admit his body; but still he did not enter.

He stood on the threshold and examined the prince carefully. At last he

gave the door a final shove, entered, approached the prince, took his

hand and seated himself and the owner of the room on two chairs side by

side.

“Ferdishenko,” he said, gazing intently and inquiringly into the

prince’s eyes.

“Very well, what next?” said the latter, almost laughing in his face.

“A lodger here,” continued the other, staring as before.

“Do you wish to make acquaintance?” asked the prince.

“Ah!” said the visitor, passing his fingers through his hair and

sighing. He then looked over to the other side of the room and around

it. “Got any money?” he asked, suddenly.

“Not much.”

“How much?”

“Twenty-five roubles.”

“Let’s see it.”

The prince took his banknote out and showed it to Ferdishenko. The

latter unfolded it and looked at it; then he turned it round and

examined the other side; then he held it up to the light.

“How strange that it should have browned so,” he said, reflectively.

“These twenty-five rouble notes brown in a most extraordinary way,

while other notes often grow paler. Take it.”

The prince took his note. Ferdishenko rose.

“I came here to warn you,” he said. “In the first place, don’t lend me

any money, for I shall certainly ask you to.”

“Very well.”

“Shall you pay here?”

“Yes, I intend to.”

“Oh! I \_don’t\_ intend to. Thanks. I live here, next door to you; you

noticed a room, did you? Don’t come to me very often; I shall see you

here quite often enough. Have you seen the general?”

“No.”

“Nor heard him?”

“No; of course not.”

“Well, you’ll both hear and see him soon; he even tries to borrow money

from me. \_Avis au lecteur.\_ Good-bye; do you think a man can possibly

live with a name like Ferdishenko?”

“Why not?”

“Good-bye.”

And so he departed. The prince found out afterwards that this gentleman

made it his business to amaze people with his originality and wit, but

that it did not as a rule “come off.” He even produced a bad impression

on some people, which grieved him sorely; but he did not change his

ways for all that.

As he went out of the prince’s room, he collided with yet another

visitor coming in. Ferdishenko took the opportunity of making several

warning gestures to the prince from behind the new arrival’s back, and

left the room in conscious pride.

This next arrival was a tall red-faced man of about fifty-five, with

greyish hair and whiskers, and large eyes which stood out of their

sockets. His appearance would have been distinguished had it not been

that he gave the idea of being rather dirty. He was dressed in an old

coat, and he smelled of vodka when he came near. His walk was

effective, and he clearly did his best to appear dignified, and to

impress people by his manner.

This gentleman now approached the prince slowly, and with a most

courteous smile; silently took his hand and held it in his own, as he

examined the prince’s features as though searching for familiar traits

therein.

“‘Tis he, ‘tis he!” he said at last, quietly, but with much solemnity.

“As though he were alive once more. I heard the familiar name—the dear

familiar name—and, oh! how it reminded me of the irrevocable

past—Prince Muishkin, I believe?”

“Exactly so.”

“General Ivolgin—retired and unfortunate. May I ask your Christian and

generic names?”

“Lef Nicolaievitch.”

“So, so—the son of my old, I may say my childhood’s friend, Nicolai

Petrovitch.”

“My father’s name was Nicolai Lvovitch.”

“Lvovitch,” repeated the general without the slightest haste, and with

perfect confidence, just as though he had not committed himself the

least in the world, but merely made a little slip of the tongue. He sat

down, and taking the prince’s hand, drew him to a seat next to himself.

“I carried you in my arms as a baby,” he observed.

“Really?” asked the prince. “Why, it’s twenty years since my father

died.”

“Yes, yes—twenty years and three months. We were educated together; I

went straight into the army, and he—”

“My father went into the army, too. He was a sub-lieutenant in the

Vasiliefsky regiment.”

“No, sir—in the Bielomirsky; he changed into the latter shortly before

his death. I was at his bedside when he died, and gave him my blessing

for eternity. Your mother—” The general paused, as though overcome with

emotion.

“She died a few months later, from a cold,” said the prince.

“Oh, not cold—believe an old man—not from a cold, but from grief for

her prince. Oh—your mother, your mother! heigh-ho! Youth—youth! Your

father and I—old friends as we were—nearly murdered each other for her

sake.”

The prince began to be a little incredulous.

“I was passionately in love with her when she was engaged—engaged to my

friend. The prince noticed the fact and was furious. He came and woke

me at seven o’clock one morning. I rise and dress in amazement; silence

on both sides. I understand it all. He takes a couple of pistols out of

his pocket—across a handkerchief—without witnesses. Why invite

witnesses when both of us would be walking in eternity in a couple of

minutes? The pistols are loaded; we stretch the handkerchief and stand

opposite one another. We aim the pistols at each other’s hearts.

Suddenly tears start to our eyes, our hands shake; we weep, we

embrace—the battle is one of self-sacrifice now! The prince shouts,

‘She is yours;’ I cry, ‘She is yours—’ in a word, in a word—You’ve come

to live with us, hey?”

“Yes—yes—for a while, I think,” stammered the prince.

“Prince, mother begs you to come to her,” said Colia, appearing at the

door.

The prince rose to go, but the general once more laid his hand in a

friendly manner on his shoulder, and dragged him down on to the sofa.

“As the true friend of your father, I wish to say a few words to you,”

he began. “I have suffered—there was a catastrophe. I suffered without

a trial; I had no trial. Nina Alexandrovna my wife, is an excellent

woman, so is my daughter Varvara. We have to let lodgings because we

are poor—a dreadful, unheard-of come-down for us—for me, who should

have been a governor-general; but we are very glad to have \_you\_, at

all events. Meanwhile there is a tragedy in the house.”

The prince looked inquiringly at the other.

“Yes, a marriage is being arranged—a marriage between a questionable

woman and a young fellow who might be a flunkey. They wish to bring

this woman into the house where my wife and daughter reside, but while

I live and breathe she shall never enter my doors. I shall lie at the

threshold, and she shall trample me underfoot if she does. I hardly

talk to Gania now, and avoid him as much as I can. I warn you of this

beforehand, but you cannot fail to observe it. But you are the son of

my old friend, and I hope—”

“Prince, be so kind as to come to me for a moment in the drawing-room,”

said Nina Alexandrovna herself, appearing at the door.

“Imagine, my dear,” cried the general, “it turns out that I have nursed

the prince on my knee in the old days.” His wife looked searchingly at

him, and glanced at the prince, but said nothing. The prince rose and

followed her; but hardly had they reached the drawing-room, and Nina

Alexandrovna had begun to talk hurriedly, when in came the general. She

immediately relapsed into silence. The master of the house may have

observed this, but at all events he did not take any notice of it; he

was in high good humour.

“A son of my old friend, dear,” he cried; “surely you must remember

Prince Nicolai Lvovitch? You saw him at—at Tver.”

“I don’t remember any Nicolai Lvovitch. Was that your father?” she

inquired of the prince.

“Yes, but he died at Elizabethgrad, not at Tver,” said the prince,

rather timidly. “So Pavlicheff told me.”

“No, Tver,” insisted the general; “he removed just before his death.

You were very small and cannot remember; and Pavlicheff, though an

excellent fellow, may have made a mistake.”

“You knew Pavlicheff then?”

“Oh, yes—a wonderful fellow; but I was present myself. I gave him my

blessing.”

“My father was just about to be tried when he died,” said the prince,

“although I never knew of what he was accused. He died in hospital.”

“Oh! it was the Kolpakoff business, and of course he would have been

acquitted.”

“Yes? Do you know that for a fact?” asked the prince, whose curiosity

was aroused by the general’s words.

“I should think so indeed!” cried the latter. “The court-martial came

to no decision. It was a mysterious, an impossible business, one might

say! Captain Larionoff, commander of the company, had died; his command

was handed over to the prince for the moment. Very well. This soldier,

Kolpakoff, stole some leather from one of his comrades, intending to

sell it, and spent the money on drink. Well! The prince—you understand

that what follows took place in the presence of the sergeant-major, and

a corporal—the prince rated Kolpakoff soundly, and threatened to have

him flogged. Well, Kolpakoff went back to the barracks, lay down on a

camp bedstead, and in a quarter of an hour was dead: you quite

understand? It was, as I said, a strange, almost impossible, affair. In

due course Kolpakoff was buried; the prince wrote his report, the

deceased’s name was removed from the roll. All as it should be, is it

not? But exactly three months later at the inspection of the brigade,

the man Kolpakoff was found in the third company of the second

battalion of infantry, Novozemlianski division, just as if nothing had

happened!”

“What?” said the prince, much astonished.

“It did not occur—it’s a mistake!” said Nina Alexandrovna quickly,

looking, at the prince rather anxiously. “\_Mon mari se trompe\_,” she

added, speaking in French.

“My dear, ‘\_se trompe\_’ is easily said. Do you remember any case at all

like it? Everybody was at their wits’ end. I should be the first to say

‘\_qu’on se trompe\_,’ but unfortunately I was an eye-witness, and was

also on the commission of inquiry. Everything proved that it was really

he, the very same soldier Kolpakoff who had been given the usual

military funeral to the sound of the drum. It is of course a most

curious case—nearly an impossible one. I recognize that... but—”

“Father, your dinner is ready,” said Varvara at this point, putting her

head in at the door.

“Very glad, I’m particularly hungry. Yes, yes, a strange

coincidence—almost a psychological—”

“Your soup’ll be cold; do come.”

“Coming, coming,” said the general. “Son of my old friend—” he was

heard muttering as he went down the passage.

“You will have to excuse very much in my husband, if you stay with us,”

said Nina Alexandrovna; “but he will not disturb you often. He dines

alone. Everyone has his little peculiarities, you know, and some people

perhaps have more than those who are most pointed at and laughed at.

One thing I must beg of you—if my husband applies to you for payment

for board and lodging, tell him that you have already paid me. Of

course anything paid by you to the general would be as fully settled as

if paid to me, so far as you are concerned; but I wish it to be so, if

you please, for convenience’ sake. What is it, Varia?”

Varia had quietly entered the room, and was holding out the portrait of

Nastasia Philipovna to her mother.

Nina Alexandrovna started, and examined the photograph intently, gazing

at it long and sadly. At last she looked up inquiringly at Varia.

“It’s a present from herself to him,” said Varia; “the question is to

be finally decided this evening.”

“This evening!” repeated her mother in a tone of despair, but softly,

as though to herself. “Then it’s all settled, of course, and there’s no

hope left to us. She has anticipated her answer by the present of her

portrait. Did he show it you himself?” she added, in some surprise.

“You know we have hardly spoken to each other for a whole month.

Ptitsin told me all about it; and the photo was lying under the table,

and I picked it up.”

“Prince,” asked Nina Alexandrovna, “I wanted to inquire whether you

have known my son long? I think he said that you had only arrived today

from somewhere.”

The prince gave a short narrative of what we have heard before, leaving

out the greater part. The two ladies listened intently.

“I did not ask about Gania out of curiosity,” said the elder, at last.

“I wish to know how much you know about him, because he said just now

that we need not stand on ceremony with you. What, exactly, does that

mean?”

At this moment Gania and Ptitsin entered the room together, and Nina

Alexandrovna immediately became silent again. The prince remained

seated next to her, but Varia moved to the other end of the room; the

portrait of Nastasia Philipovna remained lying as before on the

work-table. Gania observed it there, and with a frown of annoyance

snatched it up and threw it across to his writing-table, which stood at

the other end of the room.

“Is it today, Gania?” asked Nina Alexandrovna, at last.

“Is what today?” cried the former. Then suddenly recollecting himself,

he turned sharply on the prince. “Oh,” he growled, “I see, you are

here, that explains it! Is it a disease, or what, that you can’t hold

your tongue? Look here, understand once for all, prince—”

“I am to blame in this, Gania—no one else,” said Ptitsin.

Gania glanced inquiringly at the speaker.

“It’s better so, you know, Gania—especially as, from one point of view,

the matter may be considered as settled,” said Ptitsin; and sitting

down a little way from the table he began to study a paper covered with

pencil writing.

Gania stood and frowned, he expected a family scene. He never thought

of apologizing to the prince, however.

“If it’s all settled, Gania, then of course Mr. Ptitsin is right,” said

Nina Alexandrovna. “Don’t frown. You need not worry yourself, Gania; I

shall ask you no questions. You need not tell me anything you don’t

like. I assure you I have quite submitted to your will.” She said all

this, knitting away the while as though perfectly calm and composed.

Gania was surprised, but cautiously kept silence and looked at his

mother, hoping that she would express herself more clearly. Nina

Alexandrovna observed his cautiousness and added, with a bitter smile:

“You are still suspicious, I see, and do not believe me; but you may be

quite at your ease. There shall be no more tears, nor questions—not

from my side, at all events. All I wish is that you may be happy, you

know that. I have submitted to my fate; but my heart will always be

with you, whether we remain united, or whether we part. Of course I

only answer for myself—you can hardly expect your sister—”

“My sister again,” cried Gania, looking at her with contempt and almost

hate. “Look here, mother, I have already given you my word that I shall

always respect you fully and absolutely, and so shall everyone else in

this house, be it who it may, who shall cross this threshold.”

Gania was so much relieved that he gazed at his mother almost

affectionately.

“I was not at all afraid for myself, Gania, as you know well. It was

not for my own sake that I have been so anxious and worried all this

time! They say it is all to be settled to-day. What is to be settled?”

“She has promised to tell me tonight at her own house whether she

consents or not,” replied Gania.

“We have been silent on this subject for three weeks,” said his mother,

“and it was better so; and now I will only ask you one question. How

can she give her consent and make you a present of her portrait when

you do not love her? How can such a—such a—”

“Practised hand—eh?”

“I was not going to express myself so. But how could you so blind her?”

Nina Alexandrovna’s question betrayed intense annoyance. Gania waited a

moment and then said, without taking the trouble to conceal the irony

of his tone:

“There you are, mother, you are always like that. You begin by

promising that there are to be no reproaches or insinuations or

questions, and here you are beginning them at once. We had better drop

the subject—we had, really. I shall never leave you, mother; any other

man would cut and run from such a sister as this. See how she is

looking at me at this moment! Besides, how do you know that I am

blinding Nastasia Philipovna? As for Varia, I don’t care—she can do

just as she pleases. There, that’s quite enough!”

Gania’s irritation increased with every word he uttered, as he walked

up and down the room. These conversations always touched the family

sores before long.

“I have said already that the moment she comes in I go out, and I shall

keep my word,” remarked Varia.

“Out of obstinacy” shouted Gania. “You haven’t married, either, thanks

to your obstinacy. Oh, you needn’t frown at me, Varvara! You can go at

once for all I care; I am sick enough of your company. What, you are

going to leave us are you, too?” he cried, turning to the prince, who

was rising from his chair.

Gania’s voice was full of the most uncontrolled and uncontrollable

irritation.

The prince turned at the door to say something, but perceiving in

Gania’s expression that there was but that one drop wanting to make the

cup overflow, he changed his mind and left the room without a word. A

few minutes later he was aware from the noisy voices in the drawing

room, that the conversation had become more quarrelsome than ever after

his departure.

He crossed the salon and the entrance-hall, so as to pass down the

corridor into his own room. As he came near the front door he heard

someone outside vainly endeavouring to ring the bell, which was

evidently broken, and only shook a little, without emitting any sound.

The prince took down the chain and opened the door. He started back in

amazement—for there stood Nastasia Philipovna. He knew her at once from

her photograph. Her eyes blazed with anger as she looked at him. She

quickly pushed by him into the hall, shouldering him out of her way,

and said, furiously, as she threw off her fur cloak:

“If you are too lazy to mend your bell, you should at least wait in the

hall to let people in when they rattle the bell handle. There, now,

you’ve dropped my fur cloak—dummy!”

Sure enough the cloak was lying on the ground. Nastasia had thrown it

off her towards the prince, expecting him to catch it, but the prince

had missed it.

“Now then—announce me, quick!”

The prince wanted to say something, but was so confused and astonished

that he could not. However, he moved off towards the drawing-room with

the cloak over his arm.

“Now then, where are you taking my cloak to? Ha, ha, ha! Are you mad?”

The prince turned and came back, more confused than ever. When she

burst out laughing, he smiled, but his tongue could not form a word as

yet. At first, when he had opened the door and saw her standing before

him, he had become as pale as death; but now the red blood had rushed

back to his cheeks in a torrent.

“Why, what an idiot it is!” cried Nastasia, stamping her foot with

irritation. “Go on, do! Whom are you going to announce?”

“Nastasia Philipovna,” murmured the prince.

“And how do you know that?” she asked him, sharply.

“I have never seen you before!”

“Go on, announce me—what’s that noise?”

“They are quarrelling,” said the prince, and entered the drawing-room,

just as matters in there had almost reached a crisis. Nina Alexandrovna

had forgotten that she had “submitted to everything!” She was defending

Varia. Ptitsin was taking her part, too. Not that Varia was afraid of

standing up for herself. She was by no means that sort of a girl; but

her brother was becoming ruder and more intolerable every moment. Her

usual practice in such cases as the present was to say nothing, but

stare at him, without taking her eyes off his face for an instant. This

manoeuvre, as she well knew, could drive Gania distracted.

Just at this moment the door opened and the prince entered, announcing:

“Nastasia Philipovna!”

IX.

Silence immediately fell on the room; all looked at the prince as

though they neither understood, nor hoped to understand. Gania was

motionless with horror.

Nastasia’s arrival was a most unexpected and overwhelming event to all

parties. In the first place, she had never been before. Up to now she

had been so haughty that she had never even asked Gania to introduce

her to his parents. Of late she had not so much as mentioned them.

Gania was partly glad of this; but still he had put it to her debit in

the account to be settled after marriage.

He would have borne anything from her rather than this visit. But one

thing seemed to him quite clear—her visit now, and the present of her

portrait on this particular day, pointed out plainly enough which way

she intended to make her decision!

The incredulous amazement with which all regarded the prince did not

last long, for Nastasia herself appeared at the door and passed in,

pushing by the prince again.

“At last I’ve stormed the citadel! Why do you tie up your bell?” she

said, merrily, as she pressed Gania’s hand, the latter having rushed up

to her as soon as she made her appearance. “What are you looking so

upset about? Introduce me, please!”

The bewildered Gania introduced her first to Varia, and both women,

before shaking hands, exchanged looks of strange import. Nastasia,

however, smiled amiably; but Varia did not try to look amiable, and

kept her gloomy expression. She did not even vouchsafe the usual

courteous smile of etiquette. Gania darted a terrible glance of wrath

at her for this, but Nina Alexandrovna mended matters a little when

Gania introduced her at last. Hardly, however, had the old lady begun

about her “highly gratified feelings,” and so on, when Nastasia left

her, and flounced into a chair by Gania’s side in the corner by the

window, and cried: “Where’s your study? and where are the—the lodgers?

You do take in lodgers, don’t you?”

Gania looked dreadfully put out, and tried to say something in reply,

but Nastasia interrupted him:

“Why, where are you going to squeeze lodgers in here? Don’t you use a

study? Does this sort of thing pay?” she added, turning to Nina

Alexandrovna.

“Well, it is troublesome, rather,” said the latter; “but I suppose it

will ‘pay’ pretty well. We have only just begun, however—”

Again Nastasia Philipovna did not hear the sentence out. She glanced at

Gania, and cried, laughing, “What a face! My goodness, what a face you

have on at this moment!”

Indeed, Gania did not look in the least like himself. His bewilderment

and his alarmed perplexity passed off, however, and his lips now

twitched with rage as he continued to stare evilly at his laughing

guest, while his countenance became absolutely livid.

There was another witness, who, though standing at the door motionless

and bewildered himself, still managed to remark Gania’s death-like

pallor, and the dreadful change that had come over his face. This

witness was the prince, who now advanced in alarm and muttered to

Gania:

“Drink some water, and don’t look like that!”

It was clear that he came out with these words quite spontaneously, on

the spur of the moment. But his speech was productive of much—for it

appeared that all Gania’s rage now overflowed upon the prince. He

seized him by the shoulder and gazed with an intensity of loathing and

revenge at him, but said nothing—as though his feelings were too strong

to permit of words.

General agitation prevailed. Nina Alexandrovna gave a little cry of

anxiety; Ptitsin took a step forward in alarm; Colia and Ferdishenko

stood stock still at the door in amazement;—only Varia remained coolly

watching the scene from under her eyelashes. She did not sit down, but

stood by her mother with folded hands. However, Gania recollected

himself almost immediately. He let go of the prince and burst out

laughing.

“Why, are you a doctor, prince, or what?” he asked, as naturally as

possible. “I declare you quite frightened me! Nastasia Philipovna, let

me introduce this interesting character to you—though I have only known

him myself since the morning.”

Nastasia gazed at the prince in bewilderment. “Prince? He a Prince?

Why, I took him for the footman, just now, and sent him in to announce

me! Ha, ha, ha, isn’t that good!”

“Not bad that, not bad at all!” put in Ferdishenko, “\_se non è vero\_—”

“I rather think I pitched into you, too, didn’t I? Forgive me—do! Who

is he, did you say? What prince? Muishkin?” she added, addressing

Gania.

“He is a lodger of ours,” explained the latter.

“An idiot!”—the prince distinctly heard the word half whispered from

behind him. This was Ferdishenko’s voluntary information for Nastasia’s

benefit.

“Tell me, why didn’t you put me right when I made such a dreadful

mistake just now?” continued the latter, examining the prince from head

to foot without the slightest ceremony. She awaited the answer as

though convinced that it would be so foolish that she must inevitably

fail to restrain her laughter over it.

“I was astonished, seeing you so suddenly—” murmured the prince.

“How did you know who I was? Where had you seen me before? And why were

you so struck dumb at the sight of me? What was there so overwhelming

about me?”

“Oho! ho, ho, ho!” cried Ferdishenko. “\_Now\_ then, prince! My word,

what things I would say if I had such a chance as that! My goodness,

prince—go on!”

“So should I, in your place, I’ve no doubt!” laughed the prince to

Ferdishenko; then continued, addressing Nastasia: “Your portrait struck

me very forcibly this morning; then I was talking about you to the

Epanchins; and then, in the train, before I reached Petersburg, Parfen

Rogojin told me a good deal about you; and at the very moment that I

opened the door to you I happened to be thinking of you, when—there you

stood before me!”

“And how did you recognize me?”

“From the portrait!”

“What else?”

“I seemed to imagine you exactly as you are—I seemed to have seen you

somewhere.”

“Where—where?”

“I seem to have seen your eyes somewhere; but it cannot be! I have not

seen you—I never was here before. I may have dreamed of you, I don’t

know.”

The prince said all this with manifest effort—in broken sentences, and

with many drawings of breath. He was evidently much agitated. Nastasia

Philipovna looked at him inquisitively, but did not laugh.

“Bravo, prince!” cried Ferdishenko, delighted.

At this moment a loud voice from behind the group which hedged in the

prince and Nastasia Philipovna, divided the crowd, as it were, and

before them stood the head of the family, General Ivolgin. He was

dressed in evening clothes; his moustache was dyed.

This apparition was too much for Gania. Vain and ambitious almost to

morbidness, he had had much to put up with in the last two months, and

was seeking feverishly for some means of enabling himself to lead a

more presentable kind of existence. At home, he now adopted an attitude

of absolute cynicism, but he could not keep this up before Nastasia

Philipovna, although he had sworn to make her pay after marriage for

all he suffered now. He was experiencing a last humiliation, the

bitterest of all, at this moment—the humiliation of blushing for his

own kindred in his own house. A question flashed through his mind as to

whether the game was really worth the candle.

For that had happened at this moment, which for two months had been his

nightmare; which had filled his soul with dread and shame—the meeting

between his father and Nastasia Philipovna. He had often tried to

imagine such an event, but had found the picture too mortifying and

exasperating, and had quietly dropped it. Very likely he anticipated

far worse things than was at all necessary; it is often so with vain

persons. He had long since determined, therefore, to get his father out

of the way, anywhere, before his marriage, in order to avoid such a

meeting; but when Nastasia entered the room just now, he had been so

overwhelmed with astonishment, that he had not thought of his father,

and had made no arrangements to keep him out of the way. And now it was

too late—there he was, and got up, too, in a dress coat and white tie,

and Nastasia in the very humour to heap ridicule on him and his family

circle; of this last fact, he felt quite persuaded. What else had she

come for? There were his mother and his sister sitting before her, and

she seemed to have forgotten their very existence already; and if she

behaved like that, he thought, she must have some object in view.

Ferdishenko led the general up to Nastasia Philipovna.

“Ardalion Alexandrovitch Ivolgin,” said the smiling general, with a low

bow of great dignity, “an old soldier, unfortunate, and the father of

this family; but happy in the hope of including in that family so

exquisite—”

He did not finish his sentence, for at this moment Ferdishenko pushed a

chair up from behind, and the general, not very firm on his legs, at

this post-prandial hour, flopped into it backwards. It was always a

difficult thing to put this warrior to confusion, and his sudden

descent left him as composed as before. He had sat down just opposite

to Nastasia, whose fingers he now took, and raised to his lips with

great elegance, and much courtesy. The general had once belonged to a

very select circle of society, but he had been turned out of it two or

three years since on account of certain weaknesses, in which he now

indulged with all the less restraint; but his good manners remained

with him to this day, in spite of all.

Nastasia Philipovna seemed delighted at the appearance of this latest

arrival, of whom she had of course heard a good deal by report.

“I have heard that my son—” began Ardalion Alexandrovitch.

“Your son, indeed! A nice papa you are! \_You\_ might have come to see me

anyhow, without compromising anyone. Do you hide yourself, or does your

son hide you?”

“The children of the nineteenth century, and their parents—” began the

general, again.

“Nastasia Philipovna, will you excuse the general for a moment? Someone

is inquiring for him,” said Nina Alexandrovna in a loud voice,

interrupting the conversation.

“Excuse him? Oh no, I have wished to see him too long for that. Why,

what business can he have? He has retired, hasn’t he? You won’t leave

me, general, will you?”

“I give you my word that he shall come and see you—but he—he needs rest

just now.”

“General, they say you require rest,” said Nastasia Philipovna, with

the melancholy face of a child whose toy is taken away.

Ardalion Alexandrovitch immediately did his best to make his foolish

position a great deal worse.

“My dear, my dear!” he said, solemnly and reproachfully, looking at his

wife, with one hand on his heart.

“Won’t you leave the room, mamma?” asked Varia, aloud.

“No, Varia, I shall sit it out to the end.”

Nastasia must have overheard both question and reply, but her vivacity

was not in the least damped. On the contrary, it seemed to increase.

She immediately overwhelmed the general once more with questions, and

within five minutes that gentleman was as happy as a king, and holding

forth at the top of his voice, amid the laughter of almost all who

heard him.

Colia jogged the prince’s arm.

“Can’t \_you\_ get him out of the room, somehow? \_Do\_, please,” and tears

of annoyance stood in the boy’s eyes. “Curse that Gania!” he muttered,

between his teeth.

“Oh yes, I knew General Epanchin well,” General Ivolgin was saying at

this moment; “he and Prince Nicolai Ivanovitch Muishkin—whose son I

have this day embraced after an absence of twenty years—and I, were

three inseparables. Alas one is in the grave, torn to pieces by

calumnies and bullets; another is now before you, still battling with

calumnies and bullets—”

“Bullets?” cried Nastasia.

“Yes, here in my chest. I received them at the siege of Kars, and I

feel them in bad weather now. And as to the third of our trio,

Epanchin, of course after that little affair with the poodle in the

railway carriage, it was all \_up\_ between us.”

“Poodle? What was that? And in a railway carriage? Dear me,” said

Nastasia, thoughtfully, as though trying to recall something to mind.

“Oh, just a silly, little occurrence, really not worth telling, about

Princess Bielokonski’s governess, Miss Smith, and—oh, it is really not

worth telling!”

“No, no, we must have it!” cried Nastasia merrily.

“Yes, of course,” said Ferdishenko. “C’est du nouveau.”

“Ardalion,” said Nina Alexandrovitch, entreatingly.

“Papa, you are wanted!” cried Colia.

“Well, it is a silly little story, in a few words,” began the delighted

general. “A couple of years ago, soon after the new railway was opened,

I had to go somewhere or other on business. Well, I took a first-class

ticket, sat down, and began to smoke, or rather \_continued\_ to smoke,

for I had lighted up before. I was alone in the carriage. Smoking is

not allowed, but is not prohibited either; it is half allowed—so to

speak, winked at. I had the window open.”

“Suddenly, just before the whistle, in came two ladies with a little

poodle, and sat down opposite to me; not bad-looking women; one was in

light blue, the other in black silk. The poodle, a beauty with a silver

collar, lay on light blue’s knee. They looked haughtily about, and

talked English together. I took no notice, just went on smoking. I

observed that the ladies were getting angry—over my cigar, doubtless.

One looked at me through her tortoise-shell eyeglass.

“I took no notice, because they never said a word. If they didn’t like

the cigar, why couldn’t they say so? Not a word, not a hint! Suddenly,

and without the very slightest suspicion of warning, ‘light blue’

seizes my cigar from between my fingers, and, wheugh! out of the window

with it! Well, on flew the train, and I sat bewildered, and the young

woman, tall and fair, and rather red in the face, too red, glared at me

with flashing eyes.

“I didn’t say a word, but with extreme courtesy, I may say with most

refined courtesy, I reached my finger and thumb over towards the

poodle, took it up delicately by the nape of the neck, and chucked it

out of the window, after the cigar. The train went flying on, and the

poodle’s yells were lost in the distance.”

“Oh, you naughty man!” cried Nastasia, laughing and clapping her hands

like a child.

“Bravo!” said Ferdishenko. Ptitsin laughed too, though he had been very

sorry to see the general appear. Even Colia laughed and said, “Bravo!”

“And I was right, truly right,” cried the general, with warmth and

solemnity, “for if cigars are forbidden in railway carriages, poodles

are much more so.”

“Well, and what did the lady do?” asked Nastasia, impatiently.

“She—ah, that’s where all the mischief of it lies!” replied Ivolgin,

frowning. “Without a word, as it were, of warning, she slapped me on

the cheek! An extraordinary woman!”

“And you?”

The general dropped his eyes, and elevated his brows; shrugged his

shoulders, tightened his lips, spread his hands, and remained silent.

At last he blurted out:

“I lost my head!”

“Did you hit her?”

“No, oh no!—there was a great flare-up, but I didn’t hit her! I had to

struggle a little, purely to defend myself; but the very devil was in

the business. It turned out that ‘light blue’ was an Englishwoman,

governess or something, at Princess Bielokonski’s, and the other woman

was one of the old-maid princesses Bielokonski. Well, everybody knows

what great friends the princess and Mrs. Epanchin are, so there was a

pretty kettle of fish. All the Bielokonskis went into mourning for the

poodle. Six princesses in tears, and the Englishwoman shrieking!

“Of course I wrote an apology, and called, but they would not receive

either me or my apology, and the Epanchins cut me, too!”

“But wait,” said Nastasia. “How is it that, five or six days since, I

read exactly the same story in the paper, as happening between a

Frenchman and an English girl? The cigar was snatched away exactly as

you describe, and the poodle was chucked out of the window after it.

The slapping came off, too, as in your case; and the girl’s dress was

light blue!”

The general blushed dreadfully; Colia blushed too; and Ptitsin turned

hastily away. Ferdishenko was the only one who laughed as gaily as

before. As to Gania, I need not say that he was miserable; he stood

dumb and wretched and took no notice of anybody.

“I assure you,” said the general, “that exactly the same thing happened

to myself!”

“I remembered there was some quarrel between father and Miss Smith, the

Bielokonski’s governess,” said Colia.

“How very curious, point for point the same anecdote, and happening at

different ends of Europe! Even the light blue dress the same,”

continued the pitiless Nastasia. “I must really send you the paper.”

“You must observe,” insisted the general, “that my experience was two

years earlier.”

“Ah! that’s it, no doubt!”

Nastasia Philipovna laughed hysterically.

“Father, will you hear a word from me outside!” said Gania, his voice

shaking with agitation, as he seized his father by the shoulder. His

eyes shone with a blaze of hatred.

At this moment there was a terrific bang at the front door, almost

enough to break it down. Some most unusual visitor must have arrived.

Colia ran to open.

X.

The entrance-hall suddenly became full of noise and people. To judge

from the sounds which penetrated to the drawing-room, a number of

people had already come in, and the stampede continued. Several voices

were talking and shouting at once; others were talking and shouting on

the stairs outside; it was evidently a most extraordinary visit that

was about to take place.

Everyone exchanged startled glances. Gania rushed out towards the

dining-room, but a number of men had already made their way in, and met

him.

“Ah! here he is, the Judas!” cried a voice which the prince recognized

at once. “How d’ye do, Gania, you old blackguard?”

“Yes, that’s the man!” said another voice.

There was no room for doubt in the prince’s mind: one of the voices was

Rogojin’s, and the other Lebedeff’s.

Gania stood at the door like a block and looked on in silence, putting

no obstacle in the way of their entrance, and ten or a dozen men

marched in behind Parfen Rogojin. They were a decidedly mixed-looking

collection, and some of them came in in their furs and caps. None of

them were quite drunk, but all appeared to be considerably excited.

They seemed to need each other’s support, morally, before they dared

come in; not one of them would have entered alone but with the rest

each one was brave enough. Even Rogojin entered rather cautiously at

the head of his troop; but he was evidently preoccupied. He appeared to

be gloomy and morose, and had clearly come with some end in view. All

the rest were merely chorus, brought in to support the chief character.

Besides Lebedeff there was the dandy Zalesheff, who came in without his

coat and hat, two or three others followed his example; the rest were

more uncouth. They included a couple of young merchants, a man in a

great-coat, a medical student, a little Pole, a small fat man who

laughed continuously, and an enormously tall stout one who apparently

put great faith in the strength of his fists. A couple of “ladies” of

some sort put their heads in at the front door, but did not dare come

any farther. Colia promptly banged the door in their faces and locked

it.

“Hallo, Gania, you blackguard! You didn’t expect Rogojin, eh?” said the

latter, entering the drawing-room, and stopping before Gania.

But at this moment he saw, seated before him, Nastasia Philipovna. He

had not dreamed of meeting her here, evidently, for her appearance

produced a marvellous effect upon him. He grew pale, and his lips

became actually blue.

“I suppose it is true, then!” he muttered to himself, and his face took

on an expression of despair. “So that’s the end of it! Now you, sir,

will you answer me or not?” he went on suddenly, gazing at Gania with

ineffable malice. “Now then, you—”

He panted, and could hardly speak for agitation. He advanced into the

room mechanically; but perceiving Nina Alexandrovna and Varia he became

more or less embarrassed, in spite of his excitement. His followers

entered after him, and all paused a moment at sight of the ladies. Of

course their modesty was not fated to be long-lived, but for a moment

they were abashed. Once let them begin to shout, however, and nothing

on earth should disconcert them.

“What, you here too, prince?” said Rogojin, absently, but a little

surprised all the same “Still in your gaiters, eh?” He sighed, and

forgot the prince next moment, and his wild eyes wandered over to

Nastasia again, as though attracted in that direction by some magnetic

force.

Nastasia looked at the new arrivals with great curiosity. Gania

recollected himself at last.

“Excuse me, sirs,” he said, loudly, “but what does all this mean?” He

glared at the advancing crowd generally, but addressed his remarks

especially to their captain, Rogojin. “You are not in a stable,

gentlemen, though you may think it—my mother and sister are present.”

“Yes, I see your mother and sister,” muttered Rogojin, through his

teeth; and Lebedeff seemed to feel himself called upon to second the

statement.

“At all events, I must request you to step into the salon,” said Gania,

his rage rising quite out of proportion to his words, “and then I shall

inquire—”

“What, he doesn’t know me!” said Rogojin, showing his teeth

disagreeably. “He doesn’t recognize Rogojin!” He did not move an inch,

however.

“I have met you somewhere, I believe, but—”

“Met me somewhere, pfu! Why, it’s only three months since I lost two

hundred roubles of my father’s money to you, at cards. The old fellow

died before he found out. Ptitsin knows all about it. Why, I’ve only to

pull out a three-rouble note and show it to you, and you’d crawl on

your hands and knees to the other end of the town for it; that’s the

sort of man you are. Why, I’ve come now, at this moment, to buy you up!

Oh, you needn’t think that because I wear these boots I have no money.

I have lots of money, my beauty,—enough to buy up you and all yours

together. So I shall, if I like to! I’ll buy you up! I will!” he

yelled, apparently growing more and more intoxicated and excited. “Oh,

Nastasia Philipovna! don’t turn me out! Say one word, do! Are you going

to marry this man, or not?”

Rogojin asked his question like a lost soul appealing to some divinity,

with the reckless daring of one appointed to die, who has nothing to

lose.

He awaited the reply in deadly anxiety.

Nastasia Philipovna gazed at him with a haughty, ironical expression of

face; but when she glanced at Nina Alexandrovna and Varia, and from

them to Gania, she changed her tone, all of a sudden.

“Certainly not; what are you thinking of? What could have induced you

to ask such a question?” she replied, quietly and seriously, and even,

apparently, with some astonishment.

“No? No?” shouted Rogojin, almost out of his mind with joy. “You are

not going to, after all? And they told me—oh, Nastasia Philipovna—they

said you had promised to marry him, \_him!\_ As if you \_could\_ do

it!—him—pooh! I don’t mind saying it to everyone—I’d buy him off for a

hundred roubles, any day pfu! Give him a thousand, or three if he

likes, poor devil, and he’d cut and run the day before his wedding, and

leave his bride to me! Wouldn’t you, Gania, you blackguard? You’d take

three thousand, wouldn’t you? Here’s the money! Look, I’ve come on

purpose to pay you off and get your receipt, formally. I said I’d buy

you up, and so I will.”

“Get out of this, you drunken beast!” cried Gania, who was red and

white by turns.

Rogojin’s troop, who were only waiting for an excuse, set up a howl at

this. Lebedeff stepped forward and whispered something in Parfen’s ear.

“You’re right, clerk,” said the latter, “you’re right, tipsy

spirit—you’re right!—Nastasia Philipovna,” he added, looking at her

like some lunatic, harmless generally, but suddenly wound up to a pitch

of audacity, “here are eighteen thousand roubles, and—and you shall

have more—.” Here he threw a packet of bank-notes tied up in white

paper, on the table before her, not daring to say all he wished to say.

“No—no—no!” muttered Lebedeff, clutching at his arm. He was clearly

aghast at the largeness of the sum, and thought a far smaller amount

should have been tried first.

“No, you fool—you don’t know whom you are dealing with—and it appears I

am a fool, too!” said Parfen, trembling beneath the flashing glance of

Nastasia. “Oh, curse it all! What a fool I was to listen to you!” he

added, with profound melancholy.

Nastasia Philipovna, observing his woe-begone expression, suddenly

burst out laughing.

“Eighteen thousand roubles, for me? Why, you declare yourself a fool at

once,” she said, with impudent familiarity, as she rose from the sofa

and prepared to go. Gania watched the whole scene with a sinking of the

heart.

“Forty thousand, then—forty thousand roubles instead of eighteen!

Ptitsin and another have promised to find me forty thousand roubles by

seven o’clock tonight. Forty thousand roubles—paid down on the nail!”

The scene was growing more and more disgraceful; but Nastasia

Philipovna continued to laugh and did not go away. Nina Alexandrovna

and Varia had both risen from their places and were waiting, in silent

horror, to see what would happen. Varia’s eyes were all ablaze with

anger; but the scene had a different effect on Nina Alexandrovna. She

paled and trembled, and looked more and more like fainting every

moment.

“Very well then, a \_hundred\_ thousand! a hundred thousand! paid this

very day. Ptitsin! find it for me. A good share shall stick to your

fingers—come!”

“You are mad!” said Ptitsin, coming up quickly and seizing him by the

hand. “You’re drunk—the police will be sent for if you don’t look out.

Think where you are.”

“Yes, he’s boasting like a drunkard,” added Nastasia, as though with

the sole intention of goading him.

“I do \_not\_ boast! You shall have a hundred thousand, this very day.

Ptitsin, get the money, you gay usurer! Take what you like for it, but

get it by the evening! I’ll show that I’m in earnest!” cried Rogojin,

working himself up into a frenzy of excitement.

“Come, come; what’s all this?” cried General Ivolgin, suddenly and

angrily, coming close up to Rogojin. The unexpectedness of this sally

on the part of the hitherto silent old man caused some laughter among

the intruders.

“Halloa! what’s this now?” laughed Rogojin. “You come along with me,

old fellow! You shall have as much to drink as you like.”

“Oh, it’s too horrible!” cried poor Colia, sobbing with shame and

annoyance.

“Surely there must be someone among all of you here who will turn this

shameless creature out of the room?” cried Varia, suddenly. She was

shaking and trembling with rage.

“That’s me, I suppose. I’m the shameless creature!” cried Nastasia

Philipovna, with amused indifference. “Dear me, and I came—like a fool,

as I am—to invite them over to my house for the evening! Look how your

sister treats me, Gavrila Ardalionovitch.”

For some moments Gania stood as if stunned or struck by lightning,

after his sister’s speech. But seeing that Nastasia Philipovna was

really about to leave the room this time, he sprang at Varia and seized

her by the arm like a madman.

“What have you done?” he hissed, glaring at her as though he would like

to annihilate her on the spot. He was quite beside himself, and could

hardly articulate his words for rage.

“What have I done? Where are you dragging me to?”

“Do you wish me to beg pardon of this creature because she has come

here to insult our mother and disgrace the whole household, you low,

base wretch?” cried Varia, looking back at her brother with proud

defiance.

A few moments passed as they stood there face to face, Gania still

holding her wrist tightly. Varia struggled once—twice—to get free; then

could restrain herself no longer, and spat in his face.

“There’s a girl for you!” cried Nastasia Philipovna. “Mr. Ptitsin, I

congratulate you on your choice.”

Gania lost his head. Forgetful of everything he aimed a blow at Varia,

which would inevitably have laid her low, but suddenly another hand

caught his. Between him and Varia stood the prince.

“Enough—enough!” said the latter, with insistence, but all of a tremble

with excitement.

“Are you going to cross my path for ever, damn you!” cried Gania; and,

loosening his hold on Varia, he slapped the prince’s face with all his

force.

Exclamations of horror arose on all sides. The prince grew pale as

death; he gazed into Gania’s eyes with a strange, wild, reproachful

look; his lips trembled and vainly endeavoured to form some words; then

his mouth twisted into an incongruous smile.

“Very well—never mind about me; but I shall not allow you to strike

her!” he said, at last, quietly. Then, suddenly, he could bear it no

longer, and covering his face with his hands, turned to the wall, and

murmured in broken accents:

“Oh! how ashamed you will be of this afterwards!”

Gania certainly did look dreadfully abashed. Colia rushed up to comfort

the prince, and after him crowded Varia, Rogojin and all, even the

general.

“It’s nothing, it’s nothing!” said the prince, and again he wore the

smile which was so inconsistent with the circumstances.

“Yes, he will be ashamed!” cried Rogojin. “You will be properly ashamed

of yourself for having injured such a—such a sheep” (he could not find

a better word). “Prince, my dear fellow, leave this and come away with

me. I’ll show you how Rogojin shows his affection for his friends.”

Nastasia Philipovna was also much impressed, both with Gania’s action

and with the prince’s reply.

Her usually thoughtful, pale face, which all this while had been so

little in harmony with the jests and laughter which she had seemed to

put on for the occasion, was now evidently agitated by new feelings,

though she tried to conceal the fact and to look as though she were as

ready as ever for jesting and irony.

“I really think I must have seen him somewhere!” she murmured seriously

enough.

“Oh, aren’t you ashamed of yourself—aren’t you ashamed? Are you really

the sort of woman you are trying to represent yourself to be? Is it

possible?” The prince was now addressing Nastasia, in a tone of

reproach, which evidently came from his very heart.

Nastasia Philipovna looked surprised, and smiled, but evidently

concealed something beneath her smile and with some confusion and a

glance at Gania she left the room.

However, she had not reached the outer hall when she turned round,

walked quickly up to Nina Alexandrovna, seized her hand and lifted it

to her lips.

“He guessed quite right. I am not that sort of woman,” she whispered

hurriedly, flushing red all over. Then she turned again and left the

room so quickly that no one could imagine what she had come back for.

All they saw was that she said something to Nina Alexandrovna in a

hurried whisper, and seemed to kiss her hand. Varia, however, both saw

and heard all, and watched Nastasia out of the room with an expression

of wonder.

Gania recollected himself in time to rush after her in order to show

her out, but she had gone. He followed her to the stairs.

“Don’t come with me,” she cried, “\_Au revoir\_, till the evening—do you

hear? \_Au revoir!\_”

He returned thoughtful and confused; the riddle lay heavier than ever

on his soul. He was troubled about the prince, too, and so bewildered

that he did not even observe Rogojin’s rowdy band crowd past him and

step on his toes, at the door as they went out. They were all talking

at once. Rogojin went ahead of the others, talking to Ptitsin, and

apparently insisting vehemently upon something very important.

“You’ve lost the game, Gania” he cried, as he passed the latter.

Gania gazed after him uneasily, but said nothing.

XI.

The prince now left the room and shut himself up in his own chamber.

Colia followed him almost at once, anxious to do what he could to

console him. The poor boy seemed to be already so attached to him that

he could hardly leave him.

“You were quite right to go away!” he said. “The row will rage there

worse than ever now; and it’s like this every day with us—and all

through that Nastasia Philipovna.”

“You have so many sources of trouble here, Colia,” said the prince.

“Yes, indeed, and it is all our own fault. But I have a great friend

who is much worse off even than we are. Would you like to know him?”

“Yes, very much. Is he one of your school-fellows?”

“Well, not exactly. I will tell you all about him some day.... What do

you think of Nastasia Philipovna? She is beautiful, isn’t she? I had

never seen her before, though I had a great wish to do so. She

fascinated me. I could forgive Gania if he were to marry her for love,

but for money! Oh dear! that is horrible!”

“Yes, your brother does not attract me much.”

“I am not surprised at that. After what you... But I do hate that way

of looking at things! Because some fool, or a rogue pretending to be a

fool, strikes a man, that man is to be dishonoured for his whole life,

unless he wipes out the disgrace with blood, or makes his assailant beg

forgiveness on his knees! I think that so very absurd and tyrannical.

Lermontoff’s Bal Masque is based on that idea—a stupid and unnatural

one, in my opinion; but he was hardly more than a child when he wrote

it.”

“I like your sister very much.”

“Did you see how she spat in Gania’s face! Varia is afraid of no one.

But you did not follow her example, and yet I am sure it was not

through cowardice. Here she comes! Speak of a wolf and you see his

tail! I felt sure that she would come. She is very generous, though of

course she has her faults.”

Varia pounced upon her brother.

“This is not the place for you,” said she. “Go to father. Is he

plaguing you, prince?”

“Not in the least; on the contrary, he interests me.”

“Scolding as usual, Varia! It is the worst thing about her. After all,

I believe father may have started off with Rogojin. No doubt he is

sorry now. Perhaps I had better go and see what he is doing,” added

Colia, running off.

“Thank God, I have got mother away, and put her to bed without another

scene! Gania is worried—and ashamed—not without reason! What a

spectacle! I have come to thank you once more, prince, and to ask you

if you knew Nastasia Philipovna before?”

“No, I have never known her.”

“Then what did you mean, when you said straight out to her that she was

not really ‘like that’? You guessed right, I fancy. It is quite

possible she was not herself at the moment, though I cannot fathom her

meaning. Evidently she meant to hurt and insult us. I have heard

curious tales about her before now, but if she came to invite us to her

house, why did she behave so to my mother? Ptitsin knows her very well;

he says he could not understand her today. With Rogojin, too! No one

with a spark of self-respect could have talked like that in the house

of her... Mother is extremely vexed on your account, too...

“That is nothing!” said the prince, waving his hand.

“But how meek she was when you spoke to her!”

“Meek! What do you mean?”

“You told her it was a shame for her to behave so, and her manner

changed at once; she was like another person. You have some influence

over her, prince,” added Varia, smiling a little.

The door opened at this point, and in came Gania most unexpectedly.

He was not in the least disconcerted to see Varia there, but he stood a

moment at the door, and then approached the prince quietly.

“Prince,” he said, with feeling, “I was a blackguard. Forgive me!” His

face gave evidence of suffering. The prince was considerably amazed,

and did not reply at once. “Oh, come, forgive me, forgive me!” Gania

insisted, rather impatiently. “If you like, I’ll kiss your hand.

There!”

The prince was touched; he took Gania’s hands, and embraced him

heartily, while each kissed the other.

“I never, never thought you were like that,” said Muishkin, drawing a

deep breath. “I thought you—you weren’t capable of—”

“Of what? Apologizing, eh? And where on earth did I get the idea that

you were an idiot? You always observe what other people pass by

unnoticed; one could talk sense to you, but—”

“Here is another to whom you should apologize,” said the prince,

pointing to Varia.

“No, no! they are all enemies! I’ve tried them often enough, believe

me,” and Gania turned his back on Varia with these words.

“But if I beg you to make it up?” said Varia.

“And you’ll go to Nastasia Philipovna’s this evening—”

“If you insist: but, judge for yourself, can I go, ought I to go?”

“But she is not that sort of woman, I tell you!” said Gania, angrily.

“She was only acting.”

“I know that—I know that; but what a part to play! And think what she

must take \_you\_ for, Gania! I know she kissed mother’s hand, and all

that, but she laughed at you, all the same. All this is not good enough

for seventy-five thousand roubles, my dear boy. You are capable of

honourable feelings still, and that’s why I am talking to you so. Oh!

\_do\_ take care what you are doing! Don’t you know yourself that it will

end badly, Gania?”

So saying, and in a state of violent agitation, Varia left the room.

“There, they are all like that,” said Gania, laughing, “just as if I do

not know all about it much better than they do.”

He sat down with these words, evidently intending to prolong his visit.

“If you know it so well,” said the prince a little timidly, “why do you

choose all this worry for the sake of the seventy-five thousand, which,

you confess, does not cover it?”

“I didn’t mean that,” said Gania; “but while we are upon the subject,

let me hear your opinion. Is all this worry worth seventy-five thousand

or not?”

“Certainly not.”

“Of course! And it would be a disgrace to marry so, eh?”

“A great disgrace.”

“Oh, well, then you may know that I shall certainly do it, now. I shall

certainly marry her. I was not quite sure of myself before, but now I

am. Don’t say a word: I know what you want to tell me—”

“No. I was only going to say that what surprises me most of all is your

extraordinary confidence.”

“How so? What in?”

“That Nastasia Philipovna will accept you, and that the question is as

good as settled; and secondly, that even if she did, you would be able

to pocket the money. Of course, I know very little about it, but that’s

my view. When a man marries for money it often happens that the wife

keeps the money in her own hands.”

“Of course, you don’t know all; but, I assure you, you needn’t be

afraid, it won’t be like that in our case. There are circumstances,”

said Gania, rather excitedly. “And as to her answer to me, there’s no

doubt about that. Why should you suppose she will refuse me?”

“Oh, I only judge by what I see. Varvara Ardalionovna said just now—”

“Oh she—they don’t know anything about it! Nastasia was only chaffing

Rogojin. I was alarmed at first, but I have thought better of it now;

she was simply laughing at him. She looks on me as a fool because I

show that I meant her money, and doesn’t realize that there are other

men who would deceive her in far worse fashion. I’m not going to

pretend anything, and you’ll see she’ll marry me, all right. If she

likes to live quietly, so she shall; but if she gives me any of her

nonsense, I shall leave her at once, but I shall keep the money. I’m

not going to look a fool; that’s the first thing, not to look a fool.”

“But Nastasia Philipovna seems to me to be such a \_sensible\_ woman,

and, as such, why should she run blindly into this business? That’s

what puzzles me so,” said the prince.

“You don’t know all, you see; I tell you there are things—and besides,

I’m sure that she is persuaded that I love her to distraction, and I

give you my word I have a strong suspicion that she loves me, too—in

her own way, of course. She thinks she will be able to make a sort of

slave of me all my life; but I shall prepare a little surprise for her.

I don’t know whether I ought to be confidential with you, prince; but,

I assure you, you are the only decent fellow I have come across. I have

not spoken so sincerely as I am doing at this moment for years. There

are uncommonly few honest people about, prince; there isn’t one

honester than Ptitsin, he’s the best of the lot. Are you laughing? You

don’t know, perhaps, that blackguards like honest people, and being one

myself I like you. \_Why\_ am I a blackguard? Tell me honestly, now. They

all call me a blackguard because of her, and I have got into the way of

thinking myself one. That’s what is so bad about the business.”

“\_I\_ for one shall never think you a blackguard again,” said the

prince. “I confess I had a poor opinion of you at first, but I have

been so joyfully surprised about you just now; it’s a good lesson for

me. I shall never judge again without a thorough trial. I see now that

you are not only not a blackguard, but are not even quite spoiled. I

see that you are quite an ordinary man, not original in the least

degree, but rather weak.”

Gania laughed sarcastically, but said nothing. The prince, seeing that

he did not quite like the last remark, blushed, and was silent too.

“Has my father asked you for money?” asked Gania, suddenly.

“No.”

“Don’t give it to him if he does. Fancy, he was a decent, respectable

man once! He was received in the best society; he was not always the

liar he is now. Of course, wine is at the bottom of it all; but he is a

good deal worse than an innocent liar now. Do you know that he keeps a

mistress? I can’t understand how mother is so long-suffering. Did he

tell you the story of the siege of Kars? Or perhaps the one about his

grey horse that talked? He loves to enlarge on these absurd histories.”

And Gania burst into a fit of laughter. Suddenly he turned to the

prince and asked: “Why are you looking at me like that?”

“I am surprised to see you laugh in that way, like a child. You came to

make friends with me again just now, and you said, ‘I will kiss your

hand, if you like,’ just as a child would have said it. And then, all

at once you are talking of this mad project—of these seventy-five

thousand roubles! It all seems so absurd and impossible.”

“Well, what conclusion have you reached?”

“That you are rushing madly into the undertaking, and that you would do

well to think it over again. It is more than possible that Varvara

Ardalionovna is right.”

“Ah! now you begin to moralize! I know that I am only a child, very

well,” replied Gania impatiently. “That is proved by my having this

conversation with you. It is not for money only, prince, that I am

rushing into this affair,” he continued, hardly master of his words, so

closely had his vanity been touched. “If I reckoned on that I should

certainly be deceived, for I am still too weak in mind and character. I

am obeying a passion, an impulse perhaps, because I have but one aim,

one that overmasters all else. You imagine that once I am in possession

of these seventy-five thousand roubles, I shall rush to buy a

carriage... No, I shall go on wearing the old overcoat I have worn for

three years, and I shall give up my club. I shall follow the example of

men who have made their fortunes. When Ptitsin was seventeen he slept

in the street, he sold pen-knives, and began with a copeck; now he has

sixty thousand roubles, but to get them, what has he not done? Well, I

shall be spared such a hard beginning, and shall start with a little

capital. In fifteen years people will say, ‘Look, that’s Ivolgin, the

king of the Jews!’ You say that I have no originality. Now mark this,

prince—there is nothing so offensive to a man of our time and race than

to be told that he is wanting in originality, that he is weak in

character, has no particular talent, and is, in short, an ordinary

person. You have not even done me the honour of looking upon me as a

rogue. Do you know, I could have knocked you down for that just now!

You wounded me more cruelly than Epanchin, who thinks me capable of

selling him my wife! Observe, it was a perfectly gratuitous idea on his

part, seeing there has never been any discussion of it between us! This

has exasperated me, and I am determined to make a fortune! I will do

it! Once I am rich, I shall be a genius, an extremely original man. One

of the vilest and most hateful things connected with money is that it

can buy even talent; and will do so as long as the world lasts. You

will say that this is childish—or romantic. Well, that will be all the

better for me, but the thing shall be done. I will carry it through. He

laughs most, who laughs last. Why does Epanchin insult me? Simply

because, socially, I am a nobody. However, enough for the present.

Colia has put his nose in to tell us dinner is ready, twice. I’m dining

out. I shall come and talk to you now and then; you shall be

comfortable enough with us. They are sure to make you one of the

family. I think you and I will either be great friends or enemies. Look

here now, supposing I had kissed your hand just now, as I offered to do

in all sincerity, should I have hated you for it afterwards?”

“Certainly, but not always. You would not have been able to keep it up,

and would have ended by forgiving me,” said the prince, after a pause

for reflection, and with a pleasant smile.

“Oho, how careful one has to be with you, prince! Haven’t you put a

drop of poison in that remark now, eh? By the way—ha, ha, ha!—I forgot

to ask, was I right in believing that you were a good deal struck

yourself with Nastasia Philipovna.”

“Ye-yes.”

“Are you in love with her?”

“N-no.”

“And yet you flush up as red as a rosebud! Come—it’s all right. I’m not

going to laugh at you. Do you know she is a very virtuous woman?

Believe it or not, as you like. You think she and Totski—not a bit of

it, not a bit of it! Not for ever so long! \_Au revoir!\_”

Gania left the room in great good humour. The prince stayed behind, and

meditated alone for a few minutes. At length, Colia popped his head in

once more.

“I don’t want any dinner, thanks, Colia. I had too good a lunch at

General Epanchin’s.”

Colia came into the room and gave the prince a note; it was from the

general and was carefully sealed up. It was clear from Colia’s face how

painful it was to him to deliver the missive. The prince read it, rose,

and took his hat.

“It’s only a couple of yards,” said Colia, blushing.

“He’s sitting there over his bottle—and how they can give him credit, I

cannot understand. Don’t tell mother I brought you the note, prince; I

have sworn not to do it a thousand times, but I’m always so sorry for

him. Don’t stand on ceremony, give him some trifle, and let that end

it.”

“Come along, Colia, I want to see your father. I have an idea,” said

the prince.

XII.

Colia took the prince to a public-house in the Litaynaya, not far off.

In one of the side rooms there sat at a table—looking like one of the

regular guests of the establishment—Ardalion Alexandrovitch, with a

bottle before him, and a newspaper on his knee. He was waiting for the

prince, and no sooner did the latter appear than he began a long

harangue about something or other; but so far gone was he that the

prince could hardly understand a word.

“I have not got a ten-rouble note,” said the prince; “but here is a

twenty-five. Change it and give me back the fifteen, or I shall be left

without a farthing myself.”

“Oh, of course, of course; and you quite understand that I—”

“Yes; and I have another request to make, general. Have you ever been

at Nastasia Philipovna’s?”

“I? I? Do you mean me? Often, my friend, often! I only pretended I had

not in order to avoid a painful subject. You saw today, you were a

witness, that I did all that a kind, an indulgent father could do. Now

a father of altogether another type shall step into the scene. You

shall see; the old soldier shall lay bare this intrigue, or a shameless

woman will force her way into a respectable and noble family.”

“Yes, quite so. I wished to ask you whether you could show me the way

to Nastasia Philipovna’s tonight. I must go; I have business with her;

I was not invited but I was introduced. Anyhow I am ready to trespass

the laws of propriety if only I can get in somehow or other.”

“My dear young friend, you have hit on my very idea. It was not for

this rubbish I asked you to come over here” (he pocketed the money,

however, at this point), “it was to invite your alliance in the

campaign against Nastasia Philipovna tonight. How well it sounds,

‘General Ivolgin and Prince Muishkin.’ That’ll fetch her, I think, eh?

Capital! We’ll go at nine; there’s time yet.”

“Where does she live?”

“Oh, a long way off, near the Great Theatre, just in the square

there—It won’t be a large party.”

The general sat on and on. He had ordered a fresh bottle when the

prince arrived; this took him an hour to drink, and then he had

another, and another, during the consumption of which he told pretty

nearly the whole story of his life. The prince was in despair. He felt

that though he had but applied to this miserable old drunkard because

he saw no other way of getting to Nastasia Philipovna’s, yet he had

been very wrong to put the slightest confidence in such a man.

At last he rose and declared that he would wait no longer. The general

rose too, drank the last drops that he could squeeze out of the bottle,

and staggered into the street.

Muishkin began to despair. He could not imagine how he had been so

foolish as to trust this man. He only wanted one thing, and that was to

get to Nastasia Philipovna’s, even at the cost of a certain amount of

impropriety. But now the scandal threatened to be more than he had

bargained for. By this time Ardalion Alexandrovitch was quite

intoxicated, and he kept his companion listening while he discoursed

eloquently and pathetically on subjects of all kinds, interspersed with

torrents of recrimination against the members of his family. He

insisted that all his troubles were caused by their bad conduct, and

time alone would put an end to them.

At last they reached the Litaynaya. The thaw increased steadily, a

warm, unhealthy wind blew through the streets, vehicles splashed

through the mud, and the iron shoes of horses and mules rang on the

paving stones. Crowds of melancholy people plodded wearily along the

footpaths, with here and there a drunken man among them.

“Do you see those brightly-lighted windows?” said the general. “Many of

my old comrades-in-arms live about here, and I, who served longer, and

suffered more than any of them, am walking on foot to the house of a

woman of rather questionable reputation! A man, look you, who has

thirteen bullets on his breast!... You don’t believe it? Well, I can

assure you it was entirely on my account that Pirogoff telegraphed to

Paris, and left Sebastopol at the greatest risk during the siege.

Nelaton, the Tuileries surgeon, demanded a safe conduct, in the name of

science, into the besieged city in order to attend my wounds. The

government knows all about it. ‘That’s the Ivolgin with thirteen

bullets in him!’ That’s how they speak of me.... Do you see that house,

prince? One of my old friends lives on the first floor, with his large

family. In this and five other houses, three overlooking Nevsky, two in

the Morskaya, are all that remain of my personal friends. Nina

Alexandrovna gave them up long ago, but I keep in touch with them

still... I may say I find refreshment in this little coterie, in thus

meeting my old acquaintances and subordinates, who worship me still, in

spite of all. General Sokolovitch (by the way, I have not called on him

lately, or seen Anna Fedorovna)... You know, my dear prince, when a

person does not receive company himself, he gives up going to other

people’s houses involuntarily. And yet... well... you look as if you

didn’t believe me.... Well now, why should I not present the son of my

old friend and companion to this delightful family—General Ivolgin and

Prince Muishkin? You will see a lovely girl—what am I saying—a lovely

girl? No, indeed, two, three! Ornaments of this city and of society:

beauty, education, culture—the woman question—poetry—everything! Added

to which is the fact that each one will have a dot of at least eighty

thousand roubles. No bad thing, eh?... In a word I absolutely must

introduce you to them: it is a duty, an obligation. General Ivolgin and

Prince Muishkin. Tableau!”

“At once? Now? You must have forgotten...” began the prince.

“No, I have forgotten nothing. Come! This is the house—up this

magnificent staircase. I am surprised not to see the porter, but ....

it is a holiday... and the man has gone off... Drunken fool! Why have

they not got rid of him? Sokolovitch owes all the happiness he has had

in the service and in his private life to me, and me alone, but... here

we are.”

The prince followed quietly, making no further objection for fear of

irritating the old man. At the same time he fervently hoped that

General Sokolovitch and his family would fade away like a mirage in the

desert, so that the visitors could escape, by merely returning

downstairs. But to his horror he saw that General Ivolgin was quite

familiar with the house, and really seemed to have friends there. At

every step he named some topographical or biographical detail that left

nothing to be desired on the score of accuracy. When they arrived at

last, on the first floor, and the general turned to ring the bell to

the right, the prince decided to run away, but a curious incident

stopped him momentarily.

“You have made a mistake, general,” said he. “The name on the door is

Koulakoff, and you were going to see General Sokolovitch.”

“Koulakoff... Koulakoff means nothing. This is Sokolovitch’s flat, and

I am ringing at his door.... What do I care for Koulakoff?... Here

comes someone to open.”

In fact, the door opened directly, and the footman informed the

visitors that the family were all away.

“What a pity! What a pity! It’s just my luck!” repeated Ardalion

Alexandrovitch over and over again, in regretful tones. “When your

master and mistress return, my man, tell them that General Ivolgin and

Prince Muishkin desired to present themselves, and that they were

extremely sorry, excessively grieved...”

Just then another person belonging to the household was seen at the

back of the hall. It was a woman of some forty years, dressed in sombre

colours, probably a housekeeper or a governess. Hearing the names she

came forward with a look of suspicion on her face.

“Marie Alexandrovna is not at home,” said she, staring hard at the

general. “She has gone to her mother’s, with Alexandra Michailovna.”

“Alexandra Michailovna out, too! How disappointing! Would you believe

it, I am always so unfortunate! May I most respectfully ask you to

present my compliments to Alexandra Michailovna, and remind her... tell

her, that with my whole heart I wish for her what she wished for

herself on Thursday evening, while she was listening to Chopin’s

Ballade. She will remember. I wish it with all sincerity. General

Ivolgin and Prince Muishkin!”

The woman’s face changed; she lost her suspicious expression.

“I will not fail to deliver your message,” she replied, and bowed them

out.

As they went downstairs the general regretted repeatedly that he had

failed to introduce the prince to his friends.

“You know I am a bit of a poet,” said he. “Have you noticed it? The

poetic soul, you know.” Then he added suddenly—“But after all... after

all I believe we made a mistake this time! I remember that the

Sokolovitch’s live in another house, and what is more, they are just

now in Moscow. Yes, I certainly was at fault. However, it is of no

consequence.”

“Just tell me,” said the prince in reply, “may I count still on your

assistance? Or shall I go on alone to see Nastasia Philipovna?”

“Count on my assistance? Go alone? How can you ask me that question,

when it is a matter on which the fate of my family so largely depends?

You don’t know Ivolgin, my friend. To trust Ivolgin is to trust a rock;

that’s how the first squadron I commanded spoke of me. ‘Depend upon

Ivolgin,’ said they all, ‘he is as steady as a rock.’ But, excuse me, I

must just call at a house on our way, a house where I have found

consolation and help in all my trials for years.”

“You are going home?”

“No... I wish... to visit Madame Terentieff, the widow of Captain

Terentieff, my old subordinate and friend. She helps me to keep up my

courage, and to bear the trials of my domestic life, and as I have an

extra burden on my mind today...”

“It seems to me,” interrupted the prince, “that I was foolish to

trouble you just now. However, at present you... Good-bye!”

“Indeed, you must not go away like that, young man, you must not!”

cried the general. “My friend here is a widow, the mother of a family;

her words come straight from her heart, and find an echo in mine. A

visit to her is merely an affair of a few minutes; I am quite at home

in her house. I will have a wash, and dress, and then we can drive to

the Grand Theatre. Make up your mind to spend the evening with me....

We are just there—that’s the house... Why, Colia! you here! Well, is

Marfa Borisovna at home or have you only just come?”

“Oh no! I have been here a long while,” replied Colia, who was at the

front door when the general met him. “I am keeping Hippolyte company.

He is worse, and has been in bed all day. I came down to buy some

cards. Marfa Borisovna expects you. But what a state you are in,

father!” added the boy, noticing his father’s unsteady gait. “Well, let

us go in.”

On meeting Colia the prince determined to accompany the general, though

he made up his mind to stay as short a time as possible. He wanted

Colia, but firmly resolved to leave the general behind. He could not

forgive himself for being so simple as to imagine that Ivolgin would be

of any use. The three climbed up the long staircase until they reached

the fourth floor where Madame Terentieff lived.

“You intend to introduce the prince?” asked Colia, as they went up.

“Yes, my boy. I wish to present him: General Ivolgin and Prince

Muishkin! But what’s the matter?... what?... How is Marfa Borisovna?”

“You know, father, you would have done much better not to come at all!

She is ready to eat you up! You have not shown yourself since the day

before yesterday and she is expecting the money. Why did you promise

her any? You are always the same! Well, now you will have to get out of

it as best you can.”

They stopped before a somewhat low doorway on the fourth floor.

Ardalion Alexandrovitch, evidently much out of countenance, pushed

Muishkin in front.

“I will wait here,” he stammered. “I should like to surprise her. ....”

Colia entered first, and as the door stood open, the mistress of the

house peeped out. The surprise of the general’s imagination fell very

flat, for she at once began to address him in terms of reproach.

Marfa Borisovna was about forty years of age. She wore a

dressing-jacket, her feet were in slippers, her face painted, and her

hair was in dozens of small plaits. No sooner did she catch sight of

Ardalion Alexandrovitch than she screamed:

“There he is, that wicked, mean wretch! I knew it was he! My heart

misgave me!”

The old man tried to put a good face on the affair.

“Come, let us go in—it’s all right,” he whispered in the prince’s ear.

But it was more serious than he wished to think. As soon as the

visitors had crossed the low dark hall, and entered the narrow

reception-room, furnished with half a dozen cane chairs, and two small

card-tables, Madame Terentieff, in the shrill tones habitual to her,

continued her stream of invectives.

“Are you not ashamed? Are you not ashamed? You barbarian! You tyrant!

You have robbed me of all I possessed—you have sucked my bones to the

marrow. How long shall I be your victim? Shameless, dishonourable man!”

“Marfa Borisovna! Marfa Borisovna! Here is... the Prince Muishkin!

General Ivolgin and Prince Muishkin,” stammered the disconcerted old

man.

“Would you believe,” said the mistress of the house, suddenly

addressing the prince, “would you believe that that man has not even

spared my orphan children? He has stolen everything I possessed, sold

everything, pawned everything; he has left me nothing—nothing! What am

I to do with your IOU’s, you cunning, unscrupulous rogue? Answer,

devourer! answer, heart of stone! How shall I feed my orphans? with

what shall I nourish them? And now he has come, he is drunk! He can

scarcely stand. How, oh how, have I offended the Almighty, that He

should bring this curse upon me! Answer, you worthless villain,

answer!”

But this was too much for the general.

“Here are twenty-five roubles, Marfa Borisovna... it is all that I can

give... and I owe even these to the prince’s generosity—my noble

friend. I have been cruelly deceived. Such is... life... Now... Excuse

me, I am very weak,” he continued, standing in the centre of the room,

and bowing to all sides. “I am faint; excuse me! Lenotchka... a

cushion... my dear!”

Lenotchka, a little girl of eight, ran to fetch the cushion at once,

and placed it on the rickety old sofa. The general meant to have said

much more, but as soon as he had stretched himself out, he turned his

face to the wall, and slept the sleep of the just.

With a grave and ceremonious air, Marfa Borisovna motioned the prince

to a chair at one of the card-tables. She seated herself opposite,

leaned her right cheek on her hand, and sat in silence, her eyes fixed

on Muishkin, now and again sighing deeply. The three children, two

little girls and a boy, Lenotchka being the eldest, came and leant on

the table and also stared steadily at him. Presently Colia appeared

from the adjoining room.

“I am very glad indeed to have met you here, Colia,” said the prince.

“Can you do something for me? I must see Nastasia Philipovna, and I

asked Ardalion Alexandrovitch just now to take me to her house, but he

has gone to sleep, as you see. Will you show me the way, for I do not

know the street? I have the address, though; it is close to the Grand

Theatre.”

“Nastasia Philipovna? She does not live there, and to tell you the

truth my father has never been to her house! It is strange that you

should have depended on him! She lives near Wladimir Street, at the

Five Corners, and it is quite close by. Will you go directly? It is

just half-past nine. I will show you the way with pleasure.”

Colia and the prince went off together. Alas! the latter had no money

to pay for a cab, so they were obliged to walk.

“I should have liked to have taken you to see Hippolyte,” said Colia.

“He is the eldest son of the lady you met just now, and was in the next

room. He is ill, and has been in bed all day. But he is rather strange,

and extremely sensitive, and I thought he might be upset considering

the circumstances in which you came... Somehow it touches me less, as

it concerns my father, while it is \_his\_ mother. That, of course, makes

a great difference. What is a terrible disgrace to a woman, does not

disgrace a man, at least not in the same way. Perhaps public opinion is

wrong in condemning one sex, and excusing the other. Hippolyte is an

extremely clever boy, but so prejudiced. He is really a slave to his

opinions.”

“Do you say he is consumptive?”

“Yes. It really would be happier for him to die young. If I were in his

place I should certainly long for death. He is unhappy about his

brother and sisters, the children you saw. If it were possible, if we

only had a little money, we should leave our respective families, and

live together in a little apartment of our own. It is our dream. But,

do you know, when I was talking over your affair with him, he was

angry, and said that anyone who did not call out a man who had given

him a blow was a coward. He is very irritable to-day, and I left off

arguing the matter with him. So Nastasia Philipovna has invited you to

go and see her?”

“To tell the truth, she has not.”

“Then how do you come to be going there?” cried Colia, so much

astonished that he stopped short in the middle of the pavement. “And...

and are you going to her ‘At Home’ in that costume?”

“I don’t know, really, whether I shall be allowed in at all. If she

will receive me, so much the better. If not, the matter is ended. As to

my clothes—what can I do?”

“Are you going there for some particular reason, or only as a way of

getting into her society, and that of her friends?”

“No, I have really an object in going... That is, I am going on

business it is difficult to explain, but...”

“Well, whether you go on business or not is your affair, I do not want

to know. The only important thing, in my eyes, is that you should not

be going there simply for the pleasure of spending your evening in such

company—cocottes, generals, usurers! If that were the case I should

despise and laugh at you. There are terribly few honest people here,

and hardly any whom one can respect, although people put on airs—Varia

especially! Have you noticed, prince, how many adventurers there are

nowadays? Especially here, in our dear Russia. How it has happened I

never can understand. There used to be a certain amount of solidity in

all things, but now what happens? Everything is exposed to the public

gaze, veils are thrown back, every wound is probed by careless fingers.

We are for ever present at an orgy of scandalous revelations. Parents

blush when they remember their old-fashioned morality. At Moscow lately

a father was heard urging his son to stop at nothing—at nothing, mind

you!—to get money! The press seized upon the story, of course, and now

it is public property. Look at my father, the general! See what he is,

and yet, I assure you, he is an honest man! Only... he drinks too much,

and his morals are not all we could desire. Yes, that’s true! I pity

him, to tell the truth, but I dare not say so, because everybody would

laugh at me—but I do pity him! And who are the really clever men, after

all? Money-grubbers, every one of them, from the first to the last.

Hippolyte finds excuses for money-lending, and says it is a necessity.

He talks about the economic movement, and the ebb and flow of capital;

the devil knows what he means. It makes me angry to hear him talk so,

but he is soured by his troubles. Just imagine—the general keeps his

mother—but she lends him money! She lends it for a week or ten days at

very high interest! Isn’t it disgusting? And then, you would hardly

believe it, but my mother—Nina Alexandrovna—helps Hippolyte in all

sorts of ways, sends him money and clothes. She even goes as far as

helping the children, through Hippolyte, because their mother cares

nothing about them, and Varia does the same.”

“Well, just now you said there were no honest nor good people about,

that there were only money-grubbers—and here they are quite close at

hand, these honest and good people, your mother and Varia! I think

there is a good deal of moral strength in helping people in such

circumstances.”

“Varia does it from pride, and likes showing off, and giving herself

airs. As to my mother, I really do admire her—yes, and honour her.

Hippolyte, hardened as he is, feels it. He laughed at first, and

thought it vulgar of her—but now, he is sometimes quite touched and

overcome by her kindness. H’m! You call that being strong and good? I

will remember that! Gania knows nothing about it. He would say that it

was encouraging vice.”

“Ah, Gania knows nothing about it? It seems there are many things that

Gania does not know,” exclaimed the prince, as he considered Colia’s

last words.

“Do you know, I like you very much indeed, prince? I shall never forget

about this afternoon.”

“I like you too, Colia.”

“Listen to me! You are going to live here, are you not?” said Colia. “I

mean to get something to do directly, and earn money. Then shall we

three live together? You, and I, and Hippolyte? We will hire a flat,

and let the general come and visit us. What do you say?”

“It would be very pleasant,” returned the prince. “But we must see. I

am really rather worried just now. What! are we there already? Is that

the house? What a long flight of steps! And there’s a porter! Well,

Colia I don’t know what will come of it all.”

The prince seemed quite distracted for the moment.

“You must tell me all about it tomorrow! Don’t be afraid. I wish you

success; we agree so entirely that I can do so, although I do not

understand why you are here. Good-bye!” cried Colia excitedly. “Now I

will rush back and tell Hippolyte all about our plans and proposals!

But as to your getting in—don’t be in the least afraid. You will see

her. She is so original about everything. It’s the first floor. The

porter will show you.”

XIII.

The prince was very nervous as he reached the outer door; but he did

his best to encourage himself with the reflection that the worst thing

that could happen to him would be that he would not be received, or,

perhaps, received, then laughed at for coming.

But there was another question, which terrified him considerably, and

that was: what was he going to do when he \_did\_ get in? And to this

question he could fashion no satisfactory reply.

If only he could find an opportunity of coming close up to Nastasia

Philipovna and saying to her: “Don’t ruin yourself by marrying this

man. He does not love you, he only loves your money. He told me so

himself, and so did Aglaya Ivanovna, and I have come on purpose to warn

you”—but even that did not seem quite a legitimate or practicable thing

to do. Then, again, there was another delicate question, to which he

could not find an answer; dared not, in fact, think of it; but at the

very idea of which he trembled and blushed. However, in spite of all

his fears and heart-quakings he went in, and asked for Nastasia

Philipovna.

Nastasia occupied a medium-sized, but distinctly tasteful, flat,

beautifully furnished and arranged. At one period of these five years

of Petersburg life, Totski had certainly not spared his expenditure

upon her. He had calculated upon her eventual love, and tried to tempt

her with a lavish outlay upon comforts and luxuries, knowing too well

how easily the heart accustoms itself to comforts, and how difficult it

is to tear one’s self away from luxuries which have become habitual

and, little by little, indispensable.

Nastasia did not reject all this, she even loved her comforts and

luxuries, but, strangely enough, never became, in the least degree,

dependent upon them, and always gave the impression that she could do

just as well without them. In fact, she went so far as to inform Totski

on several occasions that such was the case, which the latter gentleman

considered a very unpleasant communication indeed.

But, of late, Totski had observed many strange and original features

and characteristics in Nastasia, which he had neither known nor

reckoned upon in former times, and some of these fascinated him, even

now, in spite of the fact that all his old calculations with regard to

her were long ago cast to the winds.

A maid opened the door for the prince (Nastasia’s servants were all

females) and, to his surprise, received his request to announce him to

her mistress without any astonishment. Neither his dirty boots, nor his

wide-brimmed hat, nor his sleeveless cloak, nor his evident confusion

of manner, produced the least impression upon her. She helped him off

with his cloak, and begged him to wait a moment in the ante-room while

she announced him.

The company assembled at Nastasia Philipovna’s consisted of none but

her most intimate friends, and formed a very small party in comparison

with her usual gatherings on this anniversary.

In the first place there were present Totski, and General Epanchin.

They were both highly amiable, but both appeared to be labouring under

a half-hidden feeling of anxiety as to the result of Nastasia’s

deliberations with regard to Gania, which result was to be made public

this evening.

Then, of course, there was Gania who was by no means so amiable as his

elders, but stood apart, gloomy, and miserable, and silent. He had

determined not to bring Varia with him; but Nastasia had not even asked

after her, though no sooner had he arrived than she had reminded him of

the episode between himself and the prince. The general, who had heard

nothing of it before, began to listen with some interest, while Gania,

drily, but with perfect candour, went through the whole history,

including the fact of his apology to the prince. He finished by

declaring that the prince was a most extraordinary man, and goodness

knows why he had been considered an idiot hitherto, for he was very far

from being one.

Nastasia listened to all this with great interest; but the conversation

soon turned to Rogojin and his visit, and this theme proved of the

greatest attraction to both Totski and the general.

Ptitsin was able to afford some particulars as to Rogojin’s conduct

since the afternoon. He declared that he had been busy finding money

for the latter ever since, and up to nine o’clock, Rogojin having

declared that he must absolutely have a hundred thousand roubles by the

evening. He added that Rogojin was drunk, of course; but that he

thought the money would be forthcoming, for the excited and intoxicated

rapture of the fellow impelled him to give any interest or premium that

was asked of him, and there were several others engaged in beating up

the money, also.

All this news was received by the company with somewhat gloomy

interest. Nastasia was silent, and would not say what she thought about

it. Gania was equally uncommunicative. The general seemed the most

anxious of all, and decidedly uneasy. The present of pearls which he

had prepared with so much joy in the morning had been accepted but

coldly, and Nastasia had smiled rather disagreeably as she took it from

him. Ferdishenko was the only person present in good spirits.

Totski himself, who had the reputation of being a capital talker, and

was usually the life and soul of these entertainments, was as silent as

any on this occasion, and sat in a state of, for him, most uncommon

perturbation.

The rest of the guests (an old tutor or schoolmaster, goodness knows

why invited; a young man, very timid, and shy and silent; a rather loud

woman of about forty, apparently an actress; and a very pretty,

well-dressed German lady who hardly said a word all the evening) not

only had no gift for enlivening the proceedings, but hardly knew what

to say for themselves when addressed. Under these circumstances the

arrival of the prince came almost as a godsend.

The announcement of his name gave rise to some surprise and to some

smiles, especially when it became evident, from Nastasia’s astonished

look, that she had not thought of inviting him. But her astonishment

once over, Nastasia showed such satisfaction that all prepared to greet

the prince with cordial smiles of welcome.

“Of course,” remarked General Epanchin, “he does this out of pure

innocence. It’s a little dangerous, perhaps, to encourage this sort of

freedom; but it is rather a good thing that he has arrived just at this

moment. He may enliven us a little with his originalities.”

“Especially as he asked himself,” said Ferdishenko.

“What’s that got to do with it?” asked the general, who loathed

Ferdishenko.

“Why, he must pay toll for his entrance,” explained the latter.

“H’m! Prince Muishkin is not Ferdishenko,” said the general,

impatiently. This worthy gentleman could never quite reconcile himself

to the idea of meeting Ferdishenko in society, and on an equal footing.

“Oh general, spare Ferdishenko!” replied the other, smiling. “I have

special privileges.”

“What do you mean by special privileges?”

“Once before I had the honour of stating them to the company. I will

repeat the explanation to-day for your excellency’s benefit. You see,

excellency, all the world is witty and clever except myself. I am

neither. As a kind of compensation I am allowed to tell the truth, for

it is a well-known fact that only stupid people tell ‘the truth.’ Added

to this, I am a spiteful man, just because I am not clever. If I am

offended or injured I bear it quite patiently until the man injuring me

meets with some misfortune. Then I remember, and take my revenge. I

return the injury sevenfold, as Ivan Petrovitch Ptitsin says. (Of

course he never does so himself.) Excellency, no doubt you recollect

Kryloff’s fable, ‘The Lion and the Ass’? Well now, that’s you and I.

That fable was written precisely for us.”

“You seem to be talking nonsense again, Ferdishenko,” growled the

general.

“What is the matter, excellency? I know how to keep my place. When I

said just now that we, you and I, were the lion and the ass of

Kryloff’s fable, of course it is understood that I take the role of the

ass. Your excellency is the lion of which the fable remarks:

‘A mighty lion, terror of the woods,

Was shorn of his great prowess by old age.’

And I, your excellency, am the ass.”

“I am of your opinion on that last point,” said Ivan Fedorovitch, with

ill-concealed irritation.

All this was no doubt extremely coarse, and moreover it was

premeditated, but after all Ferdishenko had persuaded everyone to

accept him as a buffoon.

“If I am admitted and tolerated here,” he had said one day, “it is

simply because I talk in this way. How can anyone possibly receive such

a man as I am? I quite understand. Now, could I, a Ferdishenko, be

allowed to sit shoulder to shoulder with a clever man like Afanasy

Ivanovitch? There is one explanation, only one. I am given the position

because it is so entirely inconceivable!”

But these vulgarities seemed to please Nastasia Philipovna, although

too often they were both rude and offensive. Those who wished to go to

her house were forced to put up with Ferdishenko. Possibly the latter

was not mistaken in imagining that he was received simply in order to

annoy Totski, who disliked him extremely. Gania also was often made the

butt of the jester’s sarcasms, who used this method of keeping in

Nastasia Philipovna’s good graces.

“The prince will begin by singing us a fashionable ditty,” remarked

Ferdishenko, and looked at the mistress of the house, to see what she

would say.

“I don’t think so, Ferdishenko; please be quiet,” answered Nastasia

Philipovna dryly.

“A-ah! if he is to be under special patronage, I withdraw my claws.”

But Nastasia Philipovna had now risen and advanced to meet the prince.

“I was so sorry to have forgotten to ask you to come, when I saw you,”

she said, “and I am delighted to be able to thank you personally now,

and to express my pleasure at your resolution.”

So saying she gazed into his eyes, longing to see whether she could

make any guess as to the explanation of his motive in coming to her

house. The prince would very likely have made some reply to her kind

words, but he was so dazzled by her appearance that he could not speak.

Nastasia noticed this with satisfaction. She was in full dress this

evening; and her appearance was certainly calculated to impress all

beholders. She took his hand and led him towards her other guests. But

just before they reached the drawing-room door, the prince stopped her,

and hurriedly and in great agitation whispered to her:

“You are altogether perfection; even your pallor and thinness are

perfect; one could not wish you otherwise. I did so wish to come and

see you. I—forgive me, please—”

“Don’t apologize,” said Nastasia, laughing; “you spoil the whole

originality of the thing. I think what they say about you must be true,

that you are so original.—So you think me perfection, do you?”

“Yes.”

“H’m! Well, you may be a good reader of riddles but you are wrong

\_there\_, at all events. I’ll remind you of this, tonight.”

Nastasia introduced the prince to her guests, to most of whom he was

already known.

Totski immediately made some amiable remark. All seemed to brighten up

at once, and the conversation became general. Nastasia made the prince

sit down next to herself.

“Dear me, there’s nothing so very curious about the prince dropping in,

after all,” remarked Ferdishenko.

“It’s quite a clear case,” said the hitherto silent Gania. “I have

watched the prince almost all day, ever since the moment when he first

saw Nastasia Philipovna’s portrait, at General Epanchin’s. I remember

thinking at the time what I am now pretty sure of; and what, I may say

in passing, the prince confessed to myself.”

Gania said all this perfectly seriously, and without the slightest

appearance of joking; indeed, he seemed strangely gloomy.

“I did not confess anything to you,” said the prince, blushing. “I only

answered your question.”

“Bravo! That’s frank, at any rate!” shouted Ferdishenko, and there was

general laughter.

“Oh prince, prince! I never should have thought it of you;” said

General Epanchin. “And I imagined you a philosopher! Oh, you silent

fellows!”

“Judging from the fact that the prince blushed at this innocent joke,

like a young girl, I should think that he must, as an honourable man,

harbour the noblest intentions,” said the old toothless schoolmaster,

most unexpectedly; he had not so much as opened his mouth before. This

remark provoked general mirth, and the old fellow himself laughed

loudest of the lot, but ended with a stupendous fit of coughing.

Nastasia Philipovna, who loved originality and drollery of all kinds,

was apparently very fond of this old man, and rang the bell for more

tea to stop his coughing. It was now half-past ten o’clock.

“Gentlemen, wouldn’t you like a little champagne now?” she asked. “I

have it all ready; it will cheer us up—do now—no ceremony!”

This invitation to drink, couched, as it was, in such informal terms,

came very strangely from Nastasia Philipovna. Her usual entertainments

were not quite like this; there was more style about them. However, the

wine was not refused; each guest took a glass excepting Gania, who

drank nothing.

It was extremely difficult to account for Nastasia’s strange condition

of mind, which became more evident each moment, and which none could

avoid noticing.

She took her glass, and vowed she would empty it three times that

evening. She was hysterical, and laughed aloud every other minute with

no apparent reason—the next moment relapsing into gloom and

thoughtfulness.

Some of her guests suspected that she must be ill; but concluded at

last that she was expecting something, for she continued to look at her

watch impatiently and unceasingly; she was most absent and strange.

“You seem to be a little feverish tonight,” said the actress.

“Yes; I feel quite ill. I have been obliged to put on this shawl—I feel

so cold,” replied Nastasia. She certainly had grown very pale, and

every now and then she tried to suppress a trembling in her limbs.

“Had we not better allow our hostess to retire?” asked Totski of the

general.

“Not at all, gentlemen, not at all! Your presence is absolutely

necessary to me tonight,” said Nastasia, significantly.

As most of those present were aware that this evening a certain very

important decision was to be taken, these words of Nastasia

Philipovna’s appeared to be fraught with much hidden interest. The

general and Totski exchanged looks; Gania fidgeted convulsively in his

chair.

“Let’s play at some game!” suggested the actress.

“I know a new and most delightful game, added Ferdishenko.

“What is it?” asked the actress.

“Well, when we tried it we were a party of people, like this, for

instance; and somebody proposed that each of us, without leaving his

place at the table, should relate something about himself. It had to be

something that he really and honestly considered the very worst action

he had ever committed in his life. But he was to be honest—that was the

chief point! He wasn’t to be allowed to lie.”

“What an extraordinary idea!” said the general.

“That’s the beauty of it, general!”

“It’s a funny notion,” said Totski, “and yet quite natural—it’s only a

new way of boasting.”

“Perhaps that is just what was so fascinating about it.”

“Why, it would be a game to cry over—not to laugh at!” said the

actress.

“Did it succeed?” asked Nastasia Philipovna. “Come, let’s try it, let’s

try it; we really are not quite so jolly as we might be—let’s try it!

We may like it; it’s original, at all events!”

“Yes,” said Ferdishenko; “it’s a good idea—come along—the men begin. Of

course no one need tell a story if he prefers to be disobliging. We

must draw lots! Throw your slips of paper, gentlemen, into this hat,

and the prince shall draw for turns. It’s a very simple game; all you

have to do is to tell the story of the worst action of your life. It’s

as simple as anything. I’ll prompt anyone who forgets the rules!”

No one liked the idea much. Some smiled, some frowned; some objected,

but faintly, not wishing to oppose Nastasia’s wishes; for this new idea

seemed to be rather well received by her. She was still in an excited,

hysterical state, laughing convulsively at nothing and everything. Her

eyes were blazing, and her cheeks showed two bright red spots against

the white. The melancholy appearance of some of her guests seemed to

add to her sarcastic humour, and perhaps the very cynicism and cruelty

of the game proposed by Ferdishenko pleased her. At all events she was

attracted by the idea, and gradually her guests came round to her side;

the thing was original, at least, and might turn out to be amusing.

“And supposing it’s something that one—one can’t speak about before

ladies?” asked the timid and silent young man.

“Why, then of course, you won’t say anything about it. As if there are

not plenty of sins to your score without the need of those!” said

Ferdishenko.

“But I really don’t know which of my actions is the worst,” said the

lively actress.

“Ladies are exempted if they like.”

“And how are you to know that one isn’t lying? And if one lies the

whole point of the game is lost,” said Gania.

“Oh, but think how delightful to hear how one’s friends lie! Besides

you needn’t be afraid, Gania; everybody knows what your worst action is

without the need of any lying on your part. Only think, gentlemen,”—and

Ferdishenko here grew quite enthusiastic, “only think with what eyes we

shall observe one another tomorrow, after our tales have been told!”

“But surely this is a joke, Nastasia Philipovna?” asked Totski. “You

don’t really mean us to play this game.”

“Whoever is afraid of wolves had better not go into the wood,” said

Nastasia, smiling.

“But, pardon me, Mr. Ferdishenko, is it possible to make a game out of

this kind of thing?” persisted Totski, growing more and more uneasy. “I

assure you it can’t be a success.”

“And why not? Why, the last time I simply told straight off about how I

stole three roubles.”

“Perhaps so; but it is hardly possible that you told it so that it

seemed like truth, or so that you were believed. And, as Gavrila

Ardalionovitch has said, the least suggestion of a falsehood takes all

point out of the game. It seems to me that sincerity, on the other

hand, is only possible if combined with a kind of bad taste that would

be utterly out of place here.”

“How subtle you are, Afanasy Ivanovitch! You astonish me,” cried

Ferdishenko. “You will remark, gentlemen, that in saying that I could

not recount the story of my theft so as to be believed, Afanasy

Ivanovitch has very ingeniously implied that I am not capable of

thieving—(it would have been bad taste to say so openly); and all the

time he is probably firmly convinced, in his own mind, that I am very

well capable of it! But now, gentlemen, to business! Put in your slips,

ladies and gentlemen—is yours in, Mr. Totski? So—then we are all ready;

now prince, draw, please.” The prince silently put his hand into the

hat, and drew the names. Ferdishenko was first, then Ptitsin, then the

general, Totski next, his own fifth, then Gania, and so on; the ladies

did not draw.

“Oh, dear! oh, dear!” cried Ferdishenko. “I did so hope the prince

would come out first, and then the general. Well, gentlemen, I suppose

I must set a good example! What vexes me much is that I am such an

insignificant creature that it matters nothing to anybody whether I

have done bad actions or not! Besides, which am I to choose? It’s an

\_embarras de richesse\_. Shall I tell how I became a thief on one

occasion only, to convince Afanasy Ivanovitch that it is possible to

steal without being a thief?”

“Do go on, Ferdishenko, and don’t make unnecessary preface, or you’ll

never finish,” said Nastasia Philipovna. All observed how irritable and

cross she had become since her last burst of laughter; but none the

less obstinately did she stick to her absurd whim about this new game.

Totski sat looking miserable enough. The general lingered over his

champagne, and seemed to be thinking of some story for the time when

his turn should come.

XIV.

“I have no wit, Nastasia Philipovna,” began Ferdishenko, “and therefore

I talk too much, perhaps. Were I as witty, now, as Mr. Totski or the

general, I should probably have sat silent all the evening, as they

have. Now, prince, what do you think?—are there not far more thieves

than honest men in this world? Don’t you think we may say there does

not exist a single person so honest that he has never stolen anything

whatever in his life?”

“What a silly idea,” said the actress. “Of course it is not the case. I

have never stolen anything, for one.”

“H’m! very well, Daria Alexeyevna; you have not stolen anything—agreed.

But how about the prince, now—look how he is blushing!”

“I think you are partially right, but you exaggerate,” said the prince,

who had certainly blushed up, of a sudden, for some reason or other.

“Ferdishenko—either tell us your story, or be quiet, and mind your own

business. You exhaust all patience,” cuttingly and irritably remarked

Nastasia Philipovna.

“Immediately, immediately! As for my story, gentlemen, it is too stupid

and absurd to tell you.

“I assure you I am not a thief, and yet I have stolen; I cannot explain

why. It was at Semeon Ivanovitch Ishenka’s country house, one Sunday.

He had a dinner party. After dinner the men stayed at the table over

their wine. It struck me to ask the daughter of the house to play

something on the piano; so I passed through the corner room to join the

ladies. In that room, on Maria Ivanovna’s writing-table, I observed a

three-rouble note. She must have taken it out for some purpose, and

left it lying there. There was no one about. I took up the note and put

it in my pocket; why, I can’t say. I don’t know what possessed me to do

it, but it was done, and I went quickly back to the dining-room and

reseated myself at the dinner-table. I sat and waited there in a great

state of excitement. I talked hard, and told lots of stories, and

laughed like mad; then I joined the ladies.

“In half an hour or so the loss was discovered, and the servants were

being put under examination. Daria, the housemaid was suspected. I

exhibited the greatest interest and sympathy, and I remember that poor

Daria quite lost her head, and that I began assuring her, before

everyone, that I would guarantee her forgiveness on the part of her

mistress, if she would confess her guilt. They all stared at the girl,

and I remember a wonderful attraction in the reflection that here was I

sermonizing away, with the money in my own pocket all the while. I went

and spent the three roubles that very evening at a restaurant. I went

in and asked for a bottle of Lafite, and drank it up; I wanted to be

rid of the money.

“I did not feel much remorse either then or afterwards; but I would not

repeat the performance—believe it or not as you please. There—that’s

all.”

“Only, of course that’s not nearly your worst action,” said the

actress, with evident dislike in her face.

“That was a psychological phenomenon, not an action,” remarked Totski.

“And what about the maid?” asked Nastasia Philipovna, with undisguised

contempt.

“Oh, she was turned out next day, of course. It’s a very strict

household, there!”

“And you allowed it?”

“I should think so, rather! I was not going to return and confess next

day,” laughed Ferdishenko, who seemed a little surprised at the

disagreeable impression which his story had made on all parties.

“How mean you were!” said Nastasia.

“Bah! you wish to hear a man tell of his worst actions, and you expect

the story to come out goody-goody! One’s worst actions always are mean.

We shall see what the general has to say for himself now. All is not

gold that glitters, you know; and because a man keeps his carriage he

need not be specially virtuous, I assure you, all sorts of people keep

carriages. And by what means?”

In a word, Ferdishenko was very angry and rapidly forgetting himself;

his whole face was drawn with passion. Strange as it may appear, he had

expected much better success for his story. These little errors of

taste on Ferdishenko’s part occurred very frequently. Nastasia trembled

with rage, and looked fixedly at him, whereupon he relapsed into

alarmed silence. He realized that he had gone a little too far.

“Had we not better end this game?” asked Totski.

“It’s my turn, but I plead exemption,” said Ptitsin.

“You don’t care to oblige us?” asked Nastasia.

“I cannot, I assure you. I confess I do not understand how anyone can

play this game.”

“Then, general, it’s your turn,” continued Nastasia Philipovna, “and if

you refuse, the whole game will fall through, which will disappoint me

very much, for I was looking forward to relating a certain ‘page of my

own life.’ I am only waiting for you and Afanasy Ivanovitch to have

your turns, for I require the support of your example,” she added,

smiling.

“Oh, if you put it in that way,” cried the general, excitedly, “I’m

ready to tell the whole story of my life, but I must confess that I

prepared a little story in anticipation of my turn.”

Nastasia smiled amiably at him; but evidently her depression and

irritability were increasing with every moment. Totski was dreadfully

alarmed to hear her promise a revelation out of her own life.

“I, like everyone else,” began the general, “have committed certain not

altogether graceful actions, so to speak, during the course of my life.

But the strangest thing of all in my case is, that I should consider

the little anecdote which I am now about to give you as a confession of

the worst of my ‘bad actions.’ It is thirty-five years since it all

happened, and yet I cannot to this very day recall the circumstances

without, as it were, a sudden pang at the heart.

“It was a silly affair—I was an ensign at the time. You know

ensigns—their blood is boiling water, their circumstances generally

penurious. Well, I had a servant Nikifor who used to do everything for

me in my quarters, economized and managed for me, and even laid hands

on anything he could find (belonging to other people), in order to

augment our household goods; but a faithful, honest fellow all the

same.

“I was strict, but just by nature. At that time we were stationed in a

small town. I was quartered at an old widow’s house, a lieutenant’s

widow of eighty years of age. She lived in a wretched little wooden

house, and had not even a servant, so poor was she.

“Her relations had all died off—her husband was dead and buried forty

years since; and a niece, who had lived with her and bullied her up to

three years ago, was dead too; so that she was quite alone.

“Well, I was precious dull with her, especially as she was so childish

that there was nothing to be got out of her. Eventually, she stole a

fowl of mine; the business is a mystery to this day; but it could have

been no one but herself. I requested to be quartered somewhere else,

and was shifted to the other end of the town, to the house of a

merchant with a large family, and a long beard, as I remember him.

Nikifor and I were delighted to go; but the old lady was not pleased at

our departure.

“Well, a day or two afterwards, when I returned from drill, Nikifor

says to me: ‘We oughtn’t to have left our tureen with the old lady,

I’ve nothing to serve the soup in.’

“I asked how it came about that the tureen had been left. Nikifor

explained that the old lady refused to give it up, because, she said,

we had broken her bowl, and she must have our tureen in place of it;

she had declared that I had so arranged the matter with herself.

“This baseness on her part of course aroused my young blood to fever

heat; I jumped up, and away I flew.

“I arrived at the old woman’s house beside myself. She was sitting in a

corner all alone, leaning her face on her hand. I fell on her like a

clap of thunder. ‘You old wretch!’ I yelled and all that sort of thing,

in real Russian style. Well, when I began cursing at her, a strange

thing happened. I looked at her, and she stared back with her eyes

starting out of her head, but she did not say a word. She seemed to

sway about as she sat, and looked and looked at me in the strangest

way. Well, I soon stopped swearing and looked closer at her, asked her

questions, but not a word could I get out of her. The flies were

buzzing about the room and only this sound broke the silence; the sun

was setting outside; I didn’t know what to make of it, so I went away.

“Before I reached home I was met and summoned to the major’s, so that

it was some while before I actually got there. When I came in, Nikifor

met me. ‘Have you heard, sir, that our old lady is dead?’ ‘\_dead\_,

when?’ ‘Oh, an hour and a half ago.’ That meant nothing more nor less

than that she was dying at the moment when I pounced on her and began

abusing her.

“This produced a great effect upon me. I used to dream of the poor old

woman at nights. I really am not superstitious, but two days after, I

went to her funeral, and as time went on I thought more and more about

her. I said to myself, ‘This woman, this human being, lived to a great

age. She had children, a husband and family, friends and relations; her

household was busy and cheerful; she was surrounded by smiling faces;

and then suddenly they are gone, and she is left alone like a solitary

fly... like a fly, cursed with the burden of her age. At last, God

calls her to Himself. At sunset, on a lovely summer’s evening, my

little old woman passes away—a thought, you will notice, which offers

much food for reflection—and behold! instead of tears and prayers to

start her on her last journey, she has insults and jeers from a young

ensign, who stands before her with his hands in his pockets, making a

terrible row about a soup tureen!’ Of course I was to blame, and even

now that I have time to look back at it calmly, I pity the poor old

thing no less. I repeat that I wonder at myself, for after all I was

not really responsible. Why did she take it into her head to die at

that moment? But the more I thought of it, the more I felt the weight

of it upon my mind; and I never got quite rid of the impression until I

put a couple of old women into an almshouse and kept them there at my

own expense. There, that’s all. I repeat I dare say I have committed

many a grievous sin in my day; but I cannot help always looking back

upon this as the worst action I have ever perpetrated.”

“H’m! and instead of a bad action, your excellency has detailed one of

your noblest deeds,” said Ferdishenko. “Ferdishenko is ‘done.’”

“Dear me, general,” said Nastasia Philipovna, absently, “I really never

imagined you had such a good heart.”

The general laughed with great satisfaction, and applied himself once

more to the champagne.

It was now Totski’s turn, and his story was awaited with great

curiosity—while all eyes turned on Nastasia Philipovna, as though

anticipating that his revelation must be connected somehow with her.

Nastasia, during the whole of his story, pulled at the lace trimming of

her sleeve, and never once glanced at the speaker. Totski was a

handsome man, rather stout, with a very polite and dignified manner. He

was always well dressed, and his linen was exquisite. He had plump

white hands, and wore a magnificent diamond ring on one finger.

“What simplifies the duty before me considerably, in my opinion,” he

began, “is that I am bound to recall and relate the very worst action

of my life. In such circumstances there can, of course, be no doubt.

One’s conscience very soon informs one what is the proper narrative to

tell. I admit, that among the many silly and thoughtless actions of my

life, the memory of one comes prominently forward and reminds me that

it lay long like a stone on my heart. Some twenty years since, I paid a

visit to Platon Ordintzeff at his country-house. He had just been

elected marshal of the nobility, and had come there with his young wife

for the winter holidays. Anfisa Alexeyevna’s birthday came off just

then, too, and there were two balls arranged. At that time Dumas-fils’

beautiful work, \_La Dame aux Camélias\_—a novel which I consider

imperishable—had just come into fashion. In the provinces all the

ladies were in raptures over it, those who had read it, at least.

Camellias were all the fashion. Everyone inquired for them, everybody

wanted them; and a grand lot of camellias are to be got in a country

town—as you all know—and two balls to provide for!

“Poor Peter Volhofskoi was desperately in love with Anfisa Alexeyevna.

I don’t know whether there was anything—I mean I don’t know whether he

could possibly have indulged in any hope. The poor fellow was beside

himself to get her a bouquet of camellias. Countess Sotski and Sophia

Bespalova, as everyone knew, were coming with white camellia bouquets.

Anfisa wished for red ones, for effect. Well, her husband Platon was

driven desperate to find some. And the day before the ball, Anfisa’s

rival snapped up the only red camellias to be had in the place, from

under Platon’s nose, and Platon—wretched man—was done for. Now if Peter

had only been able to step in at this moment with a red bouquet, his

little hopes might have made gigantic strides. A woman’s gratitude

under such circumstances would have been boundless—but it was

practically an impossibility.

“The night before the ball I met Peter, looking radiant. ‘What is it?’

I ask. ‘I’ve found them, Eureka!’ ‘No! where, where?’ ‘At Ekshaisk (a

little town fifteen miles off) there’s a rich old merchant, who keeps a

lot of canaries, has no children, and he and his wife are devoted to

flowers. He’s got some camellias.’ ‘And what if he won’t let you have

them?’ ‘I’ll go on my knees and implore till I get them. I won’t go

away.’ ‘When shall you start?’ ‘Tomorrow morning at five o’clock.’ ‘Go

on,’ I said, ‘and good luck to you.’

“I was glad for the poor fellow, and went home. But an idea got hold of

me somehow. I don’t know how. It was nearly two in the morning. I rang

the bell and ordered the coachman to be waked up and sent to me. He

came. I gave him a tip of fifteen roubles, and told him to get the

carriage ready at once. In half an hour it was at the door. I got in

and off we went.

“By five I drew up at the Ekshaisky inn. I waited there till dawn, and

soon after six I was off, and at the old merchant Trepalaf’s.

“‘Camellias!’ I said, ‘father, save me, save me, let me have some

camellias!’ He was a tall, grey old man—a terrible-looking old

gentleman. ‘Not a bit of it,’ he says. ‘I won’t.’ Down I went on my

knees. ‘Don’t say so, don’t—think what you’re doing!’ I cried; ‘it’s a

matter of life and death!’ ‘If that’s the case, take them,’ says he. So

up I get, and cut such a bouquet of red camellias! He had a whole

greenhouse full of them—lovely ones. The old fellow sighs. I pull out a

hundred roubles. ‘No, no!’ says he, ‘don’t insult me that way.’ ‘Oh, if

that’s the case, give it to the village hospital,’ I say. ‘Ah,’ he

says, ‘that’s quite a different matter; that’s good of you and

generous. I’ll pay it in there for you with pleasure.’ I liked that old

fellow, Russian to the core, \_de la vraie souche\_. I went home in

raptures, but took another road in order to avoid Peter. Immediately on

arriving I sent up the bouquet for Anfisa to see when she awoke.

“You may imagine her ecstasy, her gratitude. The wretched Platon, who

had almost died since yesterday of the reproaches showered upon him,

wept on my shoulder. Of course poor Peter had no chance after this.

“I thought he would cut my throat at first, and went about armed ready

to meet him. But he took it differently; he fainted, and had brain

fever and convulsions. A month after, when he had hardly recovered, he

went off to the Crimea, and there he was shot.

“I assure you this business left me no peace for many a long year. Why

did I do it? I was not in love with her myself; I’m afraid it was

simply mischief—pure ‘cussedness’ on my part.

“If I hadn’t seized that bouquet from under his nose he might have been

alive now, and a happy man. He might have been successful in life, and

never have gone to fight the Turks.”

Totski ended his tale with the same dignity that had characterized its

commencement.

Nastasia Philipovna’s eyes were flashing in a most unmistakable way,

now; and her lips were all a-quiver by the time Totski finished his

story.

All present watched both of them with curiosity.

“You were right, Totski,” said Nastasia, “it is a dull game and a

stupid one. I’ll just tell my story, as I promised, and then we’ll play

cards.”

“Yes, but let’s have the story first!” cried the general.

“Prince,” said Nastasia Philipovna, unexpectedly turning to Muishkin,

“here are my old friends, Totski and General Epanchin, who wish to

marry me off. Tell me what you think. Shall I marry or not? As you

decide, so shall it be.”

Totski grew white as a sheet. The general was struck dumb. All present

started and listened intently. Gania sat rooted to his chair.

“Marry whom?” asked the prince, faintly.

“Gavrila Ardalionovitch Ivolgin,” said Nastasia, firmly and evenly.

There were a few seconds of dead silence.

The prince tried to speak, but could not form his words; a great weight

seemed to lie upon his breast and suffocate him.

“N-no! don’t marry him!” he whispered at last, drawing his breath with

an effort.

“So be it, then. Gavrila Ardalionovitch,” she spoke solemnly and

forcibly, “you hear the prince’s decision? Take it as my decision; and

let that be the end of the matter for good and all.”

“Nastasia Philipovna!” cried Totski, in a quaking voice.

“Nastasia Philipovna!” said the general, in persuasive but agitated

tones.

Everyone in the room fidgeted in their places, and waited to see what

was coming next.

“Well, gentlemen!” she continued, gazing around in apparent

astonishment; “what do you all look so alarmed about? Why are you so

upset?”

“But—recollect, Nastasia Philipovna,” stammered Totski, “you gave a

promise, quite a free one, and—and you might have spared us this. I am

confused and bewildered, I know; but, in a word, at such a moment, and

before company, and all so-so-irregular, finishing off a game with a

serious matter like this, a matter of honour, and of heart, and—”

“I don’t follow you, Afanasy Ivanovitch; you are losing your head. In

the first place, what do you mean by ‘before company’? Isn’t the

company good enough for you? And what’s all that about ‘a game’? I

wished to tell my little story, and I told it! Don’t you like it? You

heard what I said to the prince? ‘As you decide, so it shall be!’ If he

had said ‘yes,’ I should have given my consent! But he said ‘no,’ so I

refused. Here was my whole life hanging on his one word! Surely I was

serious enough?”

“The prince! What on earth has the prince got to do with it? Who the

deuce is the prince?” cried the general, who could conceal his wrath no

longer.

“The prince has this to do with it—that I see in him for the first time

in all my life, a man endowed with real truthfulness of spirit, and I

trust him. He trusted me at first sight, and I trust him!”

“It only remains for me, then, to thank Nastasia Philipovna for the

great delicacy with which she has treated me,” said Gania, as pale as

death, and with quivering lips. “That is my plain duty, of course; but

the prince—what has he to do in the matter?”

“I see what you are driving at,” said Nastasia Philipovna. “You imply

that the prince is after the seventy-five thousand roubles—I quite

understand you. Mr. Totski, I forgot to say, ‘Take your seventy-five

thousand roubles’—I don’t want them. I let you go free for nothing—take

your freedom! You must need it. Nine years and three months’ captivity

is enough for anybody. Tomorrow I shall start afresh—today I am a free

agent for the first time in my life.

“General, you must take your pearls back, too—give them to your

wife—here they are! Tomorrow I shall leave this flat altogether, and

then there’ll be no more of these pleasant little social gatherings,

ladies and gentlemen.”

So saying, she scornfully rose from her seat as though to depart.

“Nastasia Philipovna! Nastasia Philipovna!”

The words burst involuntarily from every mouth. All present started up

in bewildered excitement; all surrounded her; all had listened uneasily

to her wild, disconnected sentences. All felt that something had

happened, something had gone very far wrong indeed, but no one could

make head or tail of the matter.

At this moment there was a furious ring at the bell, and a great knock

at the door—exactly similar to the one which had startled the company

at Gania’s house in the afternoon.

“Ah, ah! here’s the climax at last, at half-past twelve!” cried

Nastasia Philipovna. “Sit down, gentlemen, I beg you. Something is

about to happen.”

So saying, she reseated herself; a strange smile played on her lips.

She sat quite still, but watched the door in a fever of impatience.

“Rogojin and his hundred thousand roubles, no doubt of it,” muttered

Ptitsin to himself.

XV.

Katia, the maid-servant, made her appearance, terribly frightened.

“Goodness knows what it means, ma’am,” she said. “There is a whole

collection of men come—all tipsy—and want to see you. They say that

‘it’s Rogojin, and she knows all about it.’”

“It’s all right, Katia, let them all in at once.”

“Surely not \_all\_, ma’am? They seem so disorderly—it’s dreadful to see

them.”

“Yes \_all\_, Katia, all—every one of them. Let them in, or they’ll come

in whether you like or no. Listen! what a noise they are making!

Perhaps you are offended, gentlemen, that I should receive such guests

in your presence? I am very sorry, and ask your forgiveness, but it

cannot be helped—and I should be very grateful if you could all stay

and witness this climax. However, just as you please, of course.”

The guests exchanged glances; they were annoyed and bewildered by the

episode; but it was clear enough that all this had been pre-arranged

and expected by Nastasia Philipovna, and that there was no use in

trying to stop her now—for she was little short of insane.

Besides, they were naturally inquisitive to see what was to happen.

There was nobody who would be likely to feel much alarm. There were but

two ladies present; one of whom was the lively actress, who was not

easily frightened, and the other the silent German beauty who, it

turned out, did not understand a word of Russian, and seemed to be as

stupid as she was lovely.

Her acquaintances invited her to their “At Homes” because she was so

decorative. She was exhibited to their guests like a valuable picture,

or vase, or statue, or firescreen. As for the men, Ptitsin was one of

Rogojin’s friends; Ferdishenko was as much at home as a fish in the

sea, Gania, not yet recovered from his amazement, appeared to be

chained to a pillory. The old professor did not in the least understand

what was happening; but when he noticed how extremely agitated the

mistress of the house, and her friends, seemed, he nearly wept, and

trembled with fright: but he would rather have died than leave Nastasia

Philipovna at such a crisis, for he loved her as if she were his own

granddaughter. Afanasy Ivanovitch greatly disliked having anything to

do with the affair, but he was too much interested to leave, in spite

of the mad turn things had taken; and a few words that had dropped from

the lips of Nastasia puzzled him so much, that he felt he could not go

without an explanation. He resolved therefore, to see it out, and to

adopt the attitude of silent spectator, as most suited to his dignity.

General Epanchin alone determined to depart. He was annoyed at the

manner in which his gift had been returned, as though he had

condescended, under the influence of passion, to place himself on a

level with Ptitsin and Ferdishenko, his self-respect and sense of duty

now returned together with a consciousness of what was due to his

social rank and official importance. In short, he plainly showed his

conviction that a man in his position could have nothing to do with

Rogojin and his companions. But Nastasia interrupted him at his first

words.

“Ah, general!” she cried, “I was forgetting! If I had only foreseen

this unpleasantness! I won’t insist on keeping you against your will,

although I should have liked you to be beside me now. In any case, I am

most grateful to you for your visit, and flattering attention... but if

you are afraid...”

“Excuse me, Nastasia Philipovna,” interrupted the general, with

chivalric generosity. “To whom are you speaking? I have remained until

now simply because of my devotion to you, and as for danger, I am only

afraid that the carpets may be ruined, and the furniture smashed!...

You should shut the door on the lot, in my opinion. But I confess that

I am extremely curious to see how it ends.”

“Rogojin!” announced Ferdishenko.

“What do you think about it?” said the general in a low voice to

Totski. “Is she mad? I mean mad in the medical sense of the word ....

eh?”

“I’ve always said she was predisposed to it,” whispered Afanasy

Ivanovitch slyly. “Perhaps it is a fever!”

Since their visit to Gania’s home, Rogojin’s followers had been

increased by two new recruits—a dissolute old man, the hero of some

ancient scandal, and a retired sub-lieutenant. A laughable story was

told of the former. He possessed, it was said, a set of false teeth,

and one day when he wanted money for a drinking orgy, he pawned them,

and was never able to reclaim them! The officer appeared to be a rival

of the gentleman who was so proud of his fists. He was known to none of

Rogojin’s followers, but as they passed by the Nevsky, where he stood

begging, he had joined their ranks. His claim for the charity he

desired seemed based on the fact that in the days of his prosperity he

had given away as much as fifteen roubles at a time. The rivals seemed

more than a little jealous of one another. The athlete appeared injured

at the admission of the “beggar” into the company. By nature taciturn,

he now merely growled occasionally like a bear, and glared

contemptuously upon the “beggar,” who, being somewhat of a man of the

world, and a diplomatist, tried to insinuate himself into the bear’s

good graces. He was a much smaller man than the athlete, and doubtless

was conscious that he must tread warily. Gently and without argument he

alluded to the advantages of the English style in boxing, and showed

himself a firm believer in Western institutions. The athlete’s lips

curled disdainfully, and without honouring his adversary with a formal

denial, he exhibited, as if by accident, that peculiarly Russian

object—an enormous fist, clenched, muscular, and covered with red

hairs! The sight of this pre-eminently national attribute was enough to

convince anybody, without words, that it was a serious matter for those

who should happen to come into contact with it.

None of the band were very drunk, for the leader had kept his intended

visit to Nastasia in view all day, and had done his best to prevent his

followers from drinking too much. He was sober himself, but the

excitement of this chaotic day—the strangest day of his life—had

affected him so that he was in a dazed, wild condition, which almost

resembled drunkenness.

He had kept but one idea before him all day, and for that he had worked

in an agony of anxiety and a fever of suspense. His lieutenants had

worked so hard from five o’clock until eleven, that they actually had

collected a hundred thousand roubles for him, but at such terrific

expense, that the rate of interest was only mentioned among them in

whispers and with bated breath.

As before, Rogojin walked in advance of his troop, who followed him

with mingled self-assertion and timidity. They were specially

frightened of Nastasia Philipovna herself, for some reason.

Many of them expected to be thrown downstairs at once, without further

ceremony, the elegant and irresistible Zaleshoff among them. But the

party led by the athlete, without openly showing their hostile

intentions, silently nursed contempt and even hatred for Nastasia

Philipovna, and marched into her house as they would have marched into

an enemy’s fortress. Arrived there, the luxury of the rooms seemed to

inspire them with a kind of respect, not unmixed with alarm. So many

things were entirely new to their experience—the choice furniture, the

pictures, the great statue of Venus. They followed their chief into the

salon, however, with a kind of impudent curiosity. There, the sight of

General Epanchin among the guests, caused many of them to beat a hasty

retreat into the adjoining room, the “boxer” and “beggar” being among

the first to go. A few only, of whom Lebedeff made one, stood their

ground; he had contrived to walk side by side with Rogojin, for he

quite understood the importance of a man who had a fortune of a million

odd roubles, and who at this moment carried a hundred thousand in his

hand. It may be added that the whole company, not excepting Lebedeff,

had the vaguest idea of the extent of their powers, and of how far they

could safely go. At some moments Lebedeff was sure that right was on

their side; at others he tried uneasily to remember various cheering

and reassuring articles of the Civil Code.

Rogojin, when he stepped into the room, and his eyes fell upon

Nastasia, stopped short, grew white as a sheet, and stood staring; it

was clear that his heart was beating painfully. So he stood, gazing

intently, but timidly, for a few seconds. Suddenly, as though bereft of

his senses, he moved forward, staggering helplessly, towards the table.

On his way he collided against Ptitsin’s chair, and put his dirty foot

on the lace skirt of the silent lady’s dress; but he neither apologized

for this, nor even noticed it.

On reaching the table, he placed upon it a strange-looking object,

which he had carried with him into the drawing-room. This was a paper

packet, some six or seven inches thick, and eight or nine in length,

wrapped in an old newspaper, and tied round three or four times with

string.

Having placed this before her, he stood with drooped arms and head, as

though awaiting his sentence.

His costume was the same as it had been in the morning, except for a

new silk handkerchief round his neck, bright green and red, fastened

with a huge diamond pin, and an enormous diamond ring on his dirty

forefinger.

Lebedeff stood two or three paces behind his chief; and the rest of the

band waited about near the door.

The two maid-servants were both peeping in, frightened and amazed at

this unusual and disorderly scene.

“What is that?” asked Nastasia Philipovna, gazing intently at Rogojin,

and indicating the paper packet.

“A hundred thousand,” replied the latter, almost in a whisper.

“Oh! so he kept his word—there’s a man for you! Well, sit down,

please—take that chair. I shall have something to say to you presently.

Who are all these with you? The same party? Let them come in and sit

down. There’s room on that sofa, there are some chairs and there’s

another sofa! Well, why don’t they sit down?”

Sure enough, some of the brave fellows entirely lost their heads at

this point, and retreated into the next room. Others, however, took the

hint and sat down, as far as they could from the table, however;

feeling braver in proportion to their distance from Nastasia.

Rogojin took the chair offered him, but he did not sit long; he soon

stood up again, and did not reseat himself. Little by little he began

to look around him and discern the other guests. Seeing Gania, he

smiled venomously and muttered to himself, “Look at that!”

He gazed at Totski and the general with no apparent confusion, and with

very little curiosity. But when he observed that the prince was seated

beside Nastasia Philipovna, he could not take his eyes off him for a

long while, and was clearly amazed. He could not account for the

prince’s presence there. It was not in the least surprising that

Rogojin should be, at this time, in a more or less delirious condition;

for not to speak of the excitements of the day, he had spent the night

before in the train, and had not slept more than a wink for forty-eight

hours.

“This, gentlemen, is a hundred thousand roubles,” said Nastasia

Philipovna, addressing the company in general, “here, in this dirty

parcel. This afternoon Rogojin yelled, like a madman, that he would

bring me a hundred thousand in the evening, and I have been waiting for

him all the while. He was bargaining for me, you know; first he offered

me eighteen thousand; then he rose to forty, and then to a hundred

thousand. And he has kept his word, see! My goodness, how white he is!

All this happened this afternoon, at Gania’s. I had gone to pay his

mother a visit—my future family, you know! And his sister said to my

very face, surely somebody will turn this shameless creature out. After

which she spat in her brother Gania’s face—a girl of character, that!”

“Nastasia Philipovna!” began the general, reproachfully. He was

beginning to put his own interpretation on the affair.

“Well, what, general? Not quite good form, eh? Oh, nonsense! Here have

I been sitting in my box at the French theatre for the last five years

like a statue of inaccessible virtue, and kept out of the way of all

admirers, like a silly little idiot! Now, there’s this man, who comes

and pays down his hundred thousand on the table, before you all, in

spite of my five years of innocence and proud virtue, and I dare be

sworn he has his sledge outside waiting to carry me off. He values me

at a hundred thousand! I see you are still angry with me, Gania! Why,

surely you never really wished to take \_me\_ into your family? \_me\_,

Rogojin’s mistress! What did the prince say just now?”

“I never said you were Rogojin’s mistress—you are \_not!\_” said the

prince, in trembling accents.

“Nastasia Philipovna, dear soul!” cried the actress, impatiently, “do

be calm, dear! If it annoys you so—all this—do go away and rest! Of

course you would never go with this wretched fellow, in spite of his

hundred thousand roubles! Take his money and kick him out of the house;

that’s the way to treat him and the likes of him! Upon my word, if it

were my business, I’d soon clear them all out!”

The actress was a kind-hearted woman, and highly impressionable. She

was very angry now.

“Don’t be cross, Daria Alexeyevna!” laughed Nastasia. “I was not angry

when I spoke; I wasn’t reproaching Gania. I don’t know how it was that

I ever could have indulged the whim of entering an honest family like

his. I saw his mother—and kissed her hand, too. I came and stirred up

all that fuss, Gania, this afternoon, on purpose to see how much you

could swallow—you surprised me, my friend—you did, indeed. Surely you

could not marry a woman who accepts pearls like those you knew the

general was going to give me, on the very eve of her marriage? And

Rogojin! Why, in your own house and before your own brother and sister,

he bargained with me! Yet you could come here and expect to be

betrothed to me before you left the house! You almost brought your

sister, too. Surely what Rogojin said about you is not really true:

that you would crawl all the way to the other end of the town, on hands

and knees, for three roubles?”

“Yes, he would!” said Rogojin, quietly, but with an air of absolute

conviction.

“H’m! and he receives a good salary, I’m told. Well, what should you

get but disgrace and misery if you took a wife you hated into your

family (for I know very well that you do hate me)? No, no! I believe

now that a man like you would murder anyone for money—sharpen a razor

and come up behind his best friend and cut his throat like a sheep—I’ve

read of such people. Everyone seems money-mad nowadays. No, no! I may

be shameless, but you are far worse. I don’t say a word about that

other—”

“Nastasia Philipovna, is this really you? You, once so refined and

delicate of speech. Oh, what a tongue! What dreadful things you are

saying,” cried the general, wringing his hands in real grief.

“I am intoxicated, general. I am having a day out, you know—it’s my

birthday! I have long looked forward to this happy occasion. Daria

Alexeyevna, you see that nosegay-man, that Monsieur aux Camelias,

sitting there laughing at us?”

“I am not laughing, Nastasia Philipovna; I am only listening with all

my attention,” said Totski, with dignity.

“Well, why have I worried him, for five years, and never let him go

free? Is he worth it? He is only just what he ought to be—nothing

particular. He thinks I am to blame, too. He gave me my education, kept

me like a countess. Money—my word! What a lot of money he spent over

me! And he tried to find me an honest husband first, and then this

Gania, here. And what do you think? All these five years I did not live

with him, and yet I took his money, and considered I was quite

justified.

“You say, take the hundred thousand and kick that man out. It is true,

it is an abominable business, as you say. I might have married long

ago, not Gania—Oh, no!—but that would have been abominable too.

“Would you believe it, I had some thoughts of marrying Totski, four

years ago! I meant mischief, I confess—but I could have had him, I give

you my word; he asked me himself. But I thought, no! it’s not

worthwhile to take such advantage of him. No! I had better go on to the

streets, or accept Rogojin, or become a washerwoman or something—for I

have nothing of my own, you know. I shall go away and leave everything

behind, to the last rag—he shall have it all back. And who would take

me without anything? Ask Gania, there, whether he would. Why, even

Ferdishenko wouldn’t have me!”

“No, Ferdishenko would not; he is a candid fellow, Nastasia

Philipovna,” said that worthy. “But the prince would. You sit here

making complaints, but just look at the prince. I’ve been observing him

for a long while.”

Nastasia Philipovna looked keenly round at the prince.

“Is that true?” she asked.

“Quite true,” whispered the prince.

“You’ll take me as I am, with nothing?”

“I will, Nastasia Philipovna.”

“Here’s a pretty business!” cried the general. “However, it might have

been expected of him.”

The prince continued to regard Nastasia with a sorrowful, but intent

and piercing, gaze.

“Here’s another alternative for me,” said Nastasia, turning once more

to the actress; “and he does it out of pure kindness of heart. I know

him. I’ve found a benefactor. Perhaps, though, what they say about him

may be true—that he’s an—we know what. And what shall you live on, if

you are really so madly in love with Rogojin’s mistress, that you are

ready to marry her—eh?”

“I take you as a good, honest woman, Nastasia Philipovna—not as

Rogojin’s mistress.”

“Who? I?—good and honest?”

“Yes, you.”

“Oh, you get those ideas out of novels, you know. Times are changed

now, dear prince; the world sees things as they really are. That’s all

nonsense. Besides, how can you marry? You need a nurse, not a wife.”

The prince rose and began to speak in a trembling, timid tone, but with

the air of a man absolutely sure of the truth of his words.

“I know nothing, Nastasia Philipovna. I have seen nothing. You are

right so far; but I consider that you would be honouring me, and not I

you. I am a nobody. You have suffered, you have passed through hell and

emerged pure, and that is very much. Why do you shame yourself by

desiring to go with Rogojin? You are delirious. You have returned to

Mr. Totski his seventy-five thousand roubles, and declared that you

will leave this house and all that is in it, which is a line of conduct

that not one person here would imitate. Nastasia Philipovna, I love

you! I would die for you. I shall never let any man say one word

against you, Nastasia Philipovna! and if we are poor, I can work for

both.”

As the prince spoke these last words a titter was heard from

Ferdishenko; Lebedeff laughed too. The general grunted with irritation;

Ptitsin and Totski barely restrained their smiles. The rest all sat

listening, open-mouthed with wonder.

“But perhaps we shall not be poor; we may be very rich, Nastasia

Philipovna,” continued the prince, in the same timid, quivering tones.

“I don’t know for certain, and I’m sorry to say I haven’t had an

opportunity of finding out all day; but I received a letter from

Moscow, while I was in Switzerland, from a Mr. Salaskin, and he

acquaints me with the fact that I am entitled to a very large

inheritance. This letter—”

The prince pulled a letter out of his pocket.

“Is he raving?” said the general. “Are we really in a mad-house?”

There was silence for a moment. Then Ptitsin spoke.

“I think you said, prince, that your letter was from Salaskin? Salaskin

is a very eminent man, indeed, in his own world; he is a wonderfully

clever solicitor, and if he really tells you this, I think you may be

pretty sure that he is right. It so happens, luckily, that I know his

handwriting, for I have lately had business with him. If you would

allow me to see it, I should perhaps be able to tell you.”

The prince held out the letter silently, but with a shaking hand.

“What, what?” said the general, much agitated.

“What’s all this? Is he really heir to anything?”

All present concentrated their attention upon Ptitsin, reading the

prince’s letter. The general curiosity had received a new fillip.

Ferdishenko could not sit still. Rogojin fixed his eyes first on the

prince, and then on Ptitsin, and then back again; he was extremely

agitated. Lebedeff could not stand it. He crept up and read over

Ptitsin’s shoulder, with the air of a naughty boy who expects a box on

the ear every moment for his indiscretion.

XVI.

“It’s good business,” said Ptitsin, at last, folding the letter and

handing it back to the prince. “You will receive, without the slightest

trouble, by the last will and testament of your aunt, a very large sum

of money indeed.”

“Impossible!” cried the general, starting up as if he had been shot.

Ptitsin explained, for the benefit of the company, that the prince’s

aunt had died five months since. He had never known her, but she was

his mother’s own sister, the daughter of a Moscow merchant, one

Paparchin, who had died a bankrupt. But the elder brother of this same

Paparchin, had been an eminent and very rich merchant. A year since it

had so happened that his only two sons had both died within the same

month. This sad event had so affected the old man that he, too, had

died very shortly after. He was a widower, and had no relations left,

excepting the prince’s aunt, a poor woman living on charity, who was

herself at the point of death from dropsy; but who had time, before she

died, to set Salaskin to work to find her nephew, and to make her will

bequeathing her newly-acquired fortune to him.

It appeared that neither the prince, nor the doctor with whom he lived

in Switzerland, had thought of waiting for further communications; but

the prince had started straight away with Salaskin’s letter in his

pocket.

“One thing I may tell you, for certain,” concluded Ptitsin, addressing

the prince, “that there is no question about the authenticity of this

matter. Anything that Salaskin writes you as regards your

unquestionable right to this inheritance, you may look upon as so much

money in your pocket. I congratulate you, prince; you may receive a

million and a half of roubles, perhaps more; I don’t know. All I \_do\_

know is that Paparchin was a very rich merchant indeed.”

“Hurrah!” cried Lebedeff, in a drunken voice. “Hurrah for the last of

the Muishkins!”

“My goodness me! and I gave him twenty-five roubles this morning as

though he were a beggar,” blurted out the general, half senseless with

amazement. “Well, I congratulate you, I congratulate you!” And the

general rose from his seat and solemnly embraced the prince. All came

forward with congratulations; even those of Rogojin’s party who had

retreated into the next room, now crept softly back to look on. For the

moment even Nastasia Philipovna was forgotten.

But gradually the consciousness crept back into the minds of each one

present that the prince had just made her an offer of marriage. The

situation had, therefore, become three times as fantastic as before.

Totski sat and shrugged his shoulders, bewildered. He was the only

guest left sitting at this time; the others had thronged round the

table in disorder, and were all talking at once.

It was generally agreed, afterwards, in recalling that evening, that

from this moment Nastasia Philipovna seemed entirely to lose her

senses. She continued to sit still in her place, looking around at her

guests with a strange, bewildered expression, as though she were trying

to collect her thoughts, and could not. Then she suddenly turned to the

prince, and glared at him with frowning brows; but this only lasted one

moment. Perhaps it suddenly struck her that all this was a jest, but

his face seemed to reassure her. She reflected, and smiled again,

vaguely.

“So I am really a princess,” she whispered to herself, ironically, and

glancing accidentally at Daria Alexeyevna’s face, she burst out

laughing.

“Ha, ha, ha!” she cried, “this is an unexpected climax, after all. I

didn’t expect this. What are you all standing up for, gentlemen? Sit

down; congratulate me and the prince! Ferdishenko, just step out and

order some more champagne, will you? Katia, Pasha,” she added suddenly,

seeing the servants at the door, “come here! I’m going to be married,

did you hear? To the prince. He has a million and a half of roubles; he

is Prince Muishkin, and has asked me to marry him. Here, prince, come

and sit by me; and here comes the wine. Now then, ladies and gentlemen,

where are your congratulations?”

“Hurrah!” cried a number of voices. A rush was made for the wine by

Rogojin’s followers, though, even among them, there seemed some sort of

realization that the situation had changed. Rogojin stood and looked

on, with an incredulous smile, screwing up one side of his mouth.

“Prince, my dear fellow, do remember what you are about,” said the

general, approaching Muishkin, and pulling him by the coat sleeve.

Nastasia Philipovna overheard the remark, and burst out laughing.

“No, no, general!” she cried. “You had better look out! I am the

princess now, you know. The prince won’t let you insult me. Afanasy

Ivanovitch, why don’t you congratulate me? I shall be able to sit at

table with your new wife, now. Aha! you see what I gain by marrying a

prince! A million and a half, and a prince, and an idiot into the

bargain, they say. What better could I wish for? Life is only just

about to commence for me in earnest. Rogojin, you are a little too

late. Away with your paper parcel! I’m going to marry the prince; I’m

richer than you are now.”

But Rogojin understood how things were tending, at last. An

inexpressibly painful expression came over his face. He wrung his

hands; a groan made its way up from the depths of his soul.

“Surrender her, for God’s sake!” he said to the prince.

All around burst out laughing.

“What? Surrender her to \_you?\_” cried Daria Alexeyevna. “To a fellow

who comes and bargains for a wife like a moujik! The prince wishes to

marry her, and you—”

“So do I, so do I! This moment, if I could! I’d give every farthing I

have to do it.”

“You drunken moujik,” said Daria Alexeyevna, once more. “You ought to

be kicked out of the place.”

The laughter became louder than ever.

“Do you hear, prince?” said Nastasia Philipovna. “Do you hear how this

moujik of a fellow goes on bargaining for your bride?”

“He is drunk,” said the prince, quietly, “and he loves you very much.”

“Won’t you be ashamed, afterwards, to reflect that your wife very

nearly ran away with Rogojin?”

“Oh, you were raving, you were in a fever; you are still half

delirious.”

“And won’t you be ashamed when they tell you, afterwards, that your

wife lived at Totski’s expense so many years?”

“No; I shall not be ashamed of that. You did not so live by your own

will.”

“And you’ll never reproach me with it?”

“Never.”

“Take care, don’t commit yourself for a whole lifetime.”

“Nastasia Philipovna.” said the prince, quietly, and with deep emotion,

“I said before that I shall esteem your consent to be my wife as a

great honour to myself, and shall consider that it is you who will

honour me, not I you, by our marriage. You laughed at these words, and

others around us laughed as well; I heard them. Very likely I expressed

myself funnily, and I may have looked funny, but, for all that, I

believe I understand where honour lies, and what I said was but the

literal truth. You were about to ruin yourself just now, irrevocably;

you would never have forgiven yourself for so doing afterwards; and

yet, you are absolutely blameless. It is impossible that your life

should be altogether ruined at your age. What matter that Rogojin came

bargaining here, and that Gavrila Ardalionovitch would have deceived

you if he could? Why do you continually remind us of these facts? I

assure you once more that very few could find it in them to act as you

have acted this day. As for your wish to go with Rogojin, that was

simply the idea of a delirious and suffering brain. You are still quite

feverish; you ought to be in bed, not here. You know quite well that if

you had gone with Rogojin, you would have become a washer-woman next

day, rather than stay with him. You are proud, Nastasia Philipovna, and

perhaps you have really suffered so much that you imagine yourself to

be a desperately guilty woman. You require a great deal of petting and

looking after, Nastasia Philipovna, and I will do this. I saw your

portrait this morning, and it seemed quite a familiar face to me; it

seemed to me that the portrait-face was calling to me for help. I—I

shall respect you all my life, Nastasia Philipovna,” concluded the

prince, as though suddenly recollecting himself, and blushing to think

of the sort of company before whom he had said all this.

Ptitsin bowed his head and looked at the ground, overcome by a mixture

of feelings. Totski muttered to himself: “He may be an idiot, but he

knows that flattery is the best road to success here.”

The prince observed Gania’s eyes flashing at him, as though they would

gladly annihilate him then and there.

“That’s a kind-hearted man, if you like,” said Daria Alexeyevna, whose

wrath was quickly evaporating.

“A refined man, but—lost,” murmured the general.

Totski took his hat and rose to go. He and the general exchanged

glances, making a private arrangement, thereby, to leave the house

together.

“Thank you, prince; no one has ever spoken to me like that before,”

began Nastasia Philipovna. “Men have always bargained for me, before

this; and not a single respectable man has ever proposed to marry me.

Do you hear, Afanasy Ivanovitch? What do \_you\_ think of what the prince

has just been saying? It was almost immodest, wasn’t it? You, Rogojin,

wait a moment, don’t go yet! I see you don’t intend to move however.

Perhaps I may go with you yet. Where did you mean to take me to?”

“To Ekaterinhof,” replied Lebedeff. Rogojin simply stood staring, with

trembling lips, not daring to believe his ears. He was stunned, as

though from a blow on the head.

“What are you thinking of, my dear Nastasia?” said Daria Alexeyevna in

alarm. “What are you saying?” “You are not going mad, are you?”

Nastasia Philipovna burst out laughing and jumped up from the sofa.

“You thought I should accept this good child’s invitation to ruin him,

did you?” she cried. “That’s Totski’s way, not mine. He’s fond of

children. Come along, Rogojin, get your money ready! We won’t talk

about marrying just at this moment, but let’s see the money at all

events. Come! I may not marry you, either. I don’t know. I suppose you

thought you’d keep the money, if I did! Ha, ha, ha! nonsense! I have no

sense of shame left. I tell you I have been Totski’s concubine. Prince,

you must marry Aglaya Ivanovna, not Nastasia Philipovna, or this fellow

Ferdishenko will always be pointing the finger of scorn at you. You

aren’t afraid, I know; but I should always be afraid that I had ruined

you, and that you would reproach me for it. As for what you say about

my doing you honour by marrying you—well, Totski can tell you all about

that. You had your eye on Aglaya, Gania, you know you had; and you

might have married her if you had not come bargaining. You are all like

this. You should choose, once for all, between disreputable women, and

respectable ones, or you are sure to get mixed. Look at the general,

how he’s staring at me!”

“This is too horrible,” said the general, starting to his feet. All

were standing up now. Nastasia was absolutely beside herself.

“I am very proud, in spite of what I am,” she continued. “You called me

‘perfection’ just now, prince. A nice sort of perfection to throw up a

prince and a million and a half of roubles in order to be able to boast

of the fact afterwards! What sort of a wife should I make for you,

after all I have said? Afanasy Ivanovitch, do you observe I have really

and truly thrown away a million of roubles? And you thought that I

should consider your wretched seventy-five thousand, with Gania thrown

in for a husband, a paradise of bliss! Take your seventy-five thousand

back, sir; you did not reach the hundred thousand. Rogojin cut a better

dash than you did. I’ll console Gania myself; I have an idea about

that. But now I must be off! I’ve been in prison for ten years. I’m

free at last! Well, Rogojin, what are you waiting for? Let’s get ready

and go.”

“Come along!” shouted Rogojin, beside himself with joy. “Hey! all of

you fellows! Wine! Round with it! Fill the glasses!”

“Get away!” he shouted frantically, observing that Daria Alexeyevna was

approaching to protest against Nastasia’s conduct. “Get away, she’s

mine, everything’s mine! She’s a queen, get away!”

He was panting with ecstasy. He walked round and round Nastasia

Philipovna and told everybody to “keep their distance.”

All the Rogojin company were now collected in the drawing-room; some

were drinking, some laughed and talked: all were in the highest and

wildest spirits. Ferdishenko was doing his best to unite himself to

them; the general and Totski again made an attempt to go. Gania, too

stood hat in hand ready to go; but seemed to be unable to tear his eyes

away from the scene before him.

“Get out, keep your distance!” shouted Rogojin.

“What are you shouting about there!” cried Nastasia “I’m not yours yet.

I may kick you out for all you know I haven’t taken your money yet;

there it all is on the table. Here, give me over that packet! Is there

a hundred thousand roubles in that one packet? Pfu! what abominable

stuff it looks! Oh! nonsense, Daria Alexeyevna; you surely did not

expect me to ruin \_him?\_” (indicating the prince). “Fancy him nursing

me! Why, he needs a nurse himself! The general, there, will be his

nurse now, you’ll see. Here, prince, look here! Your bride is accepting

money. What a disreputable woman she must be! And you wished to marry

her! What are you crying about? Is it a bitter dose? Never mind, you

shall laugh yet. Trust to time.” (In spite of these words there were

two large tears rolling down Nastasia’s own cheeks.) “It’s far better

to think twice of it now than afterwards. Oh! you mustn’t cry like

that! There’s Katia crying, too. What is it, Katia, dear? I shall leave

you and Pasha a lot of things, I’ve laid them out for you already; but

good-bye, now. I made an honest girl like you serve a low woman like

myself. It’s better so, prince, it is indeed. You’d begin to despise me

afterwards—we should never be happy. Oh! you needn’t swear, prince, I

shan’t believe you, you know. How foolish it would be, too! No, no;

we’d better say good-bye and part friends. I am a bit of a dreamer

myself, and I used to dream of you once. Very often during those five

years down at his estate I used to dream and think, and I always

imagined just such a good, honest, foolish fellow as you, one who

should come and say to me: ‘You are an innocent woman, Nastasia

Philipovna, and I adore you.’ I dreamt of you often. I used to think so

much down there that I nearly went mad; and then this fellow here would

come down. He would stay a couple of months out of the twelve, and

disgrace and insult and deprave me, and then go; so that I longed to

drown myself in the pond a thousand times over; but I did not dare do

it. I hadn’t the heart, and now—well, are you ready, Rogojin?”

“Ready—keep your distance, all of you!”

“We’re all ready,” said several of his friends. “The troikas [Sledges

drawn by three horses abreast.] are at the door, bells and all.”

Nastasia Philipovna seized the packet of bank-notes.

“Gania, I have an idea. I wish to recompense you—why should you lose

all? Rogojin, would he crawl for three roubles as far as the

Vassiliostrof?”

“Oh, wouldn’t he just!”

“Well, look here, Gania. I wish to look into your heart once more, for

the last time. You’ve worried me for the last three months—now it’s my

turn. Do you see this packet? It contains a hundred thousand roubles.

Now, I’m going to throw it into the fire, here—before all these

witnesses. As soon as the fire catches hold of it, you put your hands

into the fire and pick it out—without gloves, you know. You must have

bare hands, and you must turn your sleeves up. Pull it out, I say, and

it’s all yours. You may burn your fingers a little, of course; but then

it’s a hundred thousand roubles, remember—it won’t take you long to lay

hold of it and snatch it out. I shall so much admire you if you put

your hands into the fire for my money. All here present may be

witnesses that the whole packet of money is yours if you get it out. If

you don’t get it out, it shall burn. I will let no one else come;

away—get away, all of you—it’s my money! Rogojin has bought me with it.

Is it my money, Rogojin?”

“Yes, my queen; it’s your own money, my joy.”

“Get away then, all of you. I shall do as I like with my own—don’t

meddle! Ferdishenko, make up the fire, quick!”

“Nastasia Philipovna, I can’t; my hands won’t obey me,” said

Ferdishenko, astounded and helpless with bewilderment.

“Nonsense,” cried Nastasia Philipovna, seizing the poker and raking a

couple of logs together. No sooner did a tongue of flame burst out than

she threw the packet of notes upon it.

Everyone gasped; some even crossed themselves.

“She’s mad—she’s mad!” was the cry.

“Oughtn’t-oughtn’t we to secure her?” asked the general of Ptitsin, in

a whisper; “or shall we send for the authorities? Why, she’s mad, isn’t

she—isn’t she, eh?”

“N-no, I hardly think she is actually mad,” whispered Ptitsin, who was

as white as his handkerchief, and trembling like a leaf. He could not

take his eyes off the smouldering packet.

“She’s mad surely, isn’t she?” the general appealed to Totski.

“I told you she wasn’t an ordinary woman,” replied the latter, who was

as pale as anyone.

“Oh, but, positively, you know—a hundred thousand roubles!”

“Goodness gracious! good heavens!” came from all quarters of the room.

All now crowded round the fire and thronged to see what was going on;

everyone lamented and gave vent to exclamations of horror and woe. Some

jumped up on chairs in order to get a better view. Daria Alexeyevna ran

into the next room and whispered excitedly to Katia and Pasha. The

beautiful German disappeared altogether.

“My lady! my sovereign!” lamented Lebedeff, falling on his knees before

Nastasia Philipovna, and stretching out his hands towards the fire;

“it’s a hundred thousand roubles, it is indeed, I packed it up myself,

I saw the money! My queen, let me get into the fire after it—say the

word—I’ll put my whole grey head into the fire for it! I have a poor

lame wife and thirteen children. My father died of starvation last

week. Nastasia Philipovna, Nastasia Philipovna!” The wretched little

man wept, and groaned, and crawled towards the fire.

“Away, out of the way!” cried Nastasia. “Make room, all of you! Gania,

what are you standing there for? Don’t stand on ceremony. Put in your

hand! There’s your whole happiness smouldering away, look! Quick!”

But Gania had borne too much that day, and especially this evening, and

he was not prepared for this last, quite unexpected trial.

The crowd parted on each side of him and he was left face to face with

Nastasia Philipovna, three paces from her. She stood by the fire and

waited, with her intent gaze fixed upon him.

Gania stood before her, in his evening clothes, holding his white

gloves and hat in his hand, speechless and motionless, with arms folded

and eyes fixed on the fire.

A silly, meaningless smile played on his white, death-like lips. He

could not take his eyes off the smouldering packet; but it appeared

that something new had come to birth in his soul—as though he were

vowing to himself that he would bear this trial. He did not move from

his place. In a few seconds it became evident to all that he did not

intend to rescue the money.

“Hey! look at it, it’ll burn in another minute or two!” cried Nastasia

Philipovna. “You’ll hang yourself afterwards, you know, if it does! I’m

not joking.”

The fire, choked between a couple of smouldering pieces of wood, had

died down for the first few moments after the packet was thrown upon

it. But a little tongue of fire now began to lick the paper from below,

and soon, gathering courage, mounted the sides of the parcel, and crept

around it. In another moment, the whole of it burst into flames, and

the exclamations of woe and horror were redoubled.

“Nastasia Philipovna!” lamented Lebedeff again, straining towards the

fireplace; but Rogojin dragged him away, and pushed him to the rear

once more.

The whole of Rogojin’s being was concentrated in one rapturous gaze of

ecstasy. He could not take his eyes off Nastasia. He stood drinking her

in, as it were. He was in the seventh heaven of delight.

“Oh, what a queen she is!” he ejaculated, every other minute, throwing

out the remark for anyone who liked to catch it. “That’s the sort of

woman for me! Which of you would think of doing a thing like that, you

blackguards, eh?” he yelled. He was hopelessly and wildly beside

himself with ecstasy.

The prince watched the whole scene, silent and dejected.

“I’ll pull it out with my teeth for one thousand,” said Ferdishenko.

“So would I,” said another, from behind, “with pleasure. Devil take the

thing!” he added, in a tempest of despair, “it will all be burnt up in

a minute—It’s burning, it’s burning!”

“It’s burning, it’s burning!” cried all, thronging nearer and nearer to

the fire in their excitement.

“Gania, don’t be a fool! I tell you for the last time.”

“Get on, quick!” shrieked Ferdishenko, rushing wildly up to Gania, and

trying to drag him to the fire by the sleeve of his coat. “Get it, you

dummy, it’s burning away fast! Oh—\_damn\_ the thing!”

Gania hurled Ferdishenko from him; then he turned sharp round and made

for the door. But he had not gone a couple of steps when he tottered

and fell to the ground.

“He’s fainted!” the cry went round.

“And the money’s burning still,” Lebedeff lamented.

“Burning for nothing,” shouted others.

“Katia-Pasha! Bring him some water!” cried Nastasia Philipovna. Then

she took the tongs and fished out the packet.

Nearly the whole of the outer covering was burned away, but it was soon

evident that the contents were hardly touched. The packet had been

wrapped in a threefold covering of newspaper, and the notes were safe.

All breathed more freely.

“Some dirty little thousand or so may be touched,” said Lebedeff,

immensely relieved, “but there’s very little harm done, after all.”

“It’s all his—the whole packet is for him, do you hear—all of you?”

cried Nastasia Philipovna, placing the packet by the side of Gania. “He

restrained himself, and didn’t go after it; so his self-respect is

greater than his thirst for money. All right—he’ll come to directly—he

must have the packet or he’ll cut his throat afterwards. There! He’s

coming to himself. General, Totski, all of you, did you hear me? The

money is all Gania’s. I give it to him, fully conscious of my action,

as recompense for—well, for anything he thinks best. Tell him so. Let

it lie here beside him. Off we go, Rogojin! Goodbye, prince. I have

seen a man for the first time in my life. Goodbye, Afanasy

Ivanovitch—and thanks!”

The Rogojin gang followed their leader and Nastasia Philipovna to the

entrance-hall, laughing and shouting and whistling.

In the hall the servants were waiting, and handed her her fur cloak.

Martha, the cook, ran in from the kitchen. Nastasia kissed them all

round.

“Are you really throwing us all over, little mother? Where, where are

you going to? And on your birthday, too!” cried the four girls, crying

over her and kissing her hands.

“I am going out into the world, Katia; perhaps I shall be a laundress.

I don’t know. No more of Afanasy Ivanovitch, anyhow. Give him my

respects. Don’t think badly of me, girls.”

The prince hurried down to the front gate where the party were settling

into the troikas, all the bells tinkling a merry accompaniment the

while. The general caught him up on the stairs:

“Prince, prince!” he cried, seizing hold of his arm, “recollect

yourself! Drop her, prince! You see what sort of a woman she is. I am

speaking to you like a father.”

The prince glanced at him, but said nothing. He shook himself free, and

rushed on downstairs.

The general was just in time to see the prince take the first sledge he

could get, and, giving the order to Ekaterinhof, start off in pursuit

of the troikas. Then the general’s fine grey horse dragged that worthy

home, with some new thoughts, and some new hopes and calculations

developing in his brain, and with the pearls in his pocket, for he had

not forgotten to bring them along with him, being a man of business.

Amid his new thoughts and ideas there came, once or twice, the image of

Nastasia Philipovna. The general sighed.

“I’m sorry, really sorry,” he muttered. “She’s a ruined woman. Mad!

mad! However, the prince is not for Nastasia Philipovna now,—perhaps

it’s as well.”

Two more of Nastasia’s guests, who walked a short distance together,

indulged in high moral sentiments of a similar nature.

“Do you know, Totski, this is all very like what they say goes on among

the Japanese?” said Ptitsin. “The offended party there, they say,

marches off to his insulter and says to him, ‘You insulted me, so I

have come to rip myself open before your eyes;’ and with these words he

does actually rip his stomach open before his enemy, and considers,

doubtless, that he is having all possible and necessary satisfaction

and revenge. There are strange characters in the world, sir!”

“H’m! and you think there was something of this sort here, do you? Dear

me—a very remarkable comparison, you know! But you must have observed,

my dear Ptitsin, that I did all I possibly could. I could do no more

than I did. And you must admit that there are some rare qualities in

this woman. I felt I could not speak in that Bedlam, or I should have

been tempted to cry out, when she reproached me, that she herself was

my best justification. Such a woman could make anyone forget all

reason—everything! Even that moujik, Rogojin, you saw, brought her a

hundred thousand roubles! Of course, all that happened tonight was

ephemeral, fantastic, unseemly—yet it lacked neither colour nor

originality. My God! What might not have been made of such a character

combined with such beauty! Yet in spite of all efforts—in spite of all

education, even—all those gifts are wasted! She is an uncut diamond....

I have often said so.”

And Afanasy Ivanovitch heaved a deep sigh.

PART II

I.

Two days after the strange conclusion to Nastasia Philipovna’s birthday

party, with the record of which we concluded the first part of this

story, Prince Muishkin hurriedly left St. Petersburg for Moscow, in

order to see after some business connected with the receipt of his

unexpected fortune.

It was said that there were other reasons for his hurried departure;

but as to this, and as to his movements in Moscow, and as to his

prolonged absence from St. Petersburg, we are able to give very little

information.

The prince was away for six months, and even those who were most

interested in his destiny were able to pick up very little news about

him all that while. True, certain rumours did reach his friends, but

these were both strange and rare, and each one contradicted the last.

Of course the Epanchin family was much interested in his movements,

though he had not had time to bid them farewell before his departure.

The general, however, had had an opportunity of seeing him once or

twice since the eventful evening, and had spoken very seriously with

him; but though he had seen the prince, as I say, he told his family

nothing about the circumstance. In fact, for a month or so after his

departure it was considered not the thing to mention the prince’s name

in the Epanchin household. Only Mrs. Epanchin, at the commencement of

this period, had announced that she had been “cruelly mistaken in the

prince!” and a day or two after, she had added, evidently alluding to

him, but not mentioning his name, that it was an unalterable

characteristic of hers to be mistaken in people. Then once more, ten

days later, after some passage of arms with one of her daughters, she

had remarked sententiously. “We have had enough of mistakes. I shall be

more careful in future!” However, it was impossible to avoid remarking

that there was some sense of oppression in the household—something

unspoken, but felt; something strained. All the members of the family

wore frowning looks. The general was unusually busy; his family hardly

ever saw him.

As to the girls, nothing was said openly, at all events; and probably

very little in private. They were proud damsels, and were not always

perfectly confidential even among themselves. But they understood each

other thoroughly at the first word on all occasions; very often at the

first glance, so that there was no need of much talking as a rule.

One fact, at least, would have been perfectly plain to an outsider, had

any such person been on the spot; and that was, that the prince had

made a very considerable impression upon the family, in spite of the

fact that he had but once been inside the house, and then only for a

short time. Of course, if analyzed, this impression might have proved

to be nothing more than a feeling of curiosity; but be it what it

might, there it undoubtedly was.

Little by little, the rumours spread about town became lost in a maze

of uncertainty. It was said that some foolish young prince, name

unknown, had suddenly come into possession of a gigantic fortune, and

had married a French ballet dancer. This was contradicted, and the

rumour circulated that it was a young merchant who had come into the

enormous fortune and married the great ballet dancer, and that at the

wedding the drunken young fool had burned seventy thousand roubles at a

candle out of pure bravado.

However, all these rumours soon died down, to which circumstance

certain facts largely contributed. For instance, the whole of the

Rogojin troop had departed, with him at their head, for Moscow. This

was exactly a week after a dreadful orgy at the Ekaterinhof gardens,

where Nastasia Philipovna had been present. It became known that after

this orgy Nastasia Philipovna had entirely disappeared, and that she

had since been traced to Moscow; so that the exodus of the Rogojin band

was found consistent with this report.

There were rumours current as to Gania, too; but circumstances soon

contradicted these. He had fallen seriously ill, and his illness

precluded his appearance in society, and even at business, for over a

month. As soon as he had recovered, however, he threw up his situation

in the public company under General Epanchin’s direction, for some

unknown reason, and the post was given to another. He never went near

the Epanchins’ house at all, and was exceedingly irritable and

depressed.

Varvara Ardalionovna married Ptitsin this winter, and it was said that

the fact of Gania’s retirement from business was the ultimate cause of

the marriage, since Gania was now not only unable to support his

family, but even required help himself.

We may mention that Gania was no longer mentioned in the Epanchin

household any more than the prince was; but that a certain circumstance

in connection with the fatal evening at Nastasia’s house became known

to the general, and, in fact, to all the family the very next day. This

fact was that Gania had come home that night, but had refused to go to

bed. He had awaited the prince’s return from Ekaterinhof with feverish

impatience.

On the latter’s arrival, at six in the morning, Gania had gone to him

in his room, bringing with him the singed packet of money, which he had

insisted that the prince should return to Nastasia Philipovna without

delay. It was said that when Gania entered the prince’s room, he came

with anything but friendly feelings, and in a condition of despair and

misery; but that after a short conversation, he had stayed on for a

couple of hours with him, sobbing continuously and bitterly the whole

time. They had parted upon terms of cordial friendship.

The Epanchins heard about this, as well as about the episode at

Nastasia Philipovna’s. It was strange, perhaps, that the facts should

become so quickly, and fairly accurately, known. As far as Gania was

concerned, it might have been supposed that the news had come through

Varvara Ardalionovna, who had suddenly become a frequent visitor of the

Epanchin girls, greatly to their mother’s surprise. But though Varvara

had seen fit, for some reason, to make friends with them, it was not

likely that she would have talked to them about her brother. She had

plenty of pride, in spite of the fact that in thus acting she was

seeking intimacy with people who had practically shown her brother the

door. She and the Epanchin girls had been acquainted in childhood,

although of late they had met but rarely. Even now Varvara hardly ever

appeared in the drawing-room, but would slip in by a back way.

Lizabetha Prokofievna, who disliked Varvara, although she had a great

respect for her mother, was much annoyed by this sudden intimacy, and

put it down to the general “contrariness” of her daughters, who were

“always on the lookout for some new way of opposing her.” Nevertheless,

Varvara continued her visits.

A month after Muishkin’s departure, Mrs. Epanchin received a letter

from her old friend Princess Bielokonski (who had lately left for

Moscow), which letter put her into the greatest good humour. She did

not divulge its contents either to her daughters or the general, but

her conduct towards the former became affectionate in the extreme. She

even made some sort of confession to them, but they were unable to

understand what it was about. She actually relaxed towards the general

a little—he had been long disgraced—and though she managed to quarrel

with them all the next day, yet she soon came round, and from her

general behaviour it was to be concluded that she had had good news of

some sort, which she would like, but could not make up her mind, to

disclose.

However, a week later she received another letter from the same source,

and at last resolved to speak.

She solemnly announced that she had heard from old Princess

Bielokonski, who had given her most comforting news about “that queer

young prince.” Her friend had hunted him up, and found that all was

going well with him. He had since called in person upon her, making an

extremely favourable impression, for the princess had received him each

day since, and had introduced him into several good houses.

The girls could see that their mother concealed a great deal from them,

and left out large pieces of the letter in reading it to them.

However, the ice was broken, and it suddenly became possible to mention

the prince’s name again. And again it became evident how very strong

was the impression the young man had made in the household by his one

visit there. Mrs. Epanchin was surprised at the effect which the news

from Moscow had upon the girls, and they were no less surprised that

after solemnly remarking that her most striking characteristic was

“being mistaken in people” she should have troubled to obtain for the

prince the favour and protection of so powerful an old lady as the

Princess Bielokonski. As soon as the ice was thus broken, the general

lost no time in showing that he, too, took the greatest interest in the

subject. He admitted that he was interested, but said that it was

merely in the business side of the question. It appeared that, in the

interests of the prince, he had made arrangements in Moscow for a

careful watch to be kept upon the prince’s business affairs, and

especially upon Salaskin. All that had been said as to the prince being

an undoubted heir to a fortune turned out to be perfectly true; but the

fortune proved to be much smaller than was at first reported. The

estate was considerably encumbered with debts; creditors turned up on

all sides, and the prince, in spite of all advice and entreaty,

insisted upon managing all matters of claim himself—which, of course,

meant satisfying everybody all round, although half the claims were

absolutely fraudulent.

Mrs. Epanchin confirmed all this. She said the princess had written to

much the same effect, and added that there was no curing a fool. But it

was plain, from her expression of face, how strongly she approved of

this particular young fool’s doings. In conclusion, the general

observed that his wife took as great an interest in the prince as

though he were her own son; and that she had commenced to be especially

affectionate towards Aglaya was a self-evident fact.

All this caused the general to look grave and important. But, alas!

this agreeable state of affairs very soon changed once more.

A couple of weeks went by, and suddenly the general and his wife were

once more gloomy and silent, and the ice was as firm as ever. The fact

was, the general, who had heard first, how Nastasia Philipovna had fled

to Moscow and had been discovered there by Rogojin; that she had then

disappeared once more, and been found again by Rogojin, and how after

that she had almost promised to marry him, now received news that she

had once more disappeared, almost on the very day fixed for her

wedding, flying somewhere into the interior of Russia this time, and

that Prince Muishkin had left all his affairs in the hands of Salaskin

and disappeared also—but whether he was with Nastasia, or had only set

off in search of her, was unknown.

Lizabetha Prokofievna received confirmatory news from the princess—and

alas, two months after the prince’s first departure from St.

Petersburg, darkness and mystery once more enveloped his whereabouts

and actions, and in the Epanchin family the ice of silence once more

formed over the subject. Varia, however, informed the girls of what had

happened, she having received the news from Ptitsin, who generally knew

more than most people.

To make an end, we may say that there were many changes in the Epanchin

household in the spring, so that it was not difficult to forget the

prince, who sent no news of himself.

The Epanchin family had at last made up their minds to spend the summer

abroad, all except the general, who could not waste time in “travelling

for enjoyment,” of course. This arrangement was brought about by the

persistence of the girls, who insisted that they were never allowed to

go abroad because their parents were too anxious to marry them off.

Perhaps their parents had at last come to the conclusion that husbands

might be found abroad, and that a summer’s travel might bear fruit. The

marriage between Alexandra and Totski had been broken off. Since the

prince’s departure from St. Petersburg no more had been said about it;

the subject had been dropped without ceremony, much to the joy of Mrs.

General, who, announced that she was “ready to cross herself with both

hands” in gratitude for the escape. The general, however, regretted

Totski for a long while. “Such a fortune!” he sighed, “and such a good,

easy-going fellow!”

After a time it became known that Totski had married a French marquise,

and was to be carried off by her to Paris, and then to Brittany.

“Oh, well,” thought the general, “he’s lost to us for good, now.”

So the Epanchins prepared to depart for the summer.

But now another circumstance occurred, which changed all the plans once

more, and again the intended journey was put off, much to the delight

of the general and his spouse.

A certain Prince S—— arrived in St. Petersburg from Moscow, an eminent

and honourable young man. He was one of those active persons who always

find some good work with which to employ themselves. Without forcing

himself upon the public notice, modest and unobtrusive, this young

prince was concerned with much that happened in the world in general.

He had served, at first, in one of the civil departments, had then

attended to matters connected with the local government of provincial

towns, and had of late been a corresponding member of several important

scientific societies. He was a man of excellent family and solid means,

about thirty-five years of age.

Prince S—— made the acquaintance of the general’s family, and Adelaida,

the second girl, made a great impression upon him. Towards the spring

he proposed to her, and she accepted him. The general and his wife were

delighted. The journey abroad was put off, and the wedding was fixed

for a day not very distant.

The trip abroad might have been enjoyed later on by Mrs. Epanchin and

her two remaining daughters, but for another circumstance.

It so happened that Prince S—— introduced a distant relation of his own

into the Epanchin family—one Evgenie Pavlovitch, a young officer of

about twenty-eight years of age, whose conquests among the ladies in

Moscow had been proverbial. This young gentleman no sooner set eyes on

Aglaya than he became a frequent visitor at the house. He was witty,

well-educated, and extremely wealthy, as the general very soon

discovered. His past reputation was the only thing against him.

Nothing was said; there were not even any hints dropped; but still, it

seemed better to the parents to say nothing more about going abroad

this season, at all events. Aglaya herself perhaps was of a different

opinion.

All this happened just before the second appearance of our hero upon

the scene.

By this time, to judge from appearances, poor Prince Muishkin had been

quite forgotten in St. Petersburg. If he had appeared suddenly among

his acquaintances, he would have been received as one from the skies;

but we must just glance at one more fact before we conclude this

preface.

Colia Ivolgin, for some time after the prince’s departure, continued

his old life. That is, he went to school, looked after his father,

helped Varia in the house, and ran her errands, and went frequently to

see his friend, Hippolyte.

The lodgers had disappeared very quickly—Ferdishenko soon after the

events at Nastasia Philipovna’s, while the prince went to Moscow, as we

know. Gania and his mother went to live with Varia and Ptitsin

immediately after the latter’s wedding, while the general was housed in

a debtor’s prison by reason of certain IOU’s given to the captain’s

widow under the impression that they would never be formally used

against him. This unkind action much surprised poor Ardalion

Alexandrovitch, the victim, as he called himself, of an “unbounded

trust in the nobility of the human heart.”

When he signed those notes of hand he never dreamt that they would be a

source of future trouble. The event showed that he was mistaken. “Trust

in anyone after this! Have the least confidence in man or woman!” he

cried in bitter tones, as he sat with his new friends in prison, and

recounted to them his favourite stories of the siege of Kars, and the

resuscitated soldier. On the whole, he accommodated himself very well

to his new position. Ptitsin and Varia declared that he was in the

right place, and Gania was of the same opinion. The only person who

deplored his fate was poor Nina Alexandrovna, who wept bitter tears

over him, to the great surprise of her household, and, though always in

feeble health, made a point of going to see him as often as possible.

Since the general’s “mishap,” as Colia called it, and the marriage of

his sister, the boy had quietly possessed himself of far more freedom.

His relations saw little of him, for he rarely slept at home. He made

many new friends; and was moreover, a frequent visitor at the debtor’s

prison, to which he invariably accompanied his mother. Varia, who used

to be always correcting him, never spoke to him now on the subject of

his frequent absences, and the whole household was surprised to see

Gania, in spite of his depression, on quite friendly terms with his

brother. This was something new, for Gania had been wont to look upon

Colia as a kind of errand-boy, treating him with contempt, threatening

to “pull his ears,” and in general driving him almost wild with

irritation. It seemed now that Gania really needed his brother, and the

latter, for his part, felt as if he could forgive Gania much since he

had returned the hundred thousand roubles offered to him by Nastasia

Philipovna. Three months after the departure of the prince, the Ivolgin

family discovered that Colia had made acquaintance with the Epanchins,

and was on very friendly terms with the daughters. Varia heard of it

first, though Colia had not asked her to introduce him. Little by

little the family grew quite fond of him. Madame Epanchin at first

looked on him with disdain, and received him coldly, but in a short

time he grew to please her, because, as she said, he “was candid and no

flatterer”—a very true description. From the first he put himself on an

equality with his new friends, and though he sometimes read newspapers

and books to the mistress of the house, it was simply because he liked

to be useful.

One day, however, he and Lizabetha Prokofievna quarrelled seriously

about the “woman question,” in the course of a lively discussion on

that burning subject. He told her that she was a tyrant, and that he

would never set foot in her house again. It may seem incredible, but a

day or two after, Madame Epanchin sent a servant with a note begging

him to return, and Colia, without standing on his dignity, did so at

once.

Aglaya was the only one of the family whose good graces he could not

gain, and who always spoke to him haughtily, but it so happened that

the boy one day succeeded in giving the proud maiden a surprise.

It was about Easter, when, taking advantage of a momentary tête-à-tête

Colia handed Aglaya a letter, remarking that he “had orders to deliver

it to her privately.” She stared at him in amazement, but he did not

wait to hear what she had to say, and went out. Aglaya broke the seal,

and read as follows:

“Once you did me the honour of giving me your confidence. Perhaps you

have quite forgotten me now! How is it that I am writing to you? I do

not know; but I am conscious of an irresistible desire to remind you of

my existence, especially you. How many times I have needed all three of

you; but only you have dwelt always in my mind’s eye. I need you—I need

you very much. I will not write about myself. I have nothing to tell

you. But I long for you to be happy. \_Are\_ you happy? That is all I

wished to say to you—Your brother,

“Pr. L. Muishkin.”

On reading this short and disconnected note, Aglaya suddenly blushed

all over, and became very thoughtful.

It would be difficult to describe her thoughts at that moment. One of

them was, “Shall I show it to anyone?” But she was ashamed to show it.

So she ended by hiding it in her table drawer, with a very strange,

ironical smile upon her lips.

Next day, she took it out, and put it into a large book, as she usually

did with papers which she wanted to be able to find easily. She laughed

when, about a week later, she happened to notice the name of the book,

and saw that it was Don Quixote, but it would be difficult to say

exactly why.

I cannot say, either, whether she showed the letter to her sisters.

But when she had read it herself once more, it suddenly struck her that

surely that conceited boy, Colia, had not been the one chosen

correspondent of the prince all this while. She determined to ask him,

and did so with an exaggerated show of carelessness. He informed her

haughtily that though he had given the prince his permanent address

when the latter left town, and had offered his services, the prince had

never before given him any commission to perform, nor had he written

until the following lines arrived, with Aglaya’s letter. Aglaya took

the note, and read it.

“DEAR COLIA,—Please be so kind as to give the enclosed sealed letter to

Aglaya Ivanovna. Keep well—Ever your loving,

“Pr. L. Muishkin.”

“It seems absurd to trust a little pepper-box like you,” said Aglaya,

as she returned the note, and walked past the “pepper-box” with an

expression of great contempt.

This was more than Colia could bear. He had actually borrowed Gania’s

new green tie for the occasion, without saying why he wanted it, in

order to impress her. He was very deeply mortified.

II.

It was the beginning of June, and for a whole week the weather in St.

Petersburg had been magnificent. The Epanchins had a luxurious

country-house at Pavlofsk, [One of the fashionable summer resorts near

St. Petersburg.] and to this spot Mrs. Epanchin determined to proceed

without further delay. In a couple of days all was ready, and the

family had left town. A day or two after this removal to Pavlofsk,

Prince Muishkin arrived in St. Petersburg by the morning train from

Moscow. No one met him; but, as he stepped out of the carriage, he

suddenly became aware of two strangely glowing eyes fixed upon him from

among the crowd that met the train. On endeavouring to re-discover the

eyes, and see to whom they belonged, he could find nothing to guide

him. It must have been a hallucination. But the disagreeable impression

remained, and without this, the prince was sad and thoughtful already,

and seemed to be much preoccupied.

His cab took him to a small and bad hotel near the Litaynaya. Here he

engaged a couple of rooms, dark and badly furnished. He washed and

changed, and hurriedly left the hotel again, as though anxious to waste

no time. Anyone who now saw him for the first time since he left

Petersburg would judge that he had improved vastly so far as his

exterior was concerned. His clothes certainly were very different; they

were more fashionable, perhaps even too much so, and anyone inclined to

mockery might have found something to smile at in his appearance. But

what is there that people will not smile at?

The prince took a cab and drove to a street near the Nativity, where he

soon discovered the house he was seeking. It was a small wooden villa,

and he was struck by its attractive and clean appearance; it stood in a

pleasant little garden, full of flowers. The windows looking on the

street were open, and the sound of a voice, reading aloud or making a

speech, came through them. It rose at times to a shout, and was

interrupted occasionally by bursts of laughter.

Prince Muishkin entered the court-yard, and ascended the steps. A cook

with her sleeves turned up to the elbows opened the door. The visitor

asked if Mr. Lebedeff were at home.

“He is in there,” said she, pointing to the salon.

The room had a blue wall-paper, and was well, almost pretentiously,

furnished, with its round table, its divan, and its bronze clock under

a glass shade. There was a narrow pier-glass against the wall, and a

chandelier adorned with lustres hung by a bronze chain from the

ceiling.

When the prince entered, Lebedeff was standing in the middle of the

room, his back to the door. He was in his shirt-sleeves, on account of

the extreme heat, and he seemed to have just reached the peroration of

his speech, and was impressively beating his breast.

His audience consisted of a youth of about fifteen years of age with a

clever face, who had a book in his hand, though he was not reading; a

young lady of twenty, in deep mourning, stood near him with an infant

in her arms; another girl of thirteen, also in black, was laughing

loudly, her mouth wide open; and on the sofa lay a handsome young man,

with black hair and eyes, and a suspicion of beard and whiskers. He

frequently interrupted the speaker and argued with him, to the great

delight of the others.

“Lukian Timofeyovitch! Lukian Timofeyovitch! Here’s someone to see you!

Look here!... a gentleman to speak to you!... Well, it’s not my fault!”

and the cook turned and went away red with anger.

Lebedeff started, and at sight of the prince stood like a statue for a

moment. Then he moved up to him with an ingratiating smile, but stopped

short again.

“Prince! ex-ex-excellency!” he stammered. Then suddenly he ran towards

the girl with the infant, a movement so unexpected by her that she

staggered and fell back, but next moment he was threatening the other

child, who was standing, still laughing, in the doorway. She screamed,

and ran towards the kitchen. Lebedeff stamped his foot angrily; then,

seeing the prince regarding him with amazement, he murmured

apologetically—“Pardon to show respect!... he-he!”

“You are quite wrong...” began the prince.

“At once... at once... in one moment!”

He rushed like a whirlwind from the room, and Muishkin looked

inquiringly at the others.

They were all laughing, and the guest joined in the chorus.

“He has gone to get his coat,” said the boy.

“How annoying!” exclaimed the prince. “I thought... Tell me, is he...”

“You think he is drunk?” cried the young man on the sofa. “Not in the

least. He’s only had three or four small glasses, perhaps five; but

what is that? The usual thing!”

As the prince opened his mouth to answer, he was interrupted by the

girl, whose sweet face wore an expression of absolute frankness.

“He never drinks much in the morning; if you have come to talk business

with him, do it now. It is the best time. He sometimes comes back drunk

in the evening; but just now he passes the greater part of the evening

in tears, and reads passages of Holy Scripture aloud, because our

mother died five weeks ago.”

“No doubt he ran off because he did not know what to say to you,” said

the youth on the divan. “I bet he is trying to cheat you, and is

thinking how best to do it.”

Just then Lebedeff returned, having put on his coat.

“Five weeks!” said he, wiping his eyes. “Only five weeks! Poor

orphans!”

“But why wear a coat in holes,” asked the girl, “when your new one is

hanging behind the door? Did you not see it?”

“Hold your tongue, dragon-fly!” he scolded. “What a plague you are!” He

stamped his foot irritably, but she only laughed, and answered:

“Are you trying to frighten me? I am not Tania, you know, and I don’t

intend to run away. Look, you are waking Lubotchka, and she will have

convulsions again. Why do you shout like that?”

“Well, well! I won’t again,” said the master of the house, his anxiety

getting the better of his temper. He went up to his daughter, and

looked at the child in her arms, anxiously making the sign of the cross

over her three times. “God bless her! God bless her!” he cried with

emotion. “This little creature is my daughter Luboff,” addressing the

prince. “My wife, Helena, died—at her birth; and this is my big

daughter Vera, in mourning, as you see; and this, this, oh, this,”

pointing to the young man on the divan...

“Well, go on! never mind me!” mocked the other. “Don’t be afraid!”

“Excellency! Have you read that account of the murder of the Zemarin

family, in the newspaper?” cried Lebedeff, all of a sudden.

“Yes,” said Muishkin, with some surprise.

“Well, that is the murderer! It is he—in fact—”

“What do you mean?” asked the visitor.

“I am speaking allegorically, of course; but he will be the murderer of

a Zemarin family in the future. He is getting ready. ...”

They all laughed, and the thought crossed the prince’s mind that

perhaps Lebedeff was really trifling in this way because he foresaw

inconvenient questions, and wanted to gain time.

“He is a traitor! a conspirator!” shouted Lebedeff, who seemed to have

lost all control over himself. “A monster! a slanderer! Ought I to

treat him as a nephew, the son of my sister Anisia?”

“Oh! do be quiet! You must be drunk! He has taken it into his head to

play the lawyer, prince, and he practices speechifying, and is always

repeating his eloquent pleadings to his children. And who do you think

was his last client? An old woman who had been robbed of five hundred

roubles, her all, by some rogue of a usurer, besought him to take up

her case, instead of which he defended the usurer himself, a Jew named

Zeidler, because this Jew promised to give him fifty roubles....”

“It was to be fifty if I won the case, only five if I lost,”

interrupted Lebedeff, speaking in a low tone, a great contrast to his

earlier manner.

“Well! naturally he came to grief: the law is not administered as it

used to be, and he only got laughed at for his pains. But he was much

pleased with himself in spite of that. ‘Most learned judge!’ said he,

‘picture this unhappy man, crippled by age and infirmities, who gains

his living by honourable toil—picture him, I repeat, robbed of his all,

of his last mouthful; remember, I entreat you, the words of that

learned legislator, “Let mercy and justice alike rule the courts of

law.”’ Now, would you believe it, excellency, every morning he recites

this speech to us from beginning to end, exactly as he spoke it before

the magistrate. To-day we have heard it for the fifth time. He was just

starting again when you arrived, so much does he admire it. He is now

preparing to undertake another case. I think, by the way, that you are

Prince Muishkin? Colia tells me you are the cleverest man he has ever

known....”

“The cleverest in the world,” interrupted his uncle hastily.

“I do not pay much attention to that opinion,” continued the young man

calmly. “Colia is very fond of you, but he,” pointing to Lebedeff, “is

flattering you. I can assure you I have no intention of flattering you,

or anyone else, but at least you have some common-sense. Well, will you

judge between us? Shall we ask the prince to act as arbitrator?” he

went on, addressing his uncle.

“I am so glad you chanced to come here, prince.”

“I agree,” said Lebedeff, firmly, looking round involuntarily at his

daughter, who had come nearer, and was listening attentively to the

conversation.

“What is it all about?” asked the prince, frowning. His head ached, and

he felt sure that Lebedeff was trying to cheat him in some way, and

only talking to put off the explanation that he had come for.

“I will tell you all the story. I am his nephew; he did speak the truth

there, although he is generally telling lies. I am at the University,

and have not yet finished my course. I mean to do so, and I shall, for

I have a determined character. I must, however, find something to do

for the present, and therefore I have got employment on the railway at

twenty-four roubles a month. I admit that my uncle has helped me once

or twice before. Well, I had twenty roubles in my pocket, and I gambled

them away. Can you believe that I should be so low, so base, as to lose

money in that way?”

“And the man who won it is a rogue, a rogue whom you ought not to have

paid!” cried Lebedeff.

“Yes, he is a rogue, but I was obliged to pay him,” said the young man.

“As to his being a rogue, he is assuredly that, and I am not saying it

because he beat you. He is an ex-lieutenant, prince, dismissed from the

service, a teacher of boxing, and one of Rogojin’s followers. They are

all lounging about the pavements now that Rogojin has turned them off.

Of course, the worst of it is that, knowing he was a rascal, and a

card-sharper, I none the less played palki with him, and risked my last

rouble. To tell the truth, I thought to myself, ‘If I lose, I will go

to my uncle, and I am sure he will not refuse to help me.’ Now that was

base—cowardly and base!”

“That is so,” observed Lebedeff quietly; “cowardly and base.”

“Well, wait a bit, before you begin to triumph,” said the nephew

viciously; for the words seemed to irritate him. “He is delighted! I

came to him here and told him everything: I acted honourably, for I did

not excuse myself. I spoke most severely of my conduct, as everyone

here can witness. But I must smarten myself up before I take up my new

post, for I am really like a tramp. Just look at my boots! I cannot

possibly appear like this, and if I am not at the bureau at the time

appointed, the job will be given to someone else; and I shall have to

try for another. Now I only beg for fifteen roubles, and I give my word

that I will never ask him for anything again. I am also ready to

promise to repay my debt in three months’ time, and I will keep my

word, even if I have to live on bread and water. My salary will amount

to seventy-five roubles in three months. The sum I now ask, added to

what I have borrowed already, will make a total of about thirty-five

roubles, so you see I shall have enough to pay him and confound him! if

he wants interest, he shall have that, too! Haven’t I always paid back

the money he lent me before? Why should he be so mean now? He grudges

my having paid that lieutenant; there can be no other reason! That’s

the kind he is—a dog in the manger!”

“And he won’t go away!” cried Lebedeff. “He has installed himself here,

and here he remains!”

“I have told you already, that I will not go away until I have got what

I ask. Why are you smiling, prince? You look as if you disapproved of

me.”

“I am not smiling, but I really think you are in the wrong, somewhat,”

replied Muishkin, reluctantly.

“Don’t shuffle! Say plainly that you think that I am quite wrong,

without any ‘somewhat’! Why ‘somewhat’?”

“I will say you are quite wrong, if you wish.”

“If I wish! That’s good, I must say! Do you think I am deceived as to

the flagrant impropriety of my conduct? I am quite aware that his money

is his own, and that my action—is much like an attempt at extortion.

But you-you don’t know what life is! If people don’t learn by

experience, they never understand. They must be taught. My intentions

are perfectly honest; on my conscience he will lose nothing, and I will

pay back the money with interest. Added to which he has had the moral

satisfaction of seeing me disgraced. What does he want more? and what

is he good for if he never helps anyone? Look what he does himself!

just ask him about his dealings with others, how he deceives people!

How did he manage to buy this house? You may cut off my head if he has

not let you in for something—and if he is not trying to cheat you

again. You are smiling. You don’t believe me?”

“It seems to me that all this has nothing to do with your affairs,”

remarked the prince.

“I have lain here now for three days,” cried the young man without

noticing, “and I have seen a lot! Fancy! he suspects his daughter, that

angel, that orphan, my cousin—he suspects her, and every evening he

searches her room, to see if she has a lover hidden in it! He comes

here too on tiptoe, creeping softly—oh, so softly—and looks under the

sofa—my bed, you know. He is mad with suspicion, and sees a thief in

every corner. He runs about all night long; he was up at least seven

times last night, to satisfy himself that the windows and doors were

barred, and to peep into the oven. That man who appears in court for

scoundrels, rushes in here in the night and prays, lying prostrate,

banging his head on the ground by the half-hour—and for whom do you

think he prays? Who are the sinners figuring in his drunken petitions?

I have heard him with my own ears praying for the repose of the soul of

the Countess du Barry! Colia heard it too. He is as mad as a March

hare!”

“You hear how he slanders me, prince,” said Lebedeff, almost beside

himself with rage. “I may be a drunkard, an evil-doer, a thief, but at

least I can say one thing for myself. He does not know—how should he,

mocker that he is?—that when he came into the world it was I who washed

him, and dressed him in his swathing-bands, for my sister Anisia had

lost her husband, and was in great poverty. I was very little better

off than she, but I sat up night after night with her, and nursed both

mother and child; I used to go downstairs and steal wood for them from

the house-porter. How often did I sing him to sleep when I was half

dead with hunger! In short, I was more than a father to him, and

now—now he jeers at me! Even if I did cross myself, and pray for the

repose of the soul of the Comtesse du Barry, what does it matter? Three

days ago, for the first time in my life, I read her biography in an

historical dictionary. Do you know who she was? You there!” addressing

his nephew. “Speak! do you know?”

“Of course no one knows anything about her but you,” muttered the young

man in a would-be jeering tone.

“She was a Countess who rose from shame to reign like a Queen. An

Empress wrote to her, with her own hand, as ‘\_Ma chère cousine\_.’ At a

\_lever-du-roi\_ one morning (do you know what a \_lever-du-roi\_ was?)—a

Cardinal, a Papal legate, offered to put on her stockings; a high and

holy person like that looked on it as an honour! Did you know this? I

see by your expression that you did not! Well, how did she die?

Answer!”

“Oh! do stop—you are too absurd!”

“This is how she died. After all this honour and glory, after having

been almost a Queen, she was guillotined by that butcher, Samson. She

was quite innocent, but it had to be done, for the satisfaction of the

fishwives of Paris. She was so terrified, that she did not understand

what was happening. But when Samson seized her head, and pushed her

under the knife with his foot, she cried out: ‘Wait a moment! wait a

moment, monsieur!’ Well, because of that moment of bitter suffering,

perhaps the Saviour will pardon her other faults, for one cannot

imagine a greater agony. As I read the story my heart bled for her. And

what does it matter to you, little worm, if I implored the Divine mercy

for her, great sinner as she was, as I said my evening prayer? I might

have done it because I doubted if anyone had ever crossed himself for

her sake before. It may be that in the other world she will rejoice to

think that a sinner like herself has cried to heaven for the salvation

of her soul. Why are you laughing? You believe nothing, atheist! And

your story was not even correct! If you had listened to what I was

saying, you would have heard that I did not only pray for the Comtesse

du Barry. I said, ‘Oh Lord! give rest to the soul of that great sinner,

the Comtesse du Barry, and to all unhappy ones like her.’ You see that

is quite a different thing, for how many sinners there are, how many

women, who have passed through the trials of this life, are now

suffering and groaning in purgatory! I prayed for you, too, in spite of

your insolence and impudence, also for your fellows, as it seems that

you claim to know how I pray...”

“Oh! that’s enough in all conscience! Pray for whom you choose, and the

devil take them and you! We have a scholar here; you did not know that,

prince?” he continued, with a sneer. “He reads all sorts of books and

memoirs now.”

“At any rate, your uncle has a kind heart,” remarked the prince, who

really had to force himself to speak to the nephew, so much did he

dislike him.

“Oh, now you are going to praise him! He will be set up! He puts his

hand on his heart, and he is delighted! I never said he was a man

without heart, but he is a rascal—that’s the pity of it. And then, he

is addicted to drink, and his mind is unhinged, like that of most

people who have taken more than is good for them for years. He loves

his children—oh, I know that well enough! He respected my aunt, his

late wife... and he even has a sort of affection for me. He has

remembered me in his will.”

“I shall leave you nothing!” exclaimed his uncle angrily.

“Listen to me, Lebedeff,” said the prince in a decided voice, turning

his back on the young man. “I know by experience that when you choose,

you can be business-like... I have very little time to spare, and if

you... By the way—excuse me—what is your Christian name? I have

forgotten it.”

“Ti-Ti-Timofey.”

“And?”

“Lukianovitch.”

Everyone in the room began to laugh.

“He is telling lies!” cried the nephew. “Even now he cannot speak the

truth. He is not called Timofey Lukianovitch, prince, but Lukian

Timofeyovitch. Now do tell us why you must needs lie about it? Lukian

or Timofey, it is all the same to you, and what difference can it make

to the prince? He tells lies without the least necessity, simply by

force of habit, I assure you.”

“Is that true?” said the prince impatiently.

“My name really is Lukian Timofeyovitch,” acknowledged Lebedeff,

lowering his eyes, and putting his hand on his heart.

“Well, for God’s sake, what made you say the other?”

“To humble myself,” murmured Lebedeff.

“What on earth do you mean? Oh I if only I knew where Colia was at this

moment!” cried the prince, standing up, as if to go.

“I can tell you all about Colia,” said the young man

“Oh! no, no!” said Lebedeff, hurriedly.

“Colia spent the night here, and this morning went after his father,

whom you let out of prison by paying his debts—Heaven only knows why!

Yesterday the general promised to come and lodge here, but he did not

appear. Most probably he slept at the hotel close by. No doubt Colia is

there, unless he has gone to Pavlofsk to see the Epanchins. He had a

little money, and was intending to go there yesterday. He must be

either at the hotel or at Pavlofsk.”

“At Pavlofsk! He is at Pavlofsk, undoubtedly!” interrupted Lebedeff....

“But come—let us go into the garden—we will have coffee there....” And

Lebedeff seized the prince’s arm, and led him from the room. They went

across the yard, and found themselves in a delightful little garden

with the trees already in their summer dress of green, thanks to the

unusually fine weather. Lebedeff invited his guest to sit down on a

green seat before a table of the same colour fixed in the earth, and

took a seat facing him. In a few minutes the coffee appeared, and the

prince did not refuse it. The host kept his eyes fixed on Muishkin,

with an expression of passionate servility.

“I knew nothing about your home before,” said the prince absently, as

if he were thinking of something else.

“Poor orphans,” began Lebedeff, his face assuming a mournful air, but

he stopped short, for the other looked at him inattentively, as if he

had already forgotten his own remark. They waited a few minutes in

silence, while Lebedeff sat with his eyes fixed mournfully on the young

man’s face.

“Well!” said the latter, at last rousing himself. “Ah! yes! You know

why I came, Lebedeff. Your letter brought me. Speak! Tell me all about

it.”

The clerk, rather confused, tried to say something, hesitated, began to

speak, and again stopped. The prince looked at him gravely.

“I think I understand, Lukian Timofeyovitch: you were not sure that I

should come. You did not think I should start at the first word from

you, and you merely wrote to relieve your conscience. However, you see

now that I have come, and I have had enough of trickery. Give up

serving, or trying to serve, two masters. Rogojin has been here these

three weeks. Have you managed to sell her to him as you did before?

Tell me the truth.”

“He discovered everything, the monster... himself......”

“Don’t abuse him; though I dare say you have something to complain

of....”

“He beat me, he thrashed me unmercifully!” replied Lebedeff vehemently.

“He set a dog on me in Moscow, a bloodhound, a terrible beast that

chased me all down the street.”

“You seem to take me for a child, Lebedeff. Tell me, is it a fact that

she left him while they were in Moscow?”

“Yes, it is a fact, and this time, let me tell you, on the very eve of

their marriage! It was a question of minutes when she slipped off to

Petersburg. She came to me directly she arrived—‘Save me, Lukian! find

me some refuge, and say nothing to the prince!’ She is afraid of you,

even more than she is of him, and in that she shows her wisdom!” And

Lebedeff slily put his finger to his brow as he said the last words.

“And now it is you who have brought them together again?”

“Excellency, how could I, how could I prevent it?”

“That will do. I can find out for myself. Only tell me, where is she

now? At his house? With him?”

“Oh no! Certainly not! ‘I am free,’ she says; you know how she insists

on that point. ‘I am entirely free.’ She repeats it over and over

again. She is living in Petersburgskaia, with my sister-in-law, as I

told you in my letter.”

“She is there at this moment?”

“Yes, unless she has gone to Pavlofsk: the fine weather may have

tempted her, perhaps, into the country, with Daria Alexeyevna. ‘I am

quite free,’ she says. Only yesterday she boasted of her freedom to

Nicolai Ardalionovitch—a bad sign,” added Lebedeff, smiling.

“Colia goes to see her often, does he not?”

“He is a strange boy, thoughtless, and inclined to be indiscreet.”

“Is it long since you saw her?”

“I go to see her every day, every day.”

“Then you were there yesterday?”

“N-no: I have not been these three last days.”

“It is a pity you have taken too much wine, Lebedeff I want to ask you

something... but...”

“All right! all right! I am not drunk,” replied the clerk, preparing to

listen.

“Tell me, how was she when you left her?”

“She is a woman who is seeking...”

“Seeking?”

“She seems always to be searching about, as if she had lost something.

The mere idea of her coming marriage disgusts her; she looks on it as

an insult. She cares as much for \_him\_ as for a piece of

orange-peel—not more. Yet I am much mistaken if she does not look on

him with fear and trembling. She forbids his name to be mentioned

before her, and they only meet when unavoidable. He understands, well

enough! But it must be gone through. She is restless, mocking,

deceitful, violent....”

“Deceitful and violent?”

“Yes, violent. I can give you a proof of it. A few days ago she tried

to pull my hair because I said something that annoyed her. I tried to

soothe her by reading the Apocalypse aloud.”

“What?” exclaimed the prince, thinking he had not heard aright.

“By reading the Apocalypse. The lady has a restless imagination, he-he!

She has a liking for conversation on serious subjects, of any kind; in

fact they please her so much, that it flatters her to discuss them. Now

for fifteen years at least I have studied the Apocalypse, and she

agrees with me in thinking that the present is the epoch represented by

the third horse, the black one whose rider holds a measure in his hand.

It seems to me that everything is ruled by measure in our century; all

men are clamouring for their rights; ‘a measure of wheat for a penny,

and three measures of barley for a penny.’ But, added to this, men

desire freedom of mind and body, a pure heart, a healthy life, and all

God’s good gifts. Now by pleading their rights alone, they will never

attain all this, so the white horse, with his rider Death, comes next,

and is followed by Hell. We talked about this matter when we met, and

it impressed her very much.”

“Do you believe all this?” asked Muishkin, looking curiously at his

companion.

“I both believe it and explain it. I am but a poor creature, a beggar,

an atom in the scale of humanity. Who has the least respect for

Lebedeff? He is a target for all the world, the butt of any fool who

chooses to kick him. But in interpreting revelation I am the equal of

anyone, great as he may be! Such is the power of the mind and the

spirit. I have made a lordly personage tremble, as he sat in his

armchair... only by talking to him of things concerning the spirit. Two

years ago, on Easter Eve, His Excellency Nil Alexeyovitch, whose

subordinate I was then, wished to hear what I had to say, and sent a

message by Peter Zakkaritch to ask me to go to his private room. ‘They

tell me you expound the prophecies relating to Antichrist,’ said he,

when we were alone. ‘Is that so?’ ‘Yes,’ I answered unhesitatingly, and

I began to give some comments on the Apostle’s allegorical vision. At

first he smiled, but when we reached the numerical computations and

correspondences, he trembled, and turned pale. Then he begged me to

close the book, and sent me away, promising to put my name on the

reward list. That took place as I said on the eve of Easter, and eight

days later his soul returned to God.”

“What?”

“It is the truth. One evening after dinner he stumbled as he stepped

out of his carriage. He fell, and struck his head on the curb, and died

immediately. He was seventy-three years of age, and had a red face, and

white hair; he deluged himself with scent, and was always smiling like

a child. Peter Zakkaritch recalled my interview with him, and said,

‘\_you foretold his death.\_’”

The prince rose from his seat, and Lebedeff, surprised to see his guest

preparing to go so soon, remarked: “You are not interested?” in a

respectful tone.

“I am not very well, and my head aches. Doubtless the effect of the

journey,” replied the prince, frowning.

“You should go into the country,” said Lebedeff timidly.

The prince seemed to be considering the suggestion.

“You see, I am going into the country myself in three days, with my

children and belongings. The little one is delicate; she needs change

of air; and during our absence this house will be done up. I am going

to Pavlofsk.”

“You are going to Pavlofsk too?” asked the prince sharply. “Everybody

seems to be going there. Have you a house in that neighbourhood?”

“I don’t know of many people going to Pavlofsk, and as for the house,

Ivan Ptitsin has let me one of his villas rather cheaply. It is a

pleasant place, lying on a hill surrounded by trees, and one can live

there for a mere song. There is good music to be heard, so no wonder it

is popular. I shall stay in the lodge. As to the villa itself...”

“Have you let it?”

“N-no—not exactly.”

“Let it to me,” said the prince.

Now this was precisely what Lebedeff had made up his mind to do in the

last three minutes. Not that he had any difficulty in finding a tenant;

in fact the house was occupied at present by a chance visitor, who had

told Lebedeff that he would perhaps take it for the summer months. The

clerk knew very well that this “\_perhaps\_” meant “\_certainly\_,” but as

he thought he could make more out of a tenant like the prince, he felt

justified in speaking vaguely about the present inhabitant’s

intentions. “This is quite a coincidence,” thought he, and when the

subject of price was mentioned, he made a gesture with his hand, as if

to waive away a question of so little importance.

“Oh well, as you like!” said Muishkin. “I will think it over. You shall

lose nothing!”

They were walking slowly across the garden.

“But if you... I could...” stammered Lebedeff, “if... if you please,

prince, tell you something on the subject which would interest you, I

am sure.” He spoke in wheedling tones, and wriggled as he walked along.

Muishkin stopped short.

“Daria Alexeyevna also has a villa at Pavlofsk.”

“Well?”

“A certain person is very friendly with her, and intends to visit her

pretty often.”

“Well?”

“Aglaya Ivanovna...”

“Oh stop, Lebedeff!” interposed Muishkin, feeling as if he had been

touched on an open wound. “That... that has nothing to do with me. I

should like to know when you are going to start. The sooner the better

as far as I am concerned, for I am at an hotel.”

They had left the garden now, and were crossing the yard on their way

to the gate.

“Well, leave your hotel at once and come here; then we can all go

together to Pavlofsk the day after tomorrow.”

“I will think about it,” said the prince dreamily, and went off.

The clerk stood looking after his guest, struck by his sudden

absent-mindedness. He had not even remembered to say goodbye, and

Lebedeff was the more surprised at the omission, as he knew by

experience how courteous the prince usually was.

III.

It was now close on twelve o’clock.

The prince knew that if he called at the Epanchins’ now he would only

find the general, and that the latter might probably carry him straight

off to Pavlofsk with him; whereas there was one visit he was most

anxious to make without delay.

So at the risk of missing General Epanchin altogether, and thus

postponing his visit to Pavlofsk for a day, at least, the prince

decided to go and look for the house he desired to find.

The visit he was about to pay was, in some respects, a risky one. He

was in two minds about it, but knowing that the house was in the

Gorohovaya, not far from the Sadovaya, he determined to go in that

direction, and to try to make up his mind on the way.

Arrived at the point where the Gorohovaya crosses the Sadovaya, he was

surprised to find how excessively agitated he was. He had no idea that

his heart could beat so painfully.

One house in the Gorohovaya began to attract his attention long before

he reached it, and the prince remembered afterwards that he had said to

himself: “That is the house, I’m sure of it.” He came up to it quite

curious to discover whether he had guessed right, and felt that he

would be disagreeably impressed to find that he had actually done so.

The house was a large gloomy-looking structure, without the slightest

claim to architectural beauty, in colour a dirty green. There are a few

of these old houses, built towards the end of the last century, still

standing in that part of St. Petersburg, and showing little change from

their original form and colour. They are solidly built, and are

remarkable for the thickness of their walls, and for the fewness of

their windows, many of which are covered by gratings. On the

ground-floor there is usually a money-changer’s shop, and the owner

lives over it. Without as well as within, the houses seem inhospitable

and mysterious—an impression which is difficult to explain, unless it

has something to do with the actual architectural style. These houses

are almost exclusively inhabited by the merchant class.

Arrived at the gate, the prince looked up at the legend over it, which

ran:

“House of Rogojin, hereditary and honourable citizen.”

He hesitated no longer; but opened the glazed door at the bottom of the

outer stairs and made his way up to the second storey. The place was

dark and gloomy-looking; the walls of the stone staircase were painted

a dull red. Rogojin and his mother and brother occupied the whole of

the second floor. The servant who opened the door to Muishkin led him,

without taking his name, through several rooms and up and down many

steps until they arrived at a door, where he knocked.

Parfen Rogojin opened the door himself.

On seeing the prince he became deadly white, and apparently fixed to

the ground, so that he was more like a marble statue than a human

being. The prince had expected some surprise, but Rogojin evidently

considered his visit an impossible and miraculous event. He stared with

an expression almost of terror, and his lips twisted into a bewildered

smile.

“Parfen! perhaps my visit is ill-timed. I—I can go away again if you

like,” said Muishkin at last, rather embarrassed.

“No, no; it’s all right, come in,” said Parfen, recollecting himself.

They were evidently on quite familiar terms. In Moscow they had had

many occasions of meeting; indeed, some few of those meetings were but

too vividly impressed upon their memories. They had not met now,

however, for three months.

The deathlike pallor, and a sort of slight convulsion about the lips,

had not left Rogojin’s face. Though he welcomed his guest, he was still

obviously much disturbed. As he invited the prince to sit down near the

table, the latter happened to turn towards him, and was startled by the

strange expression on his face. A painful recollection flashed into his

mind. He stood for a time, looking straight at Rogojin, whose eyes

seemed to blaze like fire. At last Rogojin smiled, though he still

looked agitated and shaken.

“What are you staring at me like that for?” he muttered. “Sit down.”

The prince took a chair.

“Parfen,” he said, “tell me honestly, did you know that I was coming to

Petersburg or no?”

“Oh, I supposed you were coming,” the other replied, smiling

sarcastically, “and I was right in my supposition, you see; but how was

I to know that you would come \_today?\_”

A certain strangeness and impatience in his manner impressed the prince

very forcibly.

“And if you had known that I was coming today, why be so irritated

about it?” he asked, in quiet surprise.

“Why did you ask me?”

“Because when I jumped out of the train this morning, two eyes glared

at me just as yours did a moment since.”

“Ha! and whose eyes may they have been?” said Rogojin, suspiciously. It

seemed to the prince that he was trembling.

“I don’t know; I thought it was a hallucination. I often have

hallucinations nowadays. I feel just as I did five years ago when my

fits were about to come on.”

“Well, perhaps it was a hallucination, I don’t know,” said Parfen.

He tried to give the prince an affectionate smile, and it seemed to the

latter as though in this smile of his something had broken, and that he

could not mend it, try as he would.

“Shall you go abroad again then?” he asked, and suddenly added, “Do you

remember how we came up in the train from Pskoff together? You and your

cloak and leggings, eh?”

And Rogojin burst out laughing, this time with unconcealed malice, as

though he were glad that he had been able to find an opportunity for

giving vent to it.

“Have you quite taken up your quarters here?” asked the prince

“Yes, I’m at home. Where else should I go to?”

“We haven’t met for some time. Meanwhile I have heard things about you

which I should not have believed to be possible.”

“What of that? People will say anything,” said Rogojin drily.

“At all events, you’ve disbanded your troop—and you are living in your

own house instead of being fast and loose about the place; that’s all

very good. Is this house all yours, or joint property?”

“It is my mother’s. You get to her apartments by that passage.”

“Where’s your brother?”

“In the other wing.”

“Is he married?”

“Widower. Why do you want to know all this?”

The prince looked at him, but said nothing. He had suddenly relapsed

into musing, and had probably not heard the question at all. Rogojin

did not insist upon an answer, and there was silence for a few moments.

“I guessed which was your house from a hundred yards off,” said the

prince at last.

“Why so?”

“I don’t quite know. Your house has the aspect of yourself and all your

family; it bears the stamp of the Rogojin life; but ask me why I think

so, and I can tell you nothing. It is nonsense, of course. I am nervous

about this kind of thing troubling me so much. I had never before

imagined what sort of a house you would live in, and yet no sooner did

I set eyes on this one than I said to myself that it must be yours.”

“Really!” said Rogojin vaguely, not taking in what the prince meant by

his rather obscure remarks.

The room they were now sitting in was a large one, lofty but dark, well

furnished, principally with writing-tables and desks covered with

papers and books. A wide sofa covered with red morocco evidently served

Rogojin for a bed. On the table beside which the prince had been

invited to seat himself lay some books; one containing a marker where

the reader had left off, was a volume of Solovieff’s History. Some

oil-paintings in worn gilded frames hung on the walls, but it was

impossible to make out what subjects they represented, so blackened

were they by smoke and age. One, a life-sized portrait, attracted the

prince’s attention. It showed a man of about fifty, wearing a long

riding-coat of German cut. He had two medals on his breast; his beard

was white, short and thin; his face yellow and wrinkled, with a sly,

suspicious expression in the eyes.

“That is your father, is it not?” asked the prince.

“Yes, it is,” replied Rogojin with an unpleasant smile, as if he had

expected his guest to ask the question, and then to make some

disagreeable remark.

“Was he one of the Old Believers?”

“No, he went to church, but to tell the truth he really preferred the

old religion. This was his study and is now mine. Why did you ask if he

were an Old Believer?”

“Are you going to be married here?”

“Ye-yes!” replied Rogojin, starting at the unexpected question.

“Soon?”

“You know yourself it does not depend on me.”

“Parfen, I am not your enemy, and I do not intend to oppose your

intentions in any way. I repeat this to you now just as I said it to

you once before on a very similar occasion. When you were arranging for

your projected marriage in Moscow, I did not interfere with you—you

know I did not. That first time she fled to me from you, from the very

altar almost, and begged me to ‘save her from you.’ Afterwards she ran

away from me again, and you found her and arranged your marriage with

her once more; and now, I hear, she has run away from you and come to

Petersburg. Is it true? Lebedeff wrote me to this effect, and that’s

why I came here. That you had once more arranged matters with Nastasia

Philipovna I only learned last night in the train from a friend of

yours, Zaleshoff—if you wish to know.

“I confess I came here with an object. I wished to persuade Nastasia to

go abroad for her health; she requires it. Both mind and body need a

change badly. I did not intend to take her abroad myself. I was going

to arrange for her to go without me. Now I tell you honestly, Parfen,

if it is true that all is made up between you, I will not so much as

set eyes upon her, and I will never even come to see you again.

“You know quite well that I am telling the truth, because I have always

been frank with you. I have never concealed my own opinion from you. I

have always told you that I consider a marriage between you and her

would be ruin to her. You would also be ruined, and perhaps even more

hopelessly. If this marriage were to be broken off again, I admit I

should be greatly pleased; but at the same time I have not the

slightest intention of trying to part you. You may be quite easy in

your mind, and you need not suspect me. You know yourself whether I was

ever really your rival or not, even when she ran away and came to me.

“There, you are laughing at me—I know why you laugh. It is perfectly

true that we lived apart from one another all the time, in different

towns. I told you before that I did not love her with love, but with

pity! You said then that you understood me; did you really understand

me or not? What hatred there is in your eyes at this moment! I came to

relieve your mind, because you are dear to me also. I love you very

much, Parfen; and now I shall go away and never come back again.

Goodbye.”

The prince rose.

“Stay a little,” said Parfen, not leaving his chair and resting his

head on his right hand. “I haven’t seen you for a long time.”

The prince sat down again. Both were silent for a few moments.

“When you are not with me I hate you, Lef Nicolaievitch. I have loathed

you every day of these three months since I last saw you. By heaven I

have!” said Rogojin. “I could have poisoned you at any minute. Now, you

have been with me but a quarter of an hour, and all my malice seems to

have melted away, and you are as dear to me as ever. Stay here a little

longer.”

“When I am with you you trust me; but as soon as my back is turned you

suspect me,” said the prince, smiling, and trying to hide his emotion.

“I trust your voice, when I hear you speak. I quite understand that you

and I cannot be put on a level, of course.”

“Why did you add that?—There! Now you are cross again,” said the

prince, wondering.

“We were not asked, you see. We were made different, with different

tastes and feelings, without being consulted. You say you love her with

pity. I have no pity for her. She hates me—that’s the plain truth of

the matter. I dream of her every night, and always that she is laughing

at me with another man. And so she does laugh at me. She thinks no more

of marrying me than if she were changing her shoe. Would you believe

it, I haven’t seen her for five days, and I daren’t go near her. She

asks me what I come for, as if she were not content with having

disgraced me—”

“Disgraced you! How?”

“Just as though you didn’t know! Why, she ran away from me, and went to

you. You admitted it yourself, just now.”

“But surely you do not believe that she...”

“That she did not disgrace me at Moscow with that officer,

Zemtuznikoff? I know for certain she did, after having fixed our

marriage-day herself!”

“Impossible!” cried the prince.

“I know it for a fact,” replied Rogojin, with conviction.

“It is not like her, you say? My friend, that’s absurd. Perhaps such an

act would horrify her, if she were with you, but it is quite different

where I am concerned. She looks on me as vermin. Her affair with Keller

was simply to make a laughing-stock of me. You don’t know what a fool

she made of me in Moscow; and the money I spent over her! The money!

the money!”

“And you can marry her now, Parfen! What will come of it all?” said the

prince, with dread in his voice.

Rogojin gazed back gloomily, and with a terrible expression in his

eyes, but said nothing.

“I haven’t been to see her for five days,” he repeated, after a slight

pause. “I’m afraid of being turned out. She says she’s still her own

mistress, and may turn me off altogether, and go abroad. She told me

this herself,” he said, with a peculiar glance at Muishkin. “I think

she often does it merely to frighten me. She is always laughing at me,

for some reason or other; but at other times she’s angry, and won’t say

a word, and that’s what I’m afraid of. I took her a shawl one day, the

like of which she might never have seen, although she did live in

luxury and she gave it away to her maid, Katia. Sometimes when I can

keep away no longer, I steal past the house on the sly, and once I

watched at the gate till dawn—I thought something was going on—and she

saw me from the window. She asked me what I should do if I found she

had deceived me. I said, ‘You know well enough.’”

“What did she know?” cried the prince.

“How was I to tell?” replied Rogojin, with an angry laugh. “I did my

best to catch her tripping in Moscow, but did not succeed. However, I

caught hold of her one day, and said: ‘You are engaged to be married

into a respectable family, and do you know what sort of a woman you

are? \_That’s\_ the sort of woman you are,’ I said.”

“You told her that?”

“Yes.”

“Well, go on.”

“She said, ‘I wouldn’t even have you for a footman now, much less for a

husband.’ ‘I shan’t leave the house,’ I said, ‘so it doesn’t matter.’

‘Then I shall call somebody and have you kicked out,’ she cried. So

then I rushed at her, and beat her till she was bruised all over.”

“Impossible!” cried the prince, aghast.

“I tell you it’s true,” said Rogojin quietly, but with eyes ablaze with

passion.

“Then for a day and a half I neither slept, nor ate, nor drank, and

would not leave her. I knelt at her feet: ‘I shall die here,’ I said,

‘if you don’t forgive me; and if you have me turned out, I shall drown

myself; because, what should I be without you now?’ She was like a

madwoman all that day; now she would cry; now she would threaten me

with a knife; now she would abuse me. She called in Zaleshoff and

Keller, and showed me to them, shamed me in their presence. ‘Let’s all

go to the theatre,’ she says, ‘and leave him here if he won’t go—it’s

not my business. They’ll give you some tea, Parfen Semeonovitch, while

I am away, for you must be hungry.’ She came back from the theatre

alone. ‘Those cowards wouldn’t come,’ she said. ‘They are afraid of

you, and tried to frighten me, too. “He won’t go away as he came,” they

said, “he’ll cut your throat—see if he doesn’t.” Now, I shall go to my

bedroom, and I shall not even lock my door, just to show you how much I

am afraid of you. You must be shown that once for all. Did you have

tea?’ ‘No,’ I said, ‘and I don’t intend to.’ ‘Ha, ha! you are playing

off your pride against your stomach! That sort of heroism doesn’t sit

well on you,’ she said.

“With that she did as she had said she would; she went to bed, and did

not lock her door. In the morning she came out. ‘Are you quite mad?’

she said, sharply. ‘Why, you’ll die of hunger like this.’ ‘Forgive me,’

I said. ‘No, I won’t, and I won’t marry you. I’ve said it. Surely you

haven’t sat in this chair all night without sleeping?’ ‘I didn’t

sleep,’ I said. ‘H’m! how sensible of you. And are you going to have no

breakfast or dinner today?’ ‘I told you I wouldn’t. Forgive me!’

‘You’ve no idea how unbecoming this sort of thing is to you,’ she said,

‘it’s like putting a saddle on a cow’s back. Do you think you are

frightening me? My word, what a dreadful thing that you should sit here

and eat no food! How terribly frightened I am!’ She wasn’t angry long,

and didn’t seem to remember my offence at all. I was surprised, for she

is a vindictive, resentful woman—but then I thought that perhaps she

despised me too much to feel any resentment against me. And that’s the

truth.

“She came up to me and said, ‘Do you know who the Pope of Rome is?’

‘I’ve heard of him,’ I said. ‘I suppose you’ve read the Universal

History, Parfen Semeonovitch, haven’t you?’ she asked. ‘I’ve learned

nothing at all,’ I said. ‘Then I’ll lend it to you to read. You must

know there was a Roman Pope once, and he was very angry with a certain

Emperor; so the Emperor came and neither ate nor drank, but knelt

before the Pope’s palace till he should be forgiven. And what sort of

vows do you think that Emperor was making during all those days on his

knees? Stop, I’ll read it to you!’ Then she read me a lot of verses,

where it said that the Emperor spent all the time vowing vengeance

against the Pope. ‘You don’t mean to say you don’t approve of the poem,

Parfen Semeonovitch,’ she says. ‘All you have read out is perfectly

true,’ say I. ‘Aha!’ says she, ‘you admit it’s true, do you? And you

are making vows to yourself that if I marry you, you will remind me of

all this, and take it out of me.’ ‘I don’t know,’ I say, ‘perhaps I was

thinking like that, and perhaps I was not. I’m not thinking of anything

just now.’ ‘What are your thoughts, then?’ ‘I’m thinking that when you

rise from your chair and go past me, I watch you, and follow you with

my eyes; if your dress does but rustle, my heart sinks; if you leave

the room, I remember every little word and action, and what your voice

sounded like, and what you said. I thought of nothing all last night,

but sat here listening to your sleeping breath, and heard you move a

little, twice.’ ‘And as for your attack upon me,’ she says, ‘I suppose

you never once thought of \_that?\_’ ‘Perhaps I did think of it, and

perhaps not,’ I say. ‘And what if I don’t either forgive you or marry,

you?’ ‘I tell you I shall go and drown myself.’ ‘H’m!’ she said, and

then relapsed into silence. Then she got angry, and went out. ‘I

suppose you’d murder me before you drowned yourself, though!’ she cried

as she left the room.

“An hour later, she came to me again, looking melancholy. ‘I will marry

you, Parfen Semeonovitch,’ she says, not because I’m frightened of you,

but because it’s all the same to me how I ruin myself. And how can I do

it better? Sit down; they’ll bring you some dinner directly. And if I

do marry you, I’ll be a faithful wife to you—you need not doubt that.’

Then she thought a bit, and said, ‘At all events, you are not a

flunkey; at first, I thought you were no better than a flunkey.’ And

she arranged the wedding and fixed the day straight away on the spot.

“Then, in another week, she had run away again, and came here to

Lebedeff’s; and when I found her here, she said to me, ‘I’m not going

to renounce you altogether, but I wish to put off the wedding a bit

longer yet—just as long as I like—for I am still my own mistress; so

you may wait, if you like.’ That’s how the matter stands between us

now. What do you think of all this, Lef Nicolaievitch?”

“‘What do you think of it yourself?” replied the prince, looking sadly

at Rogojin.

“As if I can think anything about it! I—” He was about to say more, but

stopped in despair.

The prince rose again, as if he would leave.

“At all events, I shall not interfere with you!” he murmured, as though

making answer to some secret thought of his own.

“I’ll tell you what!” cried Rogojin, and his eyes flashed fire. “I

can’t understand your yielding her to me like this; I don’t understand

it. Have you given up loving her altogether? At first you suffered

badly—I know it—I saw it. Besides, why did you come post-haste after

us? Out of pity, eh? He, he, he!” His mouth curved in a mocking smile.

“Do you think I am deceiving you?” asked the prince.

“No! I trust you—but I can’t understand. It seems to me that your pity

is greater than my love.” A hungry longing to speak his mind out seemed

to flash in the man’s eyes, combined with an intense anger.

“Your love is mingled with hatred, and therefore, when your love

passes, there will be the greater misery,” said the prince. “I tell you

this, Parfen—”

“What! that I’ll cut her throat, you mean?”

The prince shuddered.

“You’ll hate her afterwards for all your present love, and for all the

torment you are suffering on her account now. What seems to me the most

extraordinary thing is, that she can again consent to marry you, after

all that has passed between you. When I heard the news yesterday, I

could hardly bring myself to believe it. Why, she has run twice from

you, from the very altar rails, as it were. She must have some

presentiment of evil. What can she want with you now? Your money?

Nonsense! Besides, I should think you must have made a fairly large

hole in your fortune already. Surely it is not because she is so very

anxious to find a husband? She could find many a one besides yourself.

Anyone would be better than you, because you will murder her, and I

feel sure she must know that but too well by now. Is it because you

love her so passionately? Indeed, that may be it. I have heard that

there are women who want just that kind of love... but still...” The

prince paused, reflectively.

“What are you grinning at my father’s portrait again for?” asked

Rogojin, suddenly. He was carefully observing every change in the

expression of the prince’s face.

“I smiled because the idea came into my head that if it were not for

this unhappy passion of yours you might have, and would have, become

just such a man as your father, and that very quickly, too. You’d have

settled down in this house of yours with some silent and obedient wife.

You would have spoken rarely, trusted no one, heeded no one, and

thought of nothing but making money.”

“Laugh away! She said exactly the same, almost word for word, when she

saw my father’s portrait. It’s remarkable how entirely you and she are

at one now-a-days.”

“What, has she been here?” asked the prince with curiosity.

“Yes! She looked long at the portrait and asked all about my father.

‘You’d be just such another,’ she said at last, and laughed. ‘You have

such strong passions, Parfen,’ she said, ‘that they’d have taken you to

Siberia in no time if you had not, luckily, intelligence as well. For

you have a good deal of intelligence.’ (She said this—believe it or

not. The first time I ever heard anything of that sort from her.)

‘You’d soon have thrown up all this rowdyism that you indulge in now,

and you’d have settled down to quiet, steady money-making, because you

have little education; and here you’d have stayed just like your father

before you. And you’d have loved your money so that you’d amass not two

million, like him, but ten million; and you’d have died of hunger on

your money bags to finish up with, for you carry everything to

extremes.’ There, that’s exactly word for word as she said it to me.

She never talked to me like that before. She always talks nonsense and

laughs when she’s with me. We went all over this old house together. ‘I

shall change all this,’ I said, ‘or else I’ll buy a new house for the

wedding.’ ‘No, no!’ she said, ‘don’t touch anything; leave it all as it

is; I shall live with your mother when I marry you.’

“I took her to see my mother, and she was as respectful and kind as

though she were her own daughter. Mother has been almost demented ever

since father died—she’s an old woman. She sits and bows from her chair

to everyone she sees. If you left her alone and didn’t feed her for

three days, I don’t believe she would notice it. Well, I took her hand,

and I said, ‘Give your blessing to this lady, mother, she’s going to be

my wife.’ So Nastasia kissed mother’s hand with great feeling. ‘She

must have suffered terribly, hasn’t she?’ she said. She saw this book

here lying before me. ‘What! have you begun to read Russian history?’

she asked. She told me once in Moscow, you know, that I had better get

Solovieff’s Russian History and read it, because I knew nothing.

‘That’s good,’ she said, ‘you go on like that, reading books. I’ll make

you a list myself of the books you ought to read first—shall I?’ She

had never once spoken to me like this before; it was the first time I

felt I could breathe before her like a living creature.”

“I’m very, very glad to hear of this, Parfen,” said the prince, with

real feeling. “Who knows? Maybe God will yet bring you near to one

another.”

“Never, never!” cried Rogojin, excitedly.

“Look here, Parfen; if you love her so much, surely you must be anxious

to earn her respect? And if you do so wish, surely you may hope to? I

said just now that I considered it extraordinary that she could still

be ready to marry you. Well, though I cannot yet understand it, I feel

sure she must have some good reason, or she wouldn’t do it. She is sure

of your love; but besides that, she must attribute \_something\_ else to

you—some good qualities, otherwise the thing would not be. What you

have just said confirms my words. You say yourself that she found it

possible to speak to you quite differently from her usual manner. You

are suspicious, you know, and jealous, therefore when anything annoying

happens to you, you exaggerate its significance. Of course, of course,

she does not think so ill of you as you say. Why, if she did, she would

simply be walking to death by drowning or by the knife, with her eyes

wide open, when she married you. It is impossible! As if anybody would

go to their death deliberately!”

Rogojin listened to the prince’s excited words with a bitter smile. His

conviction was, apparently, unalterable.

“How dreadfully you look at me, Parfen!” said the prince, with a

feeling of dread.

“Water or the knife?” said the latter, at last. “Ha, ha—that’s exactly

why she is going to marry me, because she knows for certain that the

knife awaits her. Prince, can it be that you don’t even yet see what’s

at the root of it all?”

“I don’t understand you.”

“Perhaps he really doesn’t understand me! They do say that you are

a—you know what! She loves another—there, you can understand that much!

Just as I love her, exactly so she loves another man. And that other

man is—do you know who? It’s you. There—you didn’t know that, eh?”

“I?”

“You, you! She has loved you ever since that day, her birthday! Only

she thinks she cannot marry you, because it would be the ruin of you.

‘Everybody knows what sort of a woman I am,’ she says. She told me all

this herself, to my very face! She’s afraid of disgracing and ruining

you, she says, but it doesn’t matter about me. She can marry me all

right! Notice how much consideration she shows for me!”

“But why did she run away to me, and then again from me to—”

“From you to me? Ha, ha! that’s nothing! Why, she always acts as though

she were in a delirium now-a-days! Either she says, ‘Come on, I’ll

marry you! Let’s have the wedding quickly!’ and fixes the day, and

seems in a hurry for it, and when it begins to come near she feels

frightened; or else some other idea gets into her head—goodness knows!

you’ve seen her—you know how she goes on—laughing and crying and

raving! There’s nothing extraordinary about her having run away from

you! She ran away because she found out how dearly she loved you. She

could not bear to be near you. You said just now that I had found her

at Moscow, when she ran away from you. I didn’t do anything of the

sort; she came to me herself, straight from you. ‘Name the day—I’m

ready!’ she said. ‘Let’s have some champagne, and go and hear the

gipsies sing!’ I tell you she’d have thrown herself into the water long

ago if it were not for me! She doesn’t do it because I am, perhaps,

even more dreadful to her than the water! She’s marrying me out of

spite; if she marries me, I tell you, it will be for spite!”

“But how do you, how can you—” began the prince, gazing with dread and

horror at Rogojin.

“Why don’t you finish your sentence? Shall I tell you what you were

thinking to yourself just then? You were thinking, ‘How can she marry

him after this? How can it possibly be permitted?’ Oh, I know what you

were thinking about!”

“I didn’t come here for that purpose, Parfen. That was not in my mind—”

“That may be! Perhaps you didn’t \_come\_ with the idea, but the idea is

certainly there \_now!\_ Ha, ha! well, that’s enough! What are you upset

about? Didn’t you really know it all before? You astonish me!”

“All this is mere jealousy—it is some malady of yours, Parfen! You

exaggerate everything,” said the prince, excessively agitated. “What

are you doing?”

“Let go of it!” said Parfen, seizing from the prince’s hand a knife

which the latter had at that moment taken up from the table, where it

lay beside the history. Parfen replaced it where it had been.

“I seemed to know it—I felt it, when I was coming back to Petersburg,”

continued the prince, “I did not want to come, I wished to forget all

this, to uproot it from my memory altogether! Well, good-bye—what is

the matter?”

He had absently taken up the knife a second time, and again Rogojin

snatched it from his hand, and threw it down on the table. It was a

plain looking knife, with a bone handle, a blade about eight inches

long, and broad in proportion, it did not clasp.

Seeing that the prince was considerably struck by the fact that he had

twice seized this knife out of his hand, Rogojin caught it up with some

irritation, put it inside the book, and threw the latter across to

another table.

“Do you cut your pages with it, or what?” asked Muishkin, still rather

absently, as though unable to throw off a deep preoccupation into which

the conversation had thrown him.

“Yes.”

“It’s a garden knife, isn’t it?”

“Yes. Can’t one cut pages with a garden knife?”

“It’s quite new.”

“Well, what of that? Can’t I buy a new knife if I like?” shouted

Rogojin furiously, his irritation growing with every word.

The prince shuddered, and gazed fixedly at Parfen. Suddenly he burst

out laughing.

“Why, what an idea!” he said. “I didn’t mean to ask you any of these

questions; I was thinking of something quite different! But my head is

heavy, and I seem so absent-minded nowadays! Well, good-bye—I can’t

remember what I wanted to say—good-bye!”

“Not that way,” said Rogojin.

“There, I’ve forgotten that too!”

“This way—come along—I’ll show you.”

IV.

They passed through the same rooms which the prince had traversed on

his arrival. In the largest there were pictures on the walls, portraits

and landscapes of little interest. Over the door, however, there was

one of strange and rather striking shape; it was six or seven feet in

length, and not more than a foot in height. It represented the Saviour

just taken from the cross.

The prince glanced at it, but took no further notice. He moved on

hastily, as though anxious to get out of the house. But Rogojin

suddenly stopped underneath the picture.

“My father picked up all these pictures very cheap at auctions, and so

on,” he said; “they are all rubbish, except the one over the door, and

that is valuable. A man offered five hundred roubles for it last week.”

“Yes—that’s a copy of a Holbein,” said the prince, looking at it again,

“and a good copy, too, so far as I am able to judge. I saw the picture

abroad, and could not forget it—what’s the matter?”

Rogojin had dropped the subject of the picture and walked on. Of course

his strange frame of mind was sufficient to account for his conduct;

but, still, it seemed queer to the prince that he should so abruptly

drop a conversation commenced by himself. Rogojin did not take any

notice of his question.

“Lef Nicolaievitch,” said Rogojin, after a pause, during which the two

walked along a little further, “I have long wished to ask you, do you

believe in God?”

“How strangely you speak, and how odd you look!” said the other,

involuntarily.

“I like looking at that picture,” muttered Rogojin, not noticing,

apparently, that the prince had not answered his question.

“That picture! That picture!” cried Muishkin, struck by a sudden idea.

“Why, a man’s faith might be ruined by looking at that picture!”

“So it is!” said Rogojin, unexpectedly. They had now reached the front

door.

The prince stopped.

“How?” he said. “What do you mean? I was half joking, and you took me

up quite seriously! Why do you ask me whether I believe in God?”

“Oh, no particular reason. I meant to ask you before—many people are

unbelievers nowadays, especially Russians, I have been told. You ought

to know—you’ve lived abroad.”

Rogojin laughed bitterly as he said these words, and opening the door,

held it for the prince to pass out. Muishkin looked surprised, but went

out. The other followed him as far as the landing of the outer stairs,

and shut the door behind him. They both now stood facing one another,

as though oblivious of where they were, or what they had to do next.

“Well, good-bye!” said the prince, holding out his hand.

“Good-bye,” said Rogojin, pressing it hard, but quite mechanically.

The prince made one step forward, and then turned round.

“As to faith,” he said, smiling, and evidently unwilling to leave

Rogojin in this state—“as to faith, I had four curious conversations in

two days, a week or so ago. One morning I met a man in the train, and

made acquaintance with him at once. I had often heard of him as a very

learned man, but an atheist; and I was very glad of the opportunity of

conversing with so eminent and clever a person. He doesn’t believe in

God, and he talked a good deal about it, but all the while it appeared

to me that he was speaking \_outside the subject\_. And it has always

struck me, both in speaking to such men and in reading their books,

that they do not seem really to be touching on that at all, though on

the surface they may appear to do so. I told him this, but I dare say I

did not clearly express what I meant, for he could not understand me.

“That same evening I stopped at a small provincial hotel, and it so

happened that a dreadful murder had been committed there the night

before, and everybody was talking about it. Two peasants—elderly men

and old friends—had had tea together there the night before, and were

to occupy the same bedroom. They were not drunk but one of them had

noticed for the first time that his friend possessed a silver watch

which he was wearing on a chain. He was by no means a thief, and was,

as peasants go, a rich man; but this watch so fascinated him that he

could not restrain himself. He took a knife, and when his friend turned

his back, he came up softly behind, raised his eyes to heaven, crossed

himself, and saying earnestly—‘God forgive me, for Christ’s sake!’ he

cut his friend’s throat like a sheep, and took the watch.”

Rogojin roared with laughter. He laughed as though he were in a sort of

fit. It was strange to see him laughing so after the sombre mood he had

been in just before.

“Oh, I like that! That beats anything!” he cried convulsively, panting

for breath. “One is an absolute unbeliever; the other is such a

thorough-going believer that he murders his friend to the tune of a

prayer! Oh, prince, prince, that’s too good for anything! You can’t

have invented it. It’s the best thing I’ve heard!”

“Next morning I went out for a stroll through the town,” continued the

prince, so soon as Rogojin was a little quieter, though his laughter

still burst out at intervals, “and soon observed a drunken-looking

soldier staggering about the pavement. He came up to me and said, ‘Buy

my silver cross, sir! You shall have it for fourpence—it’s real

silver.’ I looked, and there he held a cross, just taken off his own

neck, evidently, a large tin one, made after the Byzantine pattern. I

fished out fourpence, and put his cross on my own neck, and I could see

by his face that he was as pleased as he could be at the thought that

he had succeeded in cheating a foolish gentleman, and away he went to

drink the value of his cross. At that time everything that I saw made a

tremendous impression upon me. I had understood nothing about Russia

before, and had only vague and fantastic memories of it. So I thought,

‘I will wait awhile before I condemn this Judas. Only God knows what

may be hidden in the hearts of drunkards.’

“Well, I went homewards, and near the hotel I came across a poor woman,

carrying a child—a baby of some six weeks old. The mother was quite a

girl herself. The baby was smiling up at her, for the first time in its

life, just at that moment; and while I watched the woman she suddenly

crossed herself, oh, so devoutly! ‘What is it, my good woman?’ I asked

her. (I was never but asking questions then!) ‘Exactly as is a mother’s

joy when her baby smiles for the first time into her eyes, so is God’s

joy when one of His children turns and prays to Him for the first time,

with all his heart!’ This is what that poor woman said to me, almost

word for word; and such a deep, refined, truly religious thought it

was—a thought in which the whole essence of Christianity was expressed

in one flash—that is, the recognition of God as our Father, and of

God’s joy in men as His own children, which is the chief idea of

Christ. She was a simple country-woman—a mother, it’s true—and perhaps,

who knows, she may have been the wife of the drunken soldier!

“Listen, Parfen; you put a question to me just now. This is my reply.

The essence of religious feeling has nothing to do with reason, or

atheism, or crime, or acts of any kind—it has nothing to do with these

things—and never had. There is something besides all this, something

which the arguments of the atheists can never touch. But the principal

thing, and the conclusion of my argument, is that this is most clearly

seen in the heart of a Russian. This is a conviction which I have

gained while I have been in this Russia of ours. Yes, Parfen! there is

work to be done; there is work to be done in this Russian world!

Remember what talks we used to have in Moscow! And I never wished to

come here at all; and I never thought to meet you like this, Parfen!

Well, well—good-bye—good-bye! God be with you!”

He turned and went downstairs.

“Lef Nicolaievitch!” cried Parfen, before he had reached the next

landing. “Have you got that cross you bought from the soldier with

you?”

“Yes, I have,” and the prince stopped again.

“Show it me, will you?”

A new fancy! The prince reflected, and then mounted the stairs once

more. He pulled out the cross without taking it off his neck.

“Give it to me,” said Parfen.

“Why? do you—”

The prince would rather have kept this particular cross.

“I’ll wear it; and you shall have mine. I’ll take it off at once.”

“You wish to exchange crosses? Very well, Parfen, if that’s the case,

I’m glad enough—that makes us brothers, you know.”

The prince took off his tin cross, Parfen his gold one, and the

exchange was made.

Parfen was silent. With sad surprise the prince observed that the look

of distrust, the bitter, ironical smile, had still not altogether left

his newly-adopted brother’s face. At moments, at all events, it showed

itself but too plainly,

At last Rogojin took the prince’s hand, and stood so for some moments,

as though he could not make up his mind. Then he drew him along,

murmuring almost inaudibly,

“Come!”

They stopped on the landing, and rang the bell at a door opposite to

Parfen’s own lodging.

An old woman opened to them and bowed low to Parfen, who asked her some

questions hurriedly, but did not wait to hear her answer. He led the

prince on through several dark, cold-looking rooms, spotlessly clean,

with white covers over all the furniture.

Without the ceremony of knocking, Parfen entered a small apartment,

furnished like a drawing-room, but with a polished mahogany partition

dividing one half of it from what was probably a bedroom. In one corner

of this room sat an old woman in an arm-chair, close to the stove. She

did not look very old, and her face was a pleasant, round one; but she

was white-haired and, as one could detect at the first glance, quite in

her second childhood. She wore a black woollen dress, with a black

handkerchief round her neck and shoulders, and a white cap with black

ribbons. Her feet were raised on a footstool. Beside her sat another

old woman, also dressed in mourning, and silently knitting a stocking;

this was evidently a companion. They both looked as though they never

broke the silence. The first old woman, so soon as she saw Rogojin and

the prince, smiled and bowed courteously several times, in token of her

gratification at their visit.

“Mother,” said Rogojin, kissing her hand, “here is my great friend,

Prince Muishkin; we have exchanged crosses; he was like a real brother

to me at Moscow at one time, and did a great deal for me. Bless him,

mother, as you would bless your own son. Wait a moment, let me arrange

your hands for you.”

But the old lady, before Parfen had time to touch her, raised her right

hand, and, with three fingers held up, devoutly made the sign of the

cross three times over the prince. She then nodded her head kindly at

him once more.

“There, come along, Lef Nicolaievitch; that’s all I brought you here

for,” said Rogojin.

When they reached the stairs again he added:

“She understood nothing of what I said to her, and did not know what I

wanted her to do, and yet she blessed you; that shows she wished to do

so herself. Well, goodbye; it’s time you went, and I must go too.”

He opened his own door.

“Well, let me at least embrace you and say goodbye, you strange

fellow!” cried the prince, looking with gentle reproach at Rogojin, and

advancing towards him. But the latter had hardly raised his arms when

he dropped them again. He could not make up his mind to it; he turned

away from the prince in order to avoid looking at him. He could not

embrace him.

“Don’t be afraid,” he muttered, indistinctly, “though I have taken your

cross, I shall not murder you for your watch.” So saying, he laughed

suddenly, and strangely. Then in a moment his face became transfigured;

he grew deadly white, his lips trembled, his eyes burned like fire. He

stretched out his arms and held the prince tightly to him, and said in

a strangled voice:

“Well, take her! It’s Fate! She’s yours. I surrender her.... Remember

Rogojin!” And pushing the prince from him, without looking back at him,

he hurriedly entered his own flat, and banged the door.

V.

It was late now, nearly half-past two, and the prince did not find

General Epanchin at home. He left a card, and determined to look up

Colia, who had a room at a small hotel near. Colia was not in, but he

was informed that he might be back shortly, and had left word that if

he were not in by half-past three it was to be understood that he had

gone to Pavlofsk to General Epanchin’s, and would dine there. The

prince decided to wait till half-past three, and ordered some dinner.

At half-past three there was no sign of Colia. The prince waited until

four o’clock, and then strolled off mechanically wherever his feet

should carry him.

In early summer there are often magnificent days in St.

Petersburg—bright, hot and still. This happened to be such a day.

For some time the prince wandered about without aim or object. He did

not know the town well. He stopped to look about him on bridges, at

street corners. He entered a confectioner’s shop to rest, once. He was

in a state of nervous excitement and perturbation; he noticed nothing

and no one; and he felt a craving for solitude, to be alone with his

thoughts and his emotions, and to give himself up to them passively. He

loathed the idea of trying to answer the questions that would rise up

in his heart and mind. “I am not to blame for all this,” he thought to

himself, half unconsciously.

Towards six o’clock he found himself at the station of the

Tsarsko-Selski railway.

He was tired of solitude now; a new rush of feeling took hold of him,

and a flood of light chased away the gloom, for a moment, from his

soul. He took a ticket to Pavlofsk, and determined to get there as fast

as he could, but something stopped him; a reality, and not a fantasy,

as he was inclined to think it. He was about to take his place in a

carriage, when he suddenly threw away his ticket and came out again,

disturbed and thoughtful. A few moments later, in the street, he

recalled something that had bothered him all the afternoon. He caught

himself engaged in a strange occupation which he now recollected he had

taken up at odd moments for the last few hours—it was looking about all

around him for something, he did not know what. He had forgotten it for

a while, half an hour or so, and now, suddenly, the uneasy search had

recommenced.

But he had hardly become conscious of this curious phenomenon, when

another recollection suddenly swam through his brain, interesting him

for the moment, exceedingly. He remembered that the last time he had

been engaged in looking around him for the unknown something, he was

standing before a cutler’s shop, in the window of which were exposed

certain goods for sale. He was extremely anxious now to discover

whether this shop and these goods really existed, or whether the whole

thing had been a hallucination.

He felt in a very curious condition today, a condition similar to that

which had preceded his fits in bygone years.

He remembered that at such times he had been particularly absentminded,

and could not discriminate between objects and persons unless he

concentrated special attention upon them.

He remembered seeing something in the window marked at sixty copecks.

Therefore, if the shop existed and if this object were really in the

window, it would prove that he had been able to concentrate his

attention on this article at a moment when, as a general rule, his

absence of mind would have been too great to admit of any such

concentration; in fact, very shortly after he had left the railway

station in such a state of agitation.

So he walked back looking about him for the shop, and his heart beat

with intolerable impatience. Ah! here was the very shop, and there was

the article marked “60 cop.” Of course, it’s sixty copecks, he thought,

and certainly worth no more. This idea amused him and he laughed.

But it was a hysterical laugh; he was feeling terribly oppressed. He

remembered clearly that just here, standing before this window, he had

suddenly turned round, just as earlier in the day he had turned and

found the dreadful eyes of Rogojin fixed upon him. Convinced,

therefore, that in this respect at all events he had been under no

delusion, he left the shop and went on.

This must be thought out; it was clear that there had been no

hallucination at the station then, either; something had actually

happened to him, on both occasions; there was no doubt of it. But again

a loathing for all mental exertion overmastered him; he would not think

it out now, he would put it off and think of something else. He

remembered that during his epileptic fits, or rather immediately

preceding them, he had always experienced a moment or two when his

whole heart, and mind, and body seemed to wake up to vigour and light;

when he became filled with joy and hope, and all his anxieties seemed

to be swept away for ever; these moments were but presentiments, as it

were, of the one final second (it was never more than a second) in

which the fit came upon him. That second, of course, was inexpressible.

When his attack was over, and the prince reflected on his symptoms, he

used to say to himself: “These moments, short as they are, when I feel

such extreme consciousness of myself, and consequently more of life

than at other times, are due only to the disease—to the sudden rupture

of normal conditions. Therefore they are not really a higher kind of

life, but a lower.” This reasoning, however, seemed to end in a

paradox, and lead to the further consideration:—“What matter though it

be only disease, an abnormal tension of the brain, if when I recall and

analyze the moment, it seems to have been one of harmony and beauty in

the highest degree—an instant of deepest sensation, overflowing with

unbounded joy and rapture, ecstatic devotion, and completest life?”

Vague though this sounds, it was perfectly comprehensible to Muishkin,

though he knew that it was but a feeble expression of his sensations.

That there was, indeed, beauty and harmony in those abnormal moments,

that they really contained the highest synthesis of life, he could not

doubt, nor even admit the possibility of doubt. He felt that they were

not analogous to the fantastic and unreal dreams due to intoxication by

hashish, opium or wine. Of that he could judge, when the attack was

over. These instants were characterized—to define it in a word—by an

intense quickening of the sense of personality. Since, in the last

conscious moment preceding the attack, he could say to himself, with

full understanding of his words: “I would give my whole life for this

one instant,” then doubtless to him it really was worth a lifetime. For

the rest, he thought the dialectical part of his argument of little

worth; he saw only too clearly that the result of these ecstatic

moments was stupefaction, mental darkness, idiocy. No argument was

possible on that point. His conclusion, his estimate of the “moment,”

doubtless contained some error, yet the reality of the sensation

troubled him. What’s more unanswerable than a fact? And this fact had

occurred. The prince had confessed unreservedly to himself that the

feeling of intense beatitude in that crowded moment made the moment

worth a lifetime. “I feel then,” he said one day to Rogojin in Moscow,

“I feel then as if I understood those amazing words—‘There shall be no

more time.’” And he added with a smile: “No doubt the epileptic Mahomet

refers to that same moment when he says that he visited all the

dwellings of Allah, in less time than was needed to empty his pitcher

of water.” Yes, he had often met Rogojin in Moscow, and many were the

subjects they discussed. “He told me I had been a brother to him,”

thought the prince. “He said so today, for the first time.”

He was sitting in the Summer Garden on a seat under a tree, and his

mind dwelt on the matter. It was about seven o’clock, and the place was

empty. The stifling atmosphere foretold a storm, and the prince felt a

certain charm in the contemplative mood which possessed him. He found

pleasure, too, in gazing at the exterior objects around him. All the

time he was trying to forget some thing, to escape from some idea that

haunted him; but melancholy thoughts came back, though he would so

willingly have escaped from them. He remembered suddenly how he had

been talking to the waiter, while he dined, about a recently committed

murder which the whole town was discussing, and as he thought of it

something strange came over him. He was seized all at once by a violent

desire, almost a temptation, against which he strove in vain.

He jumped up and walked off as fast as he could towards the “Petersburg

Side.” [One of the quarters of St. Petersburg.] He had asked someone, a

little while before, to show him which was the Petersburg Side, on the

banks of the Neva. He had not gone there, however; and he knew very

well that it was of no use to go now, for he would certainly not find

Lebedeff’s relation at home. He had the address, but she must certainly

have gone to Pavlofsk, or Colia would have let him know. If he were to

go now, it would merely be out of curiosity, but a sudden, new idea had

come into his head.

However, it was something to move on and know where he was going. A

minute later he was still moving on, but without knowing anything. He

could no longer think out his new idea. He tried to take an interest in

all he saw; in the sky, in the Neva. He spoke to some children he met.

He felt his epileptic condition becoming more and more developed. The

evening was very close; thunder was heard some way off.

The prince was haunted all that day by the face of Lebedeff’s nephew

whom he had seen for the first time that morning, just as one is

haunted at times by some persistent musical refrain. By a curious

association of ideas, the young man always appeared as the murderer of

whom Lebedeff had spoken when introducing him to Muishkin. Yes, he had

read something about the murder, and that quite recently. Since he came

to Russia, he had heard many stories of this kind, and was interested

in them. His conversation with the waiter, an hour ago, chanced to be

on the subject of this murder of the Zemarins, and the latter had

agreed with him about it. He thought of the waiter again, and decided

that he was no fool, but a steady, intelligent man: though, said he to

himself, “God knows what he may really be; in a country with which one

is unfamiliar it is difficult to understand the people one meets.” He

was beginning to have a passionate faith in the Russian soul, however,

and what discoveries he had made in the last six months, what

unexpected discoveries! But every soul is a mystery, and depths of

mystery lie in the soul of a Russian. He had been intimate with

Rogojin, for example, and a brotherly friendship had sprung up between

them—yet did he really know him? What chaos and ugliness fills the

world at times! What a self-satisfied rascal is that nephew of

Lebedeff’s! “But what am I thinking,” continued the prince to himself.

“Can he really have committed that crime? Did he kill those six

persons? I seem to be confusing things... how strange it all is.... My

head goes round... And Lebedeff’s daughter—how sympathetic and charming

her face was as she held the child in her arms! What an innocent look

and child-like laugh she had! It is curious that I had forgotten her

until now. I expect Lebedeff adores her—and I really believe, when I

think of it, that as sure as two and two make four, he is fond of that

nephew, too!”

Well, why should he judge them so hastily! Could he really say what

they were, after one short visit? Even Lebedeff seemed an enigma today.

Did he expect to find him so? He had never seen him like that before.

Lebedeff and the Comtesse du Barry! Good Heavens! If Rogojin should

really kill someone, it would not, at any rate, be such a senseless,

chaotic affair. A knife made to a special pattern, and six people

killed in a kind of delirium. But Rogojin also had a knife made to a

special pattern. Can it be that Rogojin wishes to murder anyone? The

prince began to tremble violently. “It is a crime on my part to imagine

anything so base, with such cynical frankness.” His face reddened with

shame at the thought; and then there came across him as in a flash the

memory of the incidents at the Pavlofsk station, and at the other

station in the morning; and the question asked him by Rogojin about

\_the eyes\_ and Rogojin’s cross, that he was even now wearing; and the

benediction of Rogojin’s mother; and his embrace on the darkened

staircase—that last supreme renunciation—and now, to find himself full

of this new “idea,” staring into shop-windows, and looking round for

things—how base he was!

Despair overmastered his soul; he would not go on, he would go back to

his hotel; he even turned and went the other way; but a moment after he

changed his mind again and went on in the old direction.

Why, here he was on the Petersburg Side already, quite close to the

house! Where was his “idea”? He was marching along without it now. Yes,

his malady was coming back, it was clear enough; all this gloom and

heaviness, all these “ideas,” were nothing more nor less than a fit

coming on; perhaps he would have a fit this very day.

But just now all the gloom and darkness had fled, his heart felt full

of joy and hope, there was no such thing as doubt. And yes, he hadn’t

seen her for so long; he really must see her. He wished he could meet

Rogojin; he would take his hand, and they would go to her together. His

heart was pure, he was no rival of Parfen’s. Tomorrow, he would go and

tell him that he had seen her. Why, he had only come for the sole

purpose of seeing her, all the way from Moscow! Perhaps she might be

here still, who knows? She might not have gone away to Pavlofsk yet.

Yes, all this must be put straight and above-board, there must be no

more passionate renouncements, such as Rogojin’s. It must all be clear

as day. Cannot Rogojin’s soul bear the light? He said he did not love

her with sympathy and pity; true, he added that “your pity is greater

than my love,” but he was not quite fair on himself there. Kin! Rogojin

reading a book—wasn’t that sympathy beginning? Did it not show that he

comprehended his relations with her? And his story of waiting day and

night for her forgiveness? That didn’t look quite like passion alone.

And as to her face, could it inspire nothing but passion? Could her

face inspire passion at all now? Oh, it inspired suffering, grief,

overwhelming grief of the soul! A poignant, agonizing memory swept over

the prince’s heart.

Yes, agonizing. He remembered how he had suffered that first day when

he thought he observed in her the symptoms of madness. He had almost

fallen into despair. How could he have lost his hold upon her when she

ran away from him to Rogojin? He ought to have run after her himself,

rather than wait for news as he had done. Can Rogojin have failed to

observe, up to now, that she is mad? Rogojin attributes her strangeness

to other causes, to passion! What insane jealousy! What was it he had

hinted at in that suggestion of his? The prince suddenly blushed, and

shuddered to his very heart.

But why recall all this? There was insanity on both sides. For him, the

prince, to love this woman with passion, was unthinkable. It would be

cruel and inhuman. Yes. Rogojin is not fair to himself; he has a large

heart; he has aptitude for sympathy. When he learns the truth, and

finds what a pitiable being is this injured, broken, half-insane

creature, he will forgive her all the torment she has caused him. He

will become her slave, her brother, her friend. Compassion will teach

even Rogojin, it will show him how to reason. Compassion is the chief

law of human existence. Oh, how guilty he felt towards Rogojin! And,

for a few warm, hasty words spoken in Moscow, Parfen had called him

“brother,” while he—but no, this was delirium! It would all come right!

That gloomy Parfen had implied that his faith was waning; he must

suffer dreadfully. He said he liked to look at that picture; it was not

that he liked it, but he felt the need of looking at it. Rogojin was

not merely a passionate soul; he was a fighter. He was fighting for the

restoration of his dying faith. He must have something to hold on to

and believe, and someone to believe in. What a strange picture that of

Holbein’s is! Why, this is the street, and here’s the house, No. 16.

The prince rang the bell, and asked for Nastasia Philipovna. The lady

of the house came out, and stated that Nastasia had gone to stay with

Daria Alexeyevna at Pavlofsk, and might be there some days.

Madame Filisoff was a little woman of forty, with a cunning face, and

crafty, piercing eyes. When, with an air of mystery, she asked her

visitor’s name, he refused at first to answer, but in a moment he

changed his mind, and left strict instructions that it should be given

to Nastasia Philipovna. The urgency of his request seemed to impress

Madame Filisoff, and she put on a knowing expression, as if to say,

“You need not be afraid, I quite understand.” The prince’s name

evidently was a great surprise to her. He stood and looked absently at

her for a moment, then turned, and took the road back to his hotel. But

he went away not as he came. A great change had suddenly come over him.

He went blindly forward; his knees shook under him; he was tormented by

“ideas”; his lips were blue, and trembled with a feeble, meaningless

smile. His demon was upon him once more.

What had happened to him? Why was his brow clammy with drops of

moisture, his knees shaking beneath him, and his soul oppressed with a

cold gloom? Was it because he had just seen these dreadful eyes again?

Why, he had left the Summer Garden on purpose to see them; that had

been his “idea.” He had wished to assure himself that he would see them

once more at that house. Then why was he so overwhelmed now, having

seen them as he expected? just as though he had not expected to see

them! Yes, they were the very same eyes; and no doubt about it. The

same that he had seen in the crowd that morning at the station, the

same that he had surprised in Rogojin’s rooms some hours later, when

the latter had replied to his inquiry with a sneering laugh, “Well,

whose eyes were they?” Then for the third time they had appeared just

as he was getting into the train on his way to see Aglaya. He had had a

strong impulse to rush up to Rogojin, and repeat his words of the

morning “Whose eyes are they?” Instead he had fled from the station,

and knew nothing more, until he found himself gazing into the window of

a cutler’s shop, and wondering if a knife with a staghorn handle would

cost more than sixty copecks. And as the prince sat dreaming in the

Summer Garden under a lime-tree, a wicked demon had come and whispered

in his car: “Rogojin has been spying upon you and watching you all the

morning in a frenzy of desperation. When he finds you have not gone to

Pavlofsk—a terrible discovery for him—he will surely go at once to that

house in Petersburg Side, and watch for you there, although only this

morning you gave your word of honour not to see \_her\_, and swore that

you had not come to Petersburg for that purpose.” And thereupon the

prince had hastened off to that house, and what was there in the fact

that he had met Rogojin there? He had only seen a wretched, suffering

creature, whose state of mind was gloomy and miserable, but most

comprehensible. In the morning Rogojin had seemed to be trying to keep

out of the way; but at the station this afternoon he had stood out, he

had concealed himself, indeed, less than the prince himself; at the

house, now, he had stood fifty yards off on the other side of the road,

with folded hands, watching, plainly in view and apparently desirous of

being seen. He had stood there like an accuser, like a judge, not like

a—a what?

And why had not the prince approached him and spoken to him, instead of

turning away and pretending he had seen nothing, although their eyes

met? (Yes, their eyes had met, and they had looked at each other.) Why,

he had himself wished to take Rogojin by the hand and go in together,

he had himself determined to go to him on the morrow and tell him that

he had seen her, he had repudiated the demon as he walked to the house,

and his heart had been full of joy.

Was there something in the whole aspect of the man, today, sufficient

to justify the prince’s terror, and the awful suspicions of his demon?

Something seen, but indescribable, which filled him with dreadful

presentiments? Yes, he was convinced of it—convinced of what? (Oh, how

mean and hideous of him to feel this conviction, this presentiment! How

he blamed himself for it!) “Speak if you dare, and tell me, what is the

presentiment?” he repeated to himself, over and over again. “Put it

into words, speak out clearly and distinctly. Oh, miserable coward that

I am!” The prince flushed with shame for his own baseness. “How shall I

ever look this man in the face again? My God, what a day! And what a

nightmare, what a nightmare!”

There was a moment, during this long, wretched walk back from the

Petersburg Side, when the prince felt an irresistible desire to go

straight to Rogojin’s, wait for him, embrace him with tears of shame

and contrition, and tell him of his distrust, and finish with it—once

for all.

But here he was back at his hotel.

How often during the day he had thought of this hotel with loathing—its

corridor, its rooms, its stairs. How he had dreaded coming back to it,

for some reason.

“What a regular old woman I am today,” he had said to himself each

time, with annoyance. “I believe in every foolish presentiment that

comes into my head.”

He stopped for a moment at the door; a great flush of shame came over

him. “I am a coward, a wretched coward,” he said, and moved forward

again; but once more he paused.

Among all the incidents of the day, one recurred to his mind to the

exclusion of the rest; although now that his self-control was regained,

and he was no longer under the influence of a nightmare, he was able to

think of it calmly. It concerned the knife on Rogojin’s table. “Why

should not Rogojin have as many knives on his table as he chooses?”

thought the prince, wondering at his suspicions, as he had done when he

found himself looking into the cutler’s window. “What could it have to

do with me?” he said to himself again, and stopped as if rooted to the

ground by a kind of paralysis of limb such as attacks people under the

stress of some humiliating recollection.

The doorway was dark and gloomy at any time; but just at this moment it

was rendered doubly so by the fact that the thunder-storm had just

broken, and the rain was coming down in torrents.

And in the semi-darkness the prince distinguished a man standing close

to the stairs, apparently waiting.

There was nothing particularly significant in the fact that a man was

standing back in the doorway, waiting to come out or go upstairs; but

the prince felt an irresistible conviction that he knew this man, and

that it was Rogojin. The man moved on up the stairs; a moment later the

prince passed up them, too. His heart froze within him. “In a minute or

two I shall know all,” he thought.

The staircase led to the first and second corridors of the hotel, along

which lay the guests’ bedrooms. As is often the case in Petersburg

houses, it was narrow and very dark, and turned around a massive stone

column.

On the first landing, which was as small as the necessary turn of the

stairs allowed, there was a niche in the column, about half a yard

wide, and in this niche the prince felt convinced that a man stood

concealed. He thought he could distinguish a figure standing there. He

would pass by quickly and not look. He took a step forward, but could

bear the uncertainty no longer and turned his head.

The eyes—the same two eyes—met his! The man concealed in the niche had

also taken a step forward. For one second they stood face to face.

Suddenly the prince caught the man by the shoulder and twisted him

round towards the light, so that he might see his face more clearly.

Rogojin’s eyes flashed, and a smile of insanity distorted his

countenance. His right hand was raised, and something glittered in it.

The prince did not think of trying to stop it. All he could remember

afterwards was that he seemed to have called out:

“Parfen! I won’t believe it.”

Next moment something appeared to burst open before him: a wonderful

inner light illuminated his soul. This lasted perhaps half a second,

yet he distinctly remembered hearing the beginning of the wail, the

strange, dreadful wail, which burst from his lips of its own accord,

and which no effort of will on his part could suppress.

Next moment he was absolutely unconscious; black darkness blotted out

everything.

He had fallen in an epileptic fit.

As is well known, these fits occur instantaneously. The face,

especially the eyes, become terribly disfigured, convulsions seize the

limbs, a terrible cry breaks from the sufferer, a wail from which

everything human seems to be blotted out, so that it is impossible to

believe that the man who has just fallen is the same who emitted the

dreadful cry. It seems more as though some other being, inside the

stricken one, had cried. Many people have borne witness to this

impression; and many cannot behold an epileptic fit without a feeling

of mysterious terror and dread.

Such a feeling, we must suppose, overtook Rogojin at this moment, and

saved the prince’s life. Not knowing that it was a fit, and seeing his

victim disappear head foremost into the darkness, hearing his head

strike the stone steps below with a crash, Rogojin rushed downstairs,

skirting the body, and flung himself headlong out of the hotel, like a

raving madman.

The prince’s body slipped convulsively down the steps till it rested at

the bottom. Very soon, in five minutes or so, he was discovered, and a

crowd collected around him.

A pool of blood on the steps near his head gave rise to grave fears.

Was it a case of accident, or had there been a crime? It was, however,

soon recognized as a case of epilepsy, and identification and proper

measures for restoration followed one another, owing to a fortunate

circumstance. Colia Ivolgin had come back to his hotel about seven

o’clock, owing to a sudden impulse which made him refuse to dine at the

Epanchins’, and, finding a note from the prince awaiting him, had sped

away to the latter’s address. Arrived there, he ordered a cup of tea

and sat sipping it in the coffee-room. While there he heard excited

whispers of someone just found at the bottom of the stairs in a fit;

upon which he had hurried to the spot, with a presentiment of evil, and

at once recognized the prince.

The sufferer was immediately taken to his room, and though he partially

regained consciousness, he lay long in a semi-dazed condition.

The doctor stated that there was no danger to be apprehended from the

wound on the head, and as soon as the prince could understand what was

going on around him, Colia hired a carriage and took him away to

Lebedeff’s. There he was received with much cordiality, and the

departure to the country was hastened on his account. Three days later

they were all at Pavlofsk.

VI.

Lebedeff’s country-house was not large, but it was pretty and

convenient, especially the part which was let to the prince.

A row of orange and lemon trees and jasmines, planted in green tubs,

stood on the fairly wide terrace. According to Lebedeff, these trees

gave the house a most delightful aspect. Some were there when he bought

it, and he was so charmed with the effect that he promptly added to

their number. When the tubs containing these plants arrived at the

villa and were set in their places, Lebedeff kept running into the

street to enjoy the view of the house, and every time he did so the

rent to be demanded from the future tenant went up with a bound.

This country villa pleased the prince very much in his state of

physical and mental exhaustion. On the day that they left for Pavlofsk,

that is the day after his attack, he appeared almost well, though in

reality he felt very far from it. The faces of those around him for the

last three days had made a pleasant impression. He was pleased to see,

not only Colia, who had become his inseparable companion, but Lebedeff

himself and all the family, except the nephew, who had left the house.

He was also glad to receive a visit from General Ivolgin, before

leaving St. Petersburg.

It was getting late when the party arrived at Pavlofsk, but several

people called to see the prince, and assembled in the verandah. Gania

was the first to arrive. He had grown so pale and thin that the prince

could hardly recognize him. Then came Varia and Ptitsin, who were

rusticating in the neighbourhood. As to General Ivolgin, he scarcely

budged from Lebedeff’s house, and seemed to have moved to Pavlofsk with

him. Lebedeff did his best to keep Ardalion Alexandrovitch by him, and

to prevent him from invading the prince’s quarters. He chatted with him

confidentially, so that they might have been taken for old friends.

During those three days the prince had noticed that they frequently

held long conversations; he often heard their voices raised in argument

on deep and learned subjects, which evidently pleased Lebedeff. He

seemed as if he could not do without the general. But it was not only

Ardalion Alexandrovitch whom Lebedeff kept out of the prince’s way.

Since they had come to the villa, he treated his own family the same.

Upon the pretext that his tenant needed quiet, he kept him almost in

isolation, and Muishkin protested in vain against this excess of zeal.

Lebedeff stamped his feet at his daughters and drove them away if they

attempted to join the prince on the terrace; not even Vera was

excepted.

“They will lose all respect if they are allowed to be so free and easy;

besides it is not proper for them,” he declared at last, in answer to a

direct question from the prince.

“Why on earth not?” asked the latter. “Really, you know, you are making

yourself a nuisance, by keeping guard over me like this. I get bored

all by myself; I have told you so over and over again, and you get on

my nerves more than ever by waving your hands and creeping in and out

in the mysterious way you do.”

It was a fact that Lebedeff, though he was so anxious to keep everyone

else from disturbing the patient, was continually in and out of the

prince’s room himself. He invariably began by opening the door a crack

and peering in to see if the prince was there, or if he had escaped;

then he would creep softly up to the arm-chair, sometimes making

Muishkin jump by his sudden appearance. He always asked if the patient

wanted anything, and when the latter replied that he only wanted to be

left in peace, he would turn away obediently and make for the door on

tip-toe, with deprecatory gestures to imply that he had only just

looked in, that he would not speak a word, and would go away and not

intrude again; which did not prevent him from reappearing in ten

minutes or a quarter of an hour. Colia had free access to the prince,

at which Lebedeff was quite disgusted and indignant. He would listen at

the door for half an hour at a time while the two were talking. Colia

found this out, and naturally told the prince of his discovery.

“Do you think yourself my master, that you try to keep me under lock

and key like this?” said the prince to Lebedeff. “In the country, at

least, I intend to be free, and you may make up your mind that I mean

to see whom I like, and go where I please.”

“Why, of course,” replied the clerk, gesticulating with his hands.

The prince looked him sternly up and down.

“Well, Lukian Timofeyovitch, have you brought the little cupboard that

you had at the head of your bed with you here?”

“No, I left it where it was.”

“Impossible!”

“It cannot be moved; you would have to pull the wall down, it is so

firmly fixed.”

“Perhaps you have one like it here?”

“I have one that is even better, much better; that is really why I

bought this house.”

“Ah! What visitor did you turn away from my door, about an hour ago?”

“The-the general. I would not let him in; there is no need for him to

visit you, prince... I have the deepest esteem for him, he is a—a great

man. You don’t believe it? Well, you will see, and yet, most excellent

prince, you had much better not receive him.”

“May I ask why? and also why you walk about on tiptoe and always seem

as if you were going to whisper a secret in my ear whenever you come

near me?”

“I am vile, vile; I know it!” cried Lebedeff, beating his breast with a

contrite air. “But will not the general be too hospitable for you?”

“Too hospitable?”

“Yes. First, he proposes to come and live in my house. Well and good;

but he sticks at nothing; he immediately makes himself one of the

family. We have talked over our respective relations several times, and

discovered that we are connected by marriage. It seems also that you

are a sort of nephew on his mother’s side; he was explaining it to me

again only yesterday. If you are his nephew, it follows that I must

also be a relation of yours, most excellent prince. Never mind about

that, it is only a foible; but just now he assured me that all his

life, from the day he was made an ensign to the 11th of last June, he

has entertained at least two hundred guests at his table every day.

Finally, he went so far as to say that they never rose from the table;

they dined, supped, and had tea, for fifteen hours at a stretch. This

went on for thirty years without a break; there was barely time to

change the table-cloth; directly one person left, another took his

place. On feast-days he entertained as many as three hundred guests,

and they numbered seven hundred on the thousandth anniversary of the

foundation of the Russian Empire. It amounts to a passion with him; it

makes one uneasy to hear of it. It is terrible to have to entertain

people who do things on such a scale. That is why I wonder whether such

a man is not too hospitable for you and me.”

“But you seem to be on the best of terms with him?”

“Quite fraternal—I look upon it as a joke. Let us be brothers-in-law,

it is all the same to me,—rather an honour than not. But in spite of

the two hundred guests and the thousandth anniversary of the Russian

Empire, I can see that he is a very remarkable man. I am quite sincere.

You said just now that I always looked as if I was going to tell you a

secret; you are right. I have a secret to tell you: a certain person

has just let me know that she is very anxious for a secret interview

with you.”

“Why should it be secret? Not at all; I will call on her myself

tomorrow.”

“No, oh no!” cried Lebedeff, waving his arms; “if she is afraid, it is

not for the reason you think. By the way, do you know that the monster

comes every day to inquire after your health?”

“You call him a monster so often that it makes me suspicious.”

“You must have no suspicions, none whatever,” said Lebedeff quickly. “I

only want you to know that the person in question is not afraid of him,

but of something quite, quite different.”

“What on earth is she afraid of, then? Tell me plainly, without any

more beating about the bush,” said the prince, exasperated by the

other’s mysterious grimaces.

“Ah that is the secret,” said Lebedeff, with a smile.

“Whose secret?”

“Yours. You forbade me yourself to mention it before you, most

excellent prince,” murmured Lebedeff. Then, satisfied that he had

worked up Muishkin’s curiosity to the highest pitch, he added abruptly:

“She is afraid of Aglaya Ivanovna.”

The prince frowned for a moment in silence, and then said suddenly:

“Really, Lebedeff, I must leave your house. Where are Gavrila

Ardalionovitch and the Ptitsins? Are they here? Have you chased them

away, too?”

“They are coming, they are coming; and the general as well. I will open

all the doors; I will call all my daughters, all of them, this very

minute,” said Lebedeff in a low voice, thoroughly frightened, and

waving his hands as he ran from door to door.

At that moment Colia appeared on the terrace; he announced that

Lizabetha Prokofievna and her three daughters were close behind him.

Moved by this news, Lebedeff hurried up to the prince.

“Shall I call the Ptitsins, and Gavrila Ardalionovitch? Shall I let the

general in?” he asked.

“Why not? Let in anyone who wants to see me. I assure you, Lebedeff,

you have misunderstood my position from the very first; you have been

wrong all along. I have not the slightest reason to hide myself from

anyone,” replied the prince gaily.

Seeing him laugh, Lebedeff thought fit to laugh also, and though much

agitated his satisfaction was quite visible.

Colia was right; the Epanchin ladies were only a few steps behind him.

As they approached the terrace other visitors appeared from Lebedeff’s

side of the house—the Ptitsins, Gania, and Ardalion Alexandrovitch.

The Epanchins had only just heard of the prince’s illness and of his

presence in Pavlofsk, from Colia; and up to this time had been in a

state of considerable bewilderment about him. The general brought the

prince’s card down from town, and Mrs. Epanchin had felt convinced that

he himself would follow his card at once; she was much excited.

In vain the girls assured her that a man who had not written for six

months would not be in such a dreadful hurry, and that probably he had

enough to do in town without needing to bustle down to Pavlofsk to see

them. Their mother was quite angry at the very idea of such a thing,

and announced her absolute conviction that he would turn up the next

day at latest.

So next day the prince was expected all the morning, and at dinner,

tea, and supper; and when he did not appear in the evening, Mrs.

Epanchin quarrelled with everyone in the house, finding plenty of

pretexts without so much as mentioning the prince’s name.

On the third day there was no talk of him at all, until Aglaya remarked

at dinner: “Mamma is cross because the prince hasn’t turned up,” to

which the general replied that it was not his fault.

Mrs. Epanchin misunderstood the observation, and rising from her place

she left the room in majestic wrath. In the evening, however, Colia

came with the story of the prince’s adventures, so far as he knew them.

Mrs. Epanchin was triumphant; although Colia had to listen to a long

lecture. “He idles about here the whole day long, one can’t get rid of

him; and then when he is wanted he does not come. He might have sent a

line if he did not wish to inconvenience himself.”

At the words “one can’t get rid of him,” Colia was very angry, and

nearly flew into a rage; but he resolved to be quiet for the time and

show his resentment later. If the words had been less offensive he

might have forgiven them, so pleased was he to see Lizabetha

Prokofievna worried and anxious about the prince’s illness.

She would have insisted on sending to Petersburg at once, for a certain

great medical celebrity; but her daughters dissuaded her, though they

were not willing to stay behind when she at once prepared to go and

visit the invalid. Aglaya, however, suggested that it was a little

unceremonious to go \_en masse\_ to see him.

“Very well then, stay at home,” said Mrs. Epanchin, “and a good thing

too, for Evgenie Pavlovitch is coming down and there will be no one at

home to receive him.”

Of course, after this, Aglaya went with the rest. In fact, she had

never had the slightest intention of doing otherwise.

Prince S., who was in the house, was requested to escort the ladies. He

had been much interested when he first heard of the prince from the

Epanchins. It appeared that they had known one another before, and had

spent some time together in a little provincial town three months ago.

Prince S. had greatly taken to him, and was delighted with the

opportunity of meeting him again.

The general had not come down from town as yet, nor had Evgenie

Pavlovitch arrived.

It was not more than two or three hundred yards from the Epanchins’

house to Lebedeff’s. The first disagreeable impression experienced by

Mrs. Epanchin was to find the prince surrounded by a whole assembly of

other guests—not to mention the fact that some of those present were

particularly detestable in her eyes. The next annoying circumstance was

when an apparently strong and healthy young fellow, well dressed, and

smiling, came forward to meet her on the terrace, instead of the

half-dying unfortunate whom she had expected to see.

She was astonished and vexed, and her disappointment pleased Colia

immensely. Of course he could have undeceived her before she started,

but the mischievous boy had been careful not to do that, foreseeing the

probably laughable disgust that she would experience when she found her

dear friend, the prince, in good health. Colia was indelicate enough to

voice the delight he felt at his success in managing to annoy Lizabetha

Prokofievna, with whom, in spite of their really amicable relations, he

was constantly sparring.

“Just wait a while, my boy!” said she; “don’t be too certain of your

triumph.” And she sat down heavily, in the arm-chair pushed forward by

the prince.

Lebedeff, Ptitsin, and General Ivolgin hastened to find chairs for the

young ladies. Varia greeted them joyfully, and they exchanged

confidences in ecstatic whispers.

“I must admit, prince, I was a little put out to see you up and about

like this—I expected to find you in bed; but I give you my word, I was

only annoyed for an instant, before I collected my thoughts properly. I

am always wiser on second thoughts, and I dare say you are the same. I

assure you I am as glad to see you well as though you were my own

son,—yes, and more; and if you don’t believe me the more shame to you,

and it’s not my fault. But that spiteful boy delights in playing all

sorts of tricks. You are his patron, it seems. Well, I warn you that

one fine morning I shall deprive myself of the pleasure of his further

acquaintance.”

“What have I done wrong now?” cried Colia. “What was the good of

telling you that the prince was nearly well again? You would not have

believed me; it was so much more interesting to picture him on his

death-bed.”

“How long do you remain here, prince?” asked Madame Epanchin.

“All the summer, and perhaps longer.”

“You are alone, aren’t you,—not married?”

“No, I’m not married!” replied the prince, smiling at the ingenuousness

of this little feeler.

“Oh, you needn’t laugh! These things do happen, you know! Now then—why

didn’t you come to us? We have a wing quite empty. But just as you

like, of course. Do you lease it from \_him?\_—this fellow, I mean,” she

added, nodding towards Lebedeff. “And why does he always wriggle so?”

At that moment Vera, carrying the baby in her arms as usual, came out

of the house, on to the terrace. Lebedeff kept fidgeting among the

chairs, and did not seem to know what to do with himself, though he had

no intention of going away. He no sooner caught sight of his daughter,

than he rushed in her direction, waving his arms to keep her away; he

even forgot himself so far as to stamp his foot.

“Is he mad?” asked Madame Epanchin suddenly.

“No, he...”

“Perhaps he is drunk? Your company is rather peculiar,” she added, with

a glance at the other guests....

“But what a pretty girl! Who is she?”

“That is Lebedeff’s daughter—Vera Lukianovna.”

“Indeed? She looks very sweet. I should like to make her acquaintance.”

The words were hardly out of her mouth, when Lebedeff dragged Vera

forward, in order to present her.

“Orphans, poor orphans!” he began in a pathetic voice.

“The child she carries is an orphan, too. She is Vera’s sister, my

daughter Luboff. The day this babe was born, six weeks ago, my wife

died, by the will of God Almighty.... Yes... Vera takes her mother’s

place, though she is but her sister... nothing more... nothing more...”

“And you! You are nothing more than a fool, if you’ll excuse me! Well!

well! you know that yourself, I expect,” said the lady indignantly.

Lebedeff bowed low. “It is the truth,” he replied, with extreme

respect.

“Oh, Mr. Lebedeff, I am told you lecture on the Apocalypse. Is it

true?” asked Aglaya.

“Yes, that is so... for the last fifteen years.”

“I have heard of you, and I think read of you in the newspapers.”

“No, that was another commentator, whom the papers named. He is dead,

however, and I have taken his place,” said the other, much delighted.

“We are neighbours, so will you be so kind as to come over one day and

explain the Apocalypse to me?” said Aglaya. “I do not understand it in

the least.”

“Allow me to warn you,” interposed General Ivolgin, “that he is the

greatest charlatan on earth.” He had taken the chair next to the girl,

and was impatient to begin talking. “No doubt there are pleasures and

amusements peculiar to the country,” he continued, “and to listen to a

pretended student holding forth on the book of the Revelations may be

as good as any other. It may even be original. But... you seem to be

looking at me with some surprise—may I introduce myself—General

Ivolgin—I carried you in my arms as a baby—”

“Delighted, I’m sure,” said Aglaya; “I am acquainted with Varvara

Ardalionovna and Nina Alexandrovna.” She was trying hard to restrain

herself from laughing.

Mrs. Epanchin flushed up; some accumulation of spleen in her suddenly

needed an outlet. She could not bear this General Ivolgin whom she had

once known, long ago—in society.

“You are deviating from the truth, sir, as usual!” she remarked,

boiling over with indignation; “you never carried her in your life!”

“You have forgotten, mother,” said Aglaya, suddenly. “He really did

carry me about,—in Tver, you know. I was six years old, I remember. He

made me a bow and arrow, and I shot a pigeon. Don’t you remember

shooting a pigeon, you and I, one day?”

“Yes, and he made me a cardboard helmet, and a little wooden sword—I

remember!” said Adelaida.

“Yes, I remember too!” said Alexandra. “You quarrelled about the

wounded pigeon, and Adelaida was put in the corner, and stood there

with her helmet and sword and all.”

The poor general had merely made the remark about having carried Aglaya

in his arms because he always did so begin a conversation with young

people. But it happened that this time he had really hit upon the

truth, though he had himself entirely forgotten the fact. But when

Adelaida and Aglaya recalled the episode of the pigeon, his mind became

filled with memories, and it is impossible to describe how this poor

old man, usually half drunk, was moved by the recollection.

“I remember—I remember it all!” he cried. “I was captain then. You were

such a lovely little thing—Nina Alexandrovna!—Gania, listen! I was

received then by General Epanchin.”

“Yes, and look what you have come to now!” interrupted Mrs. Epanchin.

“However, I see you have not quite drunk your better feelings away. But

you’ve broken your wife’s heart, sir—and instead of looking after your

children, you have spent your time in public-houses and debtors’

prisons! Go away, my friend, stand in some corner and weep, and bemoan

your fallen dignity, and perhaps God will forgive you yet! Go, go! I’m

serious! There’s nothing so favourable for repentance as to think of

the past with feelings of remorse!”

There was no need to repeat that she was serious. The general, like all

drunkards, was extremely emotional and easily touched by recollections

of his better days. He rose and walked quietly to the door, so meekly

that Mrs. Epanchin was instantly sorry for him.

“Ardalion Alexandrovitch,” she cried after him, “wait a moment, we are

all sinners! When you feel that your conscience reproaches you a little

less, come over to me and we’ll have a talk about the past! I dare say

I am fifty times more of a sinner than you are! And now go, go,

good-bye, you had better not stay here!” she added, in alarm, as he

turned as though to come back.

“Don’t go after him just now, Colia, or he’ll be vexed, and the benefit

of this moment will be lost!” said the prince, as the boy was hurrying

out of the room.

“Quite true! Much better to go in half an hour or so,” said Mrs.

Epanchin.

“That’s what comes of telling the truth for once in one’s life!” said

Lebedeff. “It reduced him to tears.”

“Come, come! the less \_you\_ say about it the better—to judge from all I

have heard about you!” replied Mrs. Epanchin.

The prince took the first opportunity of informing the Epanchin ladies

that he had intended to pay them a visit that day, if they had not

themselves come this afternoon, and Lizabetha Prokofievna replied that

she hoped he would still do so.

By this time some of the visitors had disappeared.

Ptitsin had tactfully retreated to Lebedeff’s wing; and Gania soon

followed him.

The latter had behaved modestly, but with dignity, on this occasion of

his first meeting with the Epanchins since the rupture. Twice Mrs.

Epanchin had deliberately examined him from head to foot; but he had

stood fire without flinching. He was certainly much changed, as anyone

could see who had not met him for some time; and this fact seemed to

afford Aglaya a good deal of satisfaction.

“That was Gavrila Ardalionovitch, who just went out, wasn’t it?” she

asked suddenly, interrupting somebody else’s conversation to make the

remark.

“Yes, it was,” said the prince.

“I hardly knew him; he is much changed, and for the better!”

“I am very glad,” said the prince.

“He has been very ill,” added Varia.

“How has he changed for the better?” asked Mrs. Epanchin. “I don’t see

any change for the better! What’s better in him? Where did you get

\_that\_ idea from? \_what\_’s better?”

“There’s nothing better than the ‘poor knight’!” said Colia, who was

standing near the last speaker’s chair.

“I quite agree with you there!” said Prince S., laughing.

“So do I,” said Adelaida, solemnly.

“\_What\_ poor knight?” asked Mrs. Epanchin, looking round at the face of

each of the speakers in turn. Seeing, however, that Aglaya was

blushing, she added, angrily:

“What nonsense you are all talking! What do you mean by poor knight?”

“It’s not the first time this urchin, your favourite, has shown his

impudence by twisting other people’s words,” said Aglaya, haughtily.

Every time that Aglaya showed temper (and this was very often), there

was so much childish pouting, such “school-girlishness,” as it were, in

her apparent wrath, that it was impossible to avoid smiling at her, to

her own unutterable indignation. On these occasions she would say, “How

can they, how \_dare\_ they laugh at me?”

This time everyone laughed at her, her sisters, Prince S., Prince

Muishkin (though he himself had flushed for some reason), and Colia.

Aglaya was dreadfully indignant, and looked twice as pretty in her

wrath.

“He’s always twisting round what one says,” she cried.

“I am only repeating your own exclamation!” said Colia. “A month ago

you were turning over the pages of your Don Quixote, and suddenly

called out ‘there is nothing better than the poor knight.’ I don’t know

whom you were referring to, of course, whether to Don Quixote, or

Evgenie Pavlovitch, or someone else, but you certainly said these

words, and afterwards there was a long conversation...”

“You are inclined to go a little too far, my good boy, with your

guesses,” said Mrs. Epanchin, with some show of annoyance.

“But it’s not I alone,” cried Colia. “They all talked about it, and

they do still. Why, just now Prince S. and Adelaida Ivanovna declared

that they upheld ‘the poor knight’; so evidently there does exist a

‘poor knight’; and if it were not for Adelaida Ivanovna, we should have

known long ago who the ‘poor knight’ was.”

“Why, how am I to blame?” asked Adelaida, smiling.

“You wouldn’t draw his portrait for us, that’s why you are to blame!

Aglaya Ivanovna asked you to draw his portrait, and gave you the whole

subject of the picture. She invented it herself; and you wouldn’t.”

“What was I to draw? According to the lines she quoted:

“‘From his face he never lifted

That eternal mask of steel.’”

“What sort of a face was I to draw? I couldn’t draw a mask.”

“I don’t know what you are driving at; what mask do you mean?” said

Mrs. Epanchin, irritably. She began to see pretty clearly though what

it meant, and whom they referred to by the generally accepted title of

“poor knight.” But what specially annoyed her was that the prince was

looking so uncomfortable, and blushing like a ten-year-old child.

“Well, have you finished your silly joke?” she added, “and am I to be

told what this ‘poor knight’ means, or is it a solemn secret which

cannot be approached lightly?”

But they all laughed on.

“It’s simply that there is a Russian poem,” began Prince S., evidently

anxious to change the conversation, “a strange thing, without beginning

or end, and all about a ‘poor knight.’ A month or so ago, we were all

talking and laughing, and looking up a subject for one of Adelaida’s

pictures—you know it is the principal business of this family to find

subjects for Adelaida’s pictures. Well, we happened upon this ‘poor

knight.’ I don’t remember who thought of it first—”

“Oh! Aglaya Ivanovna did,” said Colia.

“Very likely—I don’t recollect,” continued Prince S.

“Some of us laughed at the subject; some liked it; but she declared

that, in order to make a picture of the gentleman, she must first see

his face. We then began to think over all our friends’ faces to see if

any of them would do, and none suited us, and so the matter stood;

that’s all. I don’t know why Nicolai Ardalionovitch has brought up the

joke now. What was appropriate and funny then, has quite lost all

interest by this time.”

“Probably there’s some new silliness about it,” said Mrs. Epanchin,

sarcastically.

“There is no silliness about it at all—only the profoundest respect,”

said Aglaya, very seriously. She had quite recovered her temper; in

fact, from certain signs, it was fair to conclude that she was

delighted to see this joke going so far; and a careful observer might

have remarked that her satisfaction dated from the moment when the fact

of the prince’s confusion became apparent to all.

“‘Profoundest respect!’ What nonsense! First, insane giggling, and

then, all of a sudden, a display of ‘profoundest respect.’ Why respect?

Tell me at once, why have you suddenly developed this ‘profound

respect,’ eh?”

“Because,” replied Aglaya gravely, “in the poem the knight is described

as a man capable of living up to an ideal all his life. That sort of

thing is not to be found every day among the men of our times. In the

poem it is not stated exactly what the ideal was, but it was evidently

some vision, some revelation of pure Beauty, and the knight wore round

his neck, instead of a scarf, a rosary. A device—A. N. B.—the meaning

of which is not explained, was inscribed on his shield—”

“No, A. N. D.,” corrected Colia.

“I say A. N. B., and so it shall be!” cried Aglaya, irritably. “Anyway,

the ‘poor knight’ did not care what his lady was, or what she did. He

had chosen his ideal, and he was bound to serve her, and break lances

for her, and acknowledge her as the ideal of pure Beauty, whatever she

might say or do afterwards. If she had taken to stealing, he would have

championed her just the same. I think the poet desired to embody in

this one picture the whole spirit of medieval chivalry and the platonic

love of a pure and high-souled knight. Of course it’s all an ideal, and

in the ‘poor knight’ that spirit reached the utmost limit of

asceticism. He is a Don Quixote, only serious and not comical. I used

not to understand him, and laughed at him, but now I love the ‘poor

knight,’ and respect his actions.”

So ended Aglaya; and, to look at her, it was difficult, indeed, to

judge whether she was joking or in earnest.

“Pooh! he was a fool, and his actions were the actions of a fool,” said

Mrs. Epanchin; “and as for you, young woman, you ought to know better.

At all events, you are not to talk like that again. What poem is it?

Recite it! I want to hear this poem! I have hated poetry all my life.

Prince, you must excuse this nonsense. We neither of us like this sort

of thing! Be patient!”

They certainly were put out, both of them.

The prince tried to say something, but he was too confused, and could

not get his words out. Aglaya, who had taken such liberties in her

little speech, was the only person present, perhaps, who was not in the

least embarrassed. She seemed, in fact, quite pleased.

She now rose solemnly from her seat, walked to the centre of the

terrace, and stood in front of the prince’s chair. All looked on with

some surprise, and Prince S. and her sisters with feelings of decided

alarm, to see what new frolic she was up to; it had gone quite far

enough already, they thought. But Aglaya evidently thoroughly enjoyed

the affectation and ceremony with which she was introducing her

recitation of the poem.

Mrs. Epanchin was just wondering whether she would not forbid the

performance after all, when, at the very moment that Aglaya commenced

her declamation, two new guests, both talking loudly, entered from the

street. The new arrivals were General Epanchin and a young man.

Their entrance caused some slight commotion.

VII.

The young fellow accompanying the general was about twenty-eight, tall,

and well built, with a handsome and clever face, and bright black eyes,

full of fun and intelligence.

Aglaya did not so much as glance at the new arrivals, but went on with

her recitation, gazing at the prince the while in an affected manner,

and at him alone. It was clear to him that she was doing all this with

some special object.

But the new guests at least somewhat eased his strained and

uncomfortable position. Seeing them approaching, he rose from his

chair, and nodding amicably to the general, signed to him not to

interrupt the recitation. He then got behind his chair, and stood there

with his left hand resting on the back of it. Thanks to this change of

position, he was able to listen to the ballad with far less

embarrassment than before. Mrs. Epanchin had also twice motioned to the

new arrivals to be quiet, and stay where they were.

The prince was much interested in the young man who had just entered.

He easily concluded that this was Evgenie Pavlovitch Radomski, of whom

he had already heard mention several times. He was puzzled, however, by

the young man’s plain clothes, for he had always heard of Evgenie

Pavlovitch as a military man. An ironical smile played on Evgenie’s

lips all the while the recitation was proceeding, which showed that he,

too, was probably in the secret of the ‘poor knight’ joke. But it had

become quite a different matter with Aglaya. All the affectation of

manner which she had displayed at the beginning disappeared as the

ballad proceeded. She spoke the lines in so serious and exalted a

manner, and with so much taste, that she even seemed to justify the

exaggerated solemnity with which she had stepped forward. It was

impossible to discern in her now anything but a deep feeling for the

spirit of the poem which she had undertaken to interpret.

Her eyes were aglow with inspiration, and a slight tremor of rapture

passed over her lovely features once or twice. She continued to recite:

“Once there came a vision glorious,

Mystic, dreadful, wondrous fair;

Burned itself into his spirit,

And abode for ever there!

“Never more—from that sweet moment—

Gazéd he on womankind;

He was dumb to love and wooing

And to all their graces blind.

“Full of love for that sweet vision,

Brave and pure he took the field;

With his blood he stained the letters

N. P. B. upon his shield.

“‘Lumen caeli, sancta Rosa!’

Shouting on the foe he fell,

And like thunder rang his war-cry

O’er the cowering infidel.

“Then within his distant castle,

Home returned, he dreamed his days—

Silent, sad,—and when death took him

He was mad, the legend says.”

When recalling all this afterwards the prince could not for the life of

him understand how to reconcile the beautiful, sincere, pure nature of

the girl with the irony of this jest. That it was a jest there was no

doubt whatever; he knew that well enough, and had good reason, too, for

his conviction; for during her recitation of the ballad Aglaya had

deliberately changed the letters A. N. B. into N. P. B. He was quite

sure she had not done this by accident, and that his ears had not

deceived him. At all events her performance—which was a joke, of

course, if rather a crude one,—was premeditated. They had evidently

talked (and laughed) over the ‘poor knight’ for more than a month.

Yet Aglaya had brought out these letters N. P. B. not only without the

slightest appearance of irony, or even any particular accentuation, but

with so even and unbroken an appearance of seriousness that assuredly

anyone might have supposed that these initials were the original ones

written in the ballad. The thing made an uncomfortable impression upon

the prince. Of course Mrs. Epanchin saw nothing either in the change of

initials or in the insinuation embodied therein. General Epanchin only

knew that there was a recitation of verses going on, and took no

further interest in the matter. Of the rest of the audience, many had

understood the allusion and wondered both at the daring of the lady and

at the motive underlying it, but tried to show no sign of their

feelings. But Evgenie Pavlovitch (as the prince was ready to wager)

both comprehended and tried his best to show that he comprehended; his

smile was too mocking to leave any doubt on that point.

“How beautiful that is!” cried Mrs. Epanchin, with sincere admiration.

“Whose is it?”

“Pushkin’s, mama, of course! Don’t disgrace us all by showing your

ignorance,” said Adelaida.

“As soon as we reach home give it to me to read.”

“I don’t think we have a copy of Pushkin in the house.”

“There are a couple of torn volumes somewhere; they have been lying

about from time immemorial,” added Alexandra.

“Send Feodor or Alexey up by the very first train to buy a copy,

then.—Aglaya, come here—kiss me, dear, you recited beautifully! but,”

she added in a whisper, “if you were sincere I am sorry for you. If it

was a joke, I do not approve of the feelings which prompted you to do

it, and in any case you would have done far better not to recite it at

all. Do you understand?—Now come along, young woman; we’ve sat here too

long. I’ll speak to you about this another time.”

Meanwhile the prince took the opportunity of greeting General Epanchin,

and the general introduced Evgenie Pavlovitch to him.

“I caught him up on the way to your house,” explained the general. “He

had heard that we were all here.”

“Yes, and I heard that you were here, too,” added Evgenie Pavlovitch;

“and since I had long promised myself the pleasure of seeking not only

your acquaintance but your friendship, I did not wish to waste time,

but came straight on. I am sorry to hear that you are unwell.”

“Oh, but I’m quite well now, thank you, and very glad to make your

acquaintance. Prince S. has often spoken to me about you,” said

Muishkin, and for an instant the two men looked intently into one

another’s eyes.

The prince remarked that Evgenie Pavlovitch’s plain clothes had

evidently made a great impression upon the company present, so much so

that all other interests seemed to be effaced before this surprising

fact.

His change of dress was evidently a matter of some importance. Adelaida

and Alexandra poured out a stream of questions; Prince S., a relative

of the young man, appeared annoyed; and Ivan Fedorovitch quite excited.

Aglaya alone was not interested. She merely looked closely at Evgenie

for a minute, curious perhaps as to whether civil or military clothes

became him best, then turned away and paid no more attention to him or

his costume. Lizabetha Prokofievna asked no questions, but it was clear

that she was uneasy, and the prince fancied that Evgenie was not in her

good graces.

“He has astonished me,” said Ivan Fedorovitch. “I nearly fell down with

surprise. I could hardly believe my eyes when I met him in Petersburg

just now. Why this haste? That’s what I want to know. He has always

said himself that there is no need to break windows.”

Evgenie Pavlovitch remarked here that he had spoken of his intention of

leaving the service long ago. He had, however, always made more or less

of a joke about it, so no one had taken him seriously. For that matter

he joked about everything, and his friends never knew what to believe,

especially if he did not wish them to understand him.

“I have only retired for a time,” said he, laughing. “For a few months;

at most for a year.”

“But there is no necessity for you to retire at all,” complained the

general, “as far as I know.”

“I want to go and look after my country estates. You advised me to do

that yourself,” was the reply. “And then I wish to go abroad.”

After a few more expostulations, the conversation drifted into other

channels, but the prince, who had been an attentive listener, thought

all this excitement about so small a matter very curious. “There must

be more in it than appears,” he said to himself.

“I see the ‘poor knight’ has come on the scene again,” said Evgenie

Pavlovitch, stepping to Aglaya’s side.

To the amazement of the prince, who overheard the remark, Aglaya looked

haughtily and inquiringly at the questioner, as though she would give

him to know, once for all, that there could be no talk between them

about the ‘poor knight,’ and that she did not understand his question.

“But not now! It is too late to send to town for a Pushkin now. It is

much too late, I say!” Colia was exclaiming in a loud voice. “I have

told you so at least a hundred times.”

“Yes, it is really much too late to send to town now,” said Evgenie

Pavlovitch, who had escaped from Aglaya as rapidly as possible. “I am

sure the shops are shut in Petersburg; it is past eight o’clock,” he

added, looking at his watch.

“We have done without him so far,” interrupted Adelaida in her turn.

“Surely we can wait until to-morrow.”

“Besides,” said Colia, “it is quite unusual, almost improper, for

people in our position to take any interest in literature. Ask Evgenie

Pavlovitch if I am not right. It is much more fashionable to drive a

waggonette with red wheels.”

“You got that from some magazine, Colia,” remarked Adelaida.

“He gets most of his conversation in that way,” laughed Evgenie

Pavlovitch. “He borrows whole phrases from the reviews. I have long had

the pleasure of knowing both Nicholai Ardalionovitch and his

conversational methods, but this time he was not repeating something he

had read; he was alluding, no doubt, to my yellow waggonette, which

has, or had, red wheels. But I have exchanged it, so you are rather

behind the times, Colia.”

The prince had been listening attentively to Radomski’s words, and

thought his manner very pleasant. When Colia chaffed him about his

waggonette he had replied with perfect equality and in a friendly

fashion. This pleased Muishkin.

At this moment Vera came up to Lizabetha Prokofievna, carrying several

large and beautifully bound books, apparently quite new.

“What is it?” demanded the lady.

“This is Pushkin,” replied the girl. “Papa told me to offer it to you.”

“What? Impossible!” exclaimed Mrs. Epanchin.

“Not as a present, not as a present! I should not have taken the

liberty,” said Lebedeff, appearing suddenly from behind his daughter.

“It is our own Pushkin, our family copy, Annenkoff’s edition; it could

not be bought now. I beg to suggest, with great respect, that your

excellency should buy it, and thus quench the noble literary thirst

which is consuming you at this moment,” he concluded grandiloquently.

“Oh! if you will sell it, very good—and thank you. You shall not be a

loser! But for goodness’ sake, don’t twist about like that, sir! I have

heard of you; they tell me you are a very learned person. We must have

a talk one of these days. You will bring me the books yourself?”

“With the greatest respect... and... and veneration,” replied Lebedeff,

making extraordinary grimaces.

“Well, bring them, with or without respect, provided always you do not

drop them on the way; but on the condition,” went on the lady, looking

full at him, “that you do not cross my threshold. I do not intend to

receive you today. You may send your daughter Vera at once, if you

like. I am much pleased with her.”

“Why don’t you tell him about them?” said Vera impatiently to her

father. “They will come in, whether you announce them or not, and they

are beginning to make a row. Lef Nicolaievitch,”—she addressed herself

to the prince—“four men are here asking for you. They have waited some

time, and are beginning to make a fuss, and papa will not bring them

in.”

“Who are these people?” said the prince.

“They say that they have come on business, and they are the kind of

men, who, if you do not see them here, will follow you about the

street. It would be better to receive them, and then you will get rid

of them. Gavrila Ardalionovitch and Ptitsin are both there, trying to

make them hear reason.”

“Pavlicheff’s son! It is not worth while!” cried Lebedeff. “There is no

necessity to see them, and it would be most unpleasant for your

excellency. They do not deserve...”

“What? Pavlicheff’s son!” cried the prince, much perturbed. “I know...

I know—but I entrusted this matter to Gavrila Ardalionovitch. He told

me...”

At that moment Gania, accompanied by Ptitsin, came out to the terrace.

From an adjoining room came a noise of angry voices, and General

Ivolgin, in loud tones, seemed to be trying to shout them down. Colia

rushed off at once to investigate the cause of the uproar.

“This is most interesting!” observed Evgenie Pavlovitch.

“I expect he knows all about it!” thought the prince.

“What, the son of Pavlicheff? And who may this son of Pavlicheff be?”

asked General Epanchin with surprise; and looking curiously around him,

he discovered that he alone had no clue to the mystery. Expectation and

suspense were on every face, with the exception of that of the prince,

who stood gravely wondering how an affair so entirely personal could

have awakened such lively and widespread interest in so short a time.

Aglaya went up to him with a peculiarly serious look.

“It will be well,” she said, “if you put an end to this affair yourself

\_at once\_: but you must allow us to be your witnesses. They want to

throw mud at you, prince, and you must be triumphantly vindicated. I

give you joy beforehand!”

“And I also wish for justice to be done, once for all,” cried Madame

Epanchin, “about this impudent claim. Deal with them promptly, prince,

and don’t spare them! I am sick of hearing about the affair, and many a

quarrel I have had in your cause. But I confess I am anxious to see

what happens, so do make them come out here, and we will remain. You

have heard people talking about it, no doubt?” she added, turning to

Prince S.

“Of course,” said he. “I have heard it spoken about at your house, and

I am anxious to see these young men!”

“They are Nihilists, are they not?”

“No, they are not Nihilists,” explained Lebedeff, who seemed much

excited. “This is another lot—a special group. According to my nephew

they are more advanced even than the Nihilists. You are quite wrong,

excellency, if you think that your presence will intimidate them;

nothing intimidates them. Educated men, learned men even, are to be

found among Nihilists; these go further, in that they are men of

action. The movement is, properly speaking, a derivative from

Nihilism—though they are only known indirectly, and by hearsay, for

they never advertise their doings in the papers. They go straight to

the point. For them, it is not a question of showing that Pushkin is

stupid, or that Russia must be torn in pieces. No; but if they have a

great desire for anything, they believe they have a right to get it

even at the cost of the lives, say, of eight persons. They are checked

by no obstacles. In fact, prince, I should not advise you...”

But Muishkin had risen, and was on his way to open the door for his

visitors.

“You are slandering them, Lebedeff,” said he, smiling.

“You are always thinking about your nephew’s conduct. Don’t believe

him, Lizabetha Prokofievna. I can assure you Gorsky and Daniloff are

exceptions—and that these are only... mistaken. However, I do not care

about receiving them here, in public. Excuse me, Lizabetha Prokofievna.

They are coming, and you can see them, and then I will take them away.

Please come in, gentlemen!”

Another thought tormented him: He wondered was this an arranged

business—arranged to happen when he had guests in his house, and in

anticipation of his humiliation rather than of his triumph? But he

reproached himself bitterly for such a thought, and felt as if he

should die of shame if it were discovered. When his new visitors

appeared, he was quite ready to believe himself infinitely less to be

respected than any of them.

Four persons entered, led by General Ivolgin, in a state of great

excitement, and talking eloquently.

“He is for me, undoubtedly!” thought the prince, with a smile. Colia

also had joined the party, and was talking with animation to Hippolyte,

who listened with a jeering smile on his lips.

The prince begged the visitors to sit down. They were all so young that

it made the proceedings seem even more extraordinary. Ivan Fedorovitch,

who really understood nothing of what was going on, felt indignant at

the sight of these youths, and would have interfered in some way had it

not been for the extreme interest shown by his wife in the affair. He

therefore remained, partly through curiosity, partly through

good-nature, hoping that his presence might be of some use. But the bow

with which General Ivolgin greeted him irritated him anew; he frowned,

and decided to be absolutely silent.

As to the rest, one was a man of thirty, the retired officer, now a

boxer, who had been with Rogojin, and in his happier days had given

fifteen roubles at a time to beggars. Evidently he had joined the

others as a comrade to give them moral, and if necessary material,

support. The man who had been spoken of as “Pavlicheff’s son,” although

he gave the name of Antip Burdovsky, was about twenty-two years of age,

fair, thin and rather tall. He was remarkable for the poverty, not to

say uncleanliness, of his personal appearance: the sleeves of his

overcoat were greasy; his dirty waistcoat, buttoned up to his neck,

showed not a trace of linen; a filthy black silk scarf, twisted till it

resembled a cord, was round his neck, and his hands were unwashed. He

looked round with an air of insolent effrontery. His face, covered with

pimples, was neither thoughtful nor even contemptuous; it wore an

expression of complacent satisfaction in demanding his rights and in

being an aggrieved party. His voice trembled, and he spoke so fast, and

with such stammerings, that he might have been taken for a foreigner,

though the purest Russian blood ran in his veins. Lebedeff’s nephew,

whom the reader has seen already, accompanied him, and also the youth

named Hippolyte Terentieff. The latter was only seventeen or eighteen.

He had an intelligent face, though it was usually irritated and fretful

in expression. His skeleton-like figure, his ghastly complexion, the

brightness of his eyes, and the red spots of colour on his cheeks,

betrayed the victim of consumption to the most casual glance. He

coughed persistently, and panted for breath; it looked as though he had

but a few weeks more to live. He was nearly dead with fatigue, and

fell, rather than sat, into a chair. The rest bowed as they came in;

and being more or less abashed, put on an air of extreme

self-assurance. In short, their attitude was not that which one would

have expected in men who professed to despise all trivialities, all

foolish mundane conventions, and indeed everything, except their own

personal interests.

“Antip Burdovsky,” stuttered the son of Pavlicheff.

“Vladimir Doktorenko,” said Lebedeff’s nephew briskly, and with a

certain pride, as if he boasted of his name.

“Keller,” murmured the retired officer.

“Hippolyte Terentieff,” cried the last-named, in a shrill voice.

They sat now in a row facing the prince, and frowned, and played with

their caps. All appeared ready to speak, and yet all were silent; the

defiant expression on their faces seemed to say, “No, sir, you don’t

take us in!” It could be felt that the first word spoken by anyone

present would bring a torrent of speech from the whole deputation.

VIII.

“I \_did\_ not expect you, gentlemen,” began the prince. “I have been ill

until to-day. A month ago,” he continued, addressing himself to Antip

Burdovsky, “I put your business into Gavrila Ardalionovitch Ivolgin’s

hands, as I told you then. I do not in the least object to having a

personal interview... but you will agree with me that this is hardly

the time... I propose that we go into another room, if you will not

keep me long... As you see, I have friends here, and believe me...”

“Friends as many as you please, but allow me,” interrupted the harsh

voice of Lebedeff’s nephew—“allow me to tell you that you might have

treated us rather more politely, and not have kept us waiting at least

two hours...

“No doubt... and I... is that acting like a prince? And you... you may

be a general! But I... I am not your valet! And I... I...” stammered

Antip Burdovsky.

He was extremely excited; his lips trembled, and the resentment of an

embittered soul was in his voice. But he spoke so indistinctly that

hardly a dozen words could be gathered.

“It was a princely action!” sneered Hippolyte.

“If anyone had treated me so,” grumbled the boxer.

“I mean to say that if I had been in Burdovsky’s place...I...”

“Gentlemen, I did not know you were there; I have only just been

informed, I assure you,” repeated Muishkin.

“We are not afraid of your friends, prince,” remarked Lebedeff’s

nephew, “for we are within our rights.”

The shrill tones of Hippolyte interrupted him. “What right have you...

by what right do you demand us to submit this matter, about

Burdovsky... to the judgment of your friends? We know only too well

what the judgment of your friends will be!...”

This beginning gave promise of a stormy discussion. The prince was much

discouraged, but at last he managed to make himself heard amid the

vociferations of his excited visitors.

“If you,” he said, addressing Burdovsky—“if you prefer not to speak

here, I offer again to go into another room with you... and as to your

waiting to see me, I repeat that I only this instant heard...”

“Well, you have no right, you have no right, no right at all!... Your

friends indeed!”... gabbled Burdovsky, defiantly examining the faces

round him, and becoming more and more excited. “You have no right!...”

As he ended thus abruptly, he leant forward, staring at the prince with

his short-sighted, bloodshot eyes. The latter was so astonished, that

he did not reply, but looked steadily at him in return.

“Lef Nicolaievitch!” interposed Madame Epanchin, suddenly, “read this

at once, this very moment! It is about this business.”

She held out a weekly comic paper, pointing to an article on one of its

pages. Just as the visitors were coming in, Lebedeff, wishing to

ingratiate himself with the great lady, had pulled this paper from his

pocket, and presented it to her, indicating a few columns marked in

pencil. Lizabetha Prokofievna had had time to read some of it, and was

greatly upset.

“Would it not be better to peruse it alone... later,” asked the prince,

nervously.

“No, no, read it—read it at once directly, and aloud, aloud!” cried

she, calling Colia to her and giving him the journal.—“Read it aloud,

so that everyone may hear it!”

An impetuous woman, Lizabetha Prokofievna sometimes weighed her anchors

and put out to sea quite regardless of the possible storms she might

encounter. Ivan Fedorovitch felt a sudden pang of alarm, but the others

were merely curious, and somewhat surprised. Colia unfolded the paper,

and began to read, in his clear, high-pitched voice, the following

article:

“Proletarians and scions of nobility! An episode of the brigandage of

today and every day! Progress! Reform! Justice!”

“Strange things are going on in our so-called Holy Russia in this age

of reform and great enterprises; this age of patriotism in which

hundreds of millions are yearly sent abroad; in which industry is

encouraged, and the hands of Labour paralyzed, etc.; there is no end to

this, gentlemen, so let us come to the point. A strange thing has

happened to a scion of our defunct aristocracy. (\_De profundis!\_) The

grandfathers of these scions ruined themselves at the gaming-tables;

their fathers were forced to serve as officers or subalterns; some have

died just as they were about to be tried for innocent thoughtlessness

in the handling of public funds. Their children are sometimes

congenital idiots, like the hero of our story; sometimes they are found

in the dock at the Assizes, where they are generally acquitted by the

jury for edifying motives; sometimes they distinguish themselves by one

of those burning scandals that amaze the public and add another blot to

the stained record of our age. Six months ago—that is, last winter—this

particular scion returned to Russia, wearing gaiters like a foreigner,

and shivering with cold in an old scantily-lined cloak. He had come

from Switzerland, where he had just undergone a successful course of

treatment for idiocy (\_sic!\_). Certainly Fortune favoured him, for,

apart from the interesting malady of which he was cured in Switzerland

(can there be a cure for idiocy?) his story proves the truth of the

Russian proverb that ‘happiness is the right of certain classes!’ Judge

for yourselves. Our subject was an infant in arms when he lost his

father, an officer who died just as he was about to be court-martialled

for gambling away the funds of his company, and perhaps also for

flogging a subordinate to excess (remember the good old days,

gentlemen). The orphan was brought up by the charity of a very rich

Russian landowner. In the good old days, this man, whom we will call

P——, owned four thousand souls as serfs (souls as serfs!—can you

understand such an expression, gentlemen? I cannot; it must be looked

up in a dictionary before one can understand it; these things of a

bygone day are already unintelligible to us). He appears to have been

one of those Russian parasites who lead an idle existence abroad,

spending the summer at some spa, and the winter in Paris, to the

greater profit of the organizers of public balls. It may safely be said

that the manager of the Chateau des Fleurs (lucky man!) pocketed at

least a third of the money paid by Russian peasants to their lords in

the days of serfdom. However this may be, the gay P—— brought up the

orphan like a prince, provided him with tutors and governesses (pretty,

of course!) whom he chose himself in Paris. But the little aristocrat,

the last of his noble race, was an idiot. The governesses, recruited at

the Chateau des Fleurs, laboured in vain; at twenty years of age their

pupil could not speak in any language, not even Russian. But ignorance

of the latter was still excusable. At last P—— was seized with a

strange notion; he imagined that in Switzerland they could change an

idiot into a man of sense. After all, the idea was quite logical; a

parasite and landowner naturally supposed that intelligence was a

marketable commodity like everything else, and that in Switzerland

especially it could be bought for money. The case was entrusted to a

celebrated Swiss professor, and cost thousands of roubles; the

treatment lasted five years. Needless to say, the idiot did not become

intelligent, but it is alleged that he grew into something more or less

resembling a man. At this stage P—— died suddenly, and, as usual, he

had made no will and left his affairs in disorder. A crowd of eager

claimants arose, who cared nothing about any last scion of a noble race

undergoing treatment in Switzerland, at the expense of the deceased, as

a congenital idiot. Idiot though he was, the noble scion tried to cheat

his professor, and they say he succeeded in getting him to continue the

treatment gratis for two years, by concealing the death of his

benefactor. But the professor himself was a charlatan. Getting anxious

at last when no money was forthcoming, and alarmed above all by his

patient’s appetite, he presented him with a pair of old gaiters and a

shabby cloak and packed him off to Russia, third class. It would seem

that Fortune had turned her back upon our hero. Not at all; Fortune,

who lets whole populations die of hunger, showered all her gifts at

once upon the little aristocrat, like Kryloff’s Cloud which passes over

an arid plain and empties itself into the sea. He had scarcely arrived

in St. Petersburg, when a relation of his mother’s (who was of

bourgeois origin, of course), died at Moscow. He was a merchant, an Old

Believer, and he had no children. He left a fortune of several millions

in good current coin, and everything came to our noble scion, our

gaitered baron, formerly treated for idiocy in a Swiss lunatic asylum.

Instantly the scene changed, crowds of friends gathered round our

baron, who meanwhile had lost his head over a celebrated demi-mondaine;

he even discovered some relations; moreover a number of young girls of

high birth burned to be united to him in lawful matrimony. Could anyone

possibly imagine a better match? Aristocrat, millionaire, and idiot, he

has every advantage! One might hunt in vain for his equal, even with

the lantern of Diogenes; his like is not to be had even by getting it

made to order!”

“Oh, I don’t know what this means” cried Ivan Fedorovitch, transported

with indignation.

“Leave off, Colia,” begged the prince. Exclamations arose on all sides.

“Let him go on reading at all costs!” ordered Lizabetha Prokofievna,

evidently preserving her composure by a desperate effort. “Prince, if

the reading is stopped, you and I will quarrel.”

Colia had no choice but to obey. With crimson cheeks he read on

unsteadily:

“But while our young millionaire dwelt as it were in the Empyrean,

something new occurred. One fine morning a man called upon him, calm

and severe of aspect, distinguished, but plainly dressed. Politely, but

in dignified terms, as befitted his errand, he briefly explained the

motive for his visit. He was a lawyer of enlightened views; his client

was a young man who had consulted him in confidence. This young man was

no other than the son of P——, though he bears another name. In his

youth P——, the sensualist, had seduced a young girl, poor but

respectable. She was a serf, but had received a European education.

Finding that a child was expected, he hastened her marriage with a man

of noble character who had loved her for a long time. He helped the

young couple for a time, but he was soon obliged to give up, for the

high-minded husband refused to accept anything from him. Soon the

careless nobleman forgot all about his former mistress and the child

she had borne him; then, as we know, he died intestate. P——’s son, born

after his mother’s marriage, found a true father in the generous man

whose name he bore. But when he also died, the orphan was left to

provide for himself, his mother now being an invalid who had lost the

use of her limbs. Leaving her in a distant province, he came to the

capital in search of pupils. By dint of daily toil he earned enough to

enable him to follow the college courses, and at last to enter the

university. But what can one earn by teaching the children of Russian

merchants at ten copecks a lesson, especially with an invalid mother to

keep? Even her death did not much diminish the hardships of the young

man’s struggle for existence. Now this is the question: how, in the

name of justice, should our scion have argued the case? Our readers

will think, no doubt, that he would say to himself: ‘P—— showered

benefits upon me all my life; he spent tens of thousands of roubles to

educate me, to provide me with governesses, and to keep me under

treatment in Switzerland. Now I am a millionaire, and P——’s son, a

noble young man who is not responsible for the faults of his careless

and forgetful father, is wearing himself out giving ill-paid lessons.

According to justice, all that was done for me ought to have been done

for him. The enormous sums spent upon me were not really mine; they

came to me by an error of blind Fortune, when they ought to have gone

to P——’s son. They should have gone to benefit him, not me, in whom P——

interested himself by a mere caprice, instead of doing his duty as a

father. If I wished to behave nobly, justly, and with delicacy, I ought

to bestow half my fortune upon the son of my benefactor; but as economy

is my favourite virtue, and I know this is not a case in which the law

can intervene, I will not give up half my millions. But it would be too

openly vile, too flagrantly infamous, if I did not at least restore to

P——’s son the tens of thousands of roubles spent in curing my idiocy.

This is simply a case of conscience and of strict justice. Whatever

would have become of me if P—— had not looked after my education, and

had taken care of his own son instead of me?’

“No, gentlemen, our scions of the nobility do not reason thus. The

lawyer, who had taken up the matter purely out of friendship to the

young man, and almost against his will, invoked every consideration of

justice, delicacy, honour, and even plain figures; in vain, the

ex-patient of the Swiss lunatic asylum was inflexible. All this might

pass, but the sequel is absolutely unpardonable, and not to be excused

by any interesting malady. This millionaire, having but just discarded

the old gaiters of his professor, could not even understand that the

noble young man slaving away at his lessons was not asking for

charitable help, but for his rightful due, though the debt was not a

legal one; that, correctly speaking, he was not asking for anything,

but it was merely his friends who had thought fit to bestir themselves

on his behalf. With the cool insolence of a bloated capitalist, secure

in his millions, he majestically drew a banknote for fifty roubles from

his pocket-book and sent it to the noble young man as a humiliating

piece of charity. You can hardly believe it, gentlemen! You are

scandalized and disgusted; you cry out in indignation! But that is what

he did! Needless to say, the money was returned, or rather flung back

in his face. The case is not within the province of the law, it must be

referred to the tribunal of public opinion; this is what we now do,

guaranteeing the truth of all the details which we have related.”

When Colia had finished reading, he handed the paper to the prince, and

retired silently to a corner of the room, hiding his face in his hands.

He was overcome by a feeling of inexpressible shame; his boyish

sensitiveness was wounded beyond endurance. It seemed to him that

something extraordinary, some sudden catastrophe had occurred, and that

he was almost the cause of it, because he had read the article aloud.

Yet all the others were similarly affected. The girls were

uncomfortable and ashamed. Lizabetha Prokofievna restrained her violent

anger by a great effort; perhaps she bitterly regretted her

interference in the matter; for the present she kept silence. The

prince felt as very shy people often do in such a case; he was so

ashamed of the conduct of other people, so humiliated for his guests,

that he dared not look them in the face. Ptitsin, Varia, Gania, and

Lebedeff himself, all looked rather confused. Stranger still, Hippolyte

and the “son of Pavlicheff” also seemed slightly surprised, and

Lebedeff’s nephew was obviously far from pleased. The boxer alone was

perfectly calm; he twisted his moustaches with affected dignity, and if

his eyes were cast down it was certainly not in confusion, but rather

in noble modesty, as if he did not wish to be insolent in his triumph.

It was evident that he was delighted with the article.

“The devil knows what it means,” growled Ivan Fedorovitch, under his

breath; “it must have taken the united wits of fifty footmen to write

it.”

“May I ask your reason for such an insulting supposition, sir?” said

Hippolyte, trembling with rage.

“You will admit yourself, general, that for an honourable man, if the

author is an honourable man, that is an—an insult,” growled the boxer

suddenly, with convulsive jerkings of his shoulders.

“In the first place, it is not for you to address me as ‘sir,’ and, in

the second place, I refuse to give you any explanation,” said Ivan

Fedorovitch vehemently; and he rose without another word, and went and

stood on the first step of the flight that led from the verandah to the

street, turning his back on the company. He was indignant with

Lizabetha Prokofievna, who did not think of moving even now.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen, let me speak at last,” cried the prince, anxious

and agitated. “Please let us understand one another. I say nothing

about the article, gentlemen, except that every word is false; I say

this because you know it as well as I do. It is shameful. I should be

surprised if any one of you could have written it.”

“I did not know of its existence till this moment,” declared Hippolyte.

“I do not approve of it.”

“I knew it had been written, but I would not have advised its

publication,” said Lebedeff’s nephew, “because it is premature.”

“I knew it, but I have a right. I... I...” stammered the “son of

Pavlicheff.”

“What! Did you write all that yourself? Is it possible?” asked the

prince, regarding Burdovsky with curiosity.

“One might dispute your right to ask such questions,” observed

Lebedeff’s nephew.

“I was only surprised that Mr. Burdovsky should have—however, this is

what I have to say. Since you had already given the matter publicity,

why did you object just now, when I began to speak of it to my

friends?”

“At last!” murmured Lizabetha Prokofievna indignantly.

Lebedeff could restrain himself no longer; he made his way through the

row of chairs.

“Prince,” he cried, “you are forgetting that if you consented to

receive and hear them, it was only because of your kind heart which has

no equal, for they had not the least right to demand it, especially as

you had placed the matter in the hands of Gavrila Ardalionovitch, which

was also extremely kind of you. You are also forgetting, most excellent

prince, that you are with friends, a select company; you cannot

sacrifice them to these gentlemen, and it is only for you to have them

turned out this instant. As the master of the house I shall have great

pleasure ....”

“Quite right!” agreed General Ivolgin in a loud voice.

“That will do, Lebedeff, that will do—” began the prince, when an

indignant outcry drowned his words.

“Excuse me, prince, excuse me, but now that will not do,” shouted

Lebedeff’s nephew, his voice dominating all the others. “The matter

must be clearly stated, for it is obviously not properly understood.

They are calling in some legal chicanery, and upon that ground they are

threatening to turn us out of the house! Really, prince, do you think

we are such fools as not to be aware that this matter does not come

within the law, and that legally we cannot claim a rouble from you? But

we are also aware that if actual law is not on our side, human law is

for us, natural law, the law of common-sense and conscience, which is

no less binding upon every noble and honest man—that is, every man of

sane judgment—because it is not to be found in miserable legal codes.

If we come here without fear of being turned out (as was threatened

just now) because of the imperative tone of our demand, and the

unseemliness of such a visit at this late hour (though it was not late

when we arrived, we were kept waiting in your anteroom), if, I say, we

came in without fear, it is just because we expected to find you a man

of sense; I mean, a man of honour and conscience. It is quite true that

we did not present ourselves humbly, like your flatterers and

parasites, but holding up our heads as befits independent men. We

present no petition, but a proud and free demand (note it well, we do

not beseech, we demand!). We ask you fairly and squarely in a dignified

manner. Do you believe that in this affair of Burdovsky you have right

on your side? Do you admit that Pavlicheff overwhelmed you with

benefits, and perhaps saved your life? If you admit it (which we take

for granted), do you intend, now that you are a millionaire, and do you

not think it in conformity with justice, to indemnify Burdovsky? Yes or

no? If it is yes, or, in other words, if you possess what you call

honour and conscience, and we more justly call common-sense, then

accede to our demand, and the matter is at an end. Give us

satisfaction, without entreaties or thanks from us; do not expect

thanks from us, for what you do will be done not for our sake, but for

the sake of justice. If you refuse to satisfy us, that is, if your

answer is no, we will go away at once, and there will be an end of the

matter. But we will tell you to your face before the present company

that you are a man of vulgar and undeveloped mind; we will openly deny

you the right to speak in future of your honour and conscience, for you

have not paid the fair price of such a right. I have no more to say—I

have put the question before you. Now turn us out if you dare. You can

do it; force is on your side. But remember that we do not beseech, we

demand! We do not beseech, we demand!”

With these last excited words, Lebedeff’s nephew was silent.

“We demand, we demand, we demand, we do not beseech,” spluttered

Burdovsky, red as a lobster.

The speech of Lebedeff’s nephew caused a certain stir among the

company; murmurs arose, though with the exception of Lebedeff, who was

still very much excited, everyone was careful not to interfere in the

matter. Strangely enough, Lebedeff, although on the prince’s side,

seemed quite proud of his nephew’s eloquence. Gratified vanity was

visible in the glances he cast upon the assembled company.

“In my opinion, Mr. Doktorenko,” said the prince, in rather a low

voice, “you are quite right in at least half of what you say. I would

go further and say that you are altogether right, and that I quite

agree with you, if there were not something lacking in your speech. I

cannot undertake to say precisely what it is, but you have certainly

omitted something, and you cannot be quite just while there is

something lacking. But let us put that aside and return to the point.

Tell me what induced you to publish this article. Every word of it is a

calumny, and I think, gentlemen, that you have been guilty of a mean

action.”

“Allow me—”

“Sir—”

“What? What? What?” cried all the visitors at once, in violent

agitation.

“As to the article,” said Hippolyte in his croaking voice, “I have told

you already that we none of us approve of it! There is the writer,” he

added, pointing to the boxer, who sat beside him. “I quite admit that

he has written it in his old regimental manner, with an equal disregard

for style and decency. I know he is a cross between a fool and an

adventurer; I make no bones about telling him so to his face every day.

But after all he is half justified; publicity is the lawful right of

every man; consequently, Burdovsky is not excepted. Let him answer for

his own blunders. As to the objection which I made just now in the name

of all, to the presence of your friends, I think I ought to explain,

gentlemen, that I only did so to assert our rights, though we really

wished to have witnesses; we had agreed unanimously upon the point

before we came in. We do not care who your witnesses may be, or whether

they are your friends or not. As they cannot fail to recognize

Burdovsky’s right (seeing that it is mathematically demonstrable), it

is just as well that the witnesses should be your friends. The truth

will only be more plainly evident.”

“It is quite true; we had agreed upon that point,” said Lebedeff’s

nephew, in confirmation.

“If that is the case, why did you begin by making such a fuss about

it?” asked the astonished prince.

The boxer was dying to get in a few words; owing, no doubt, to the

presence of the ladies, he was becoming quite jovial.

“As to the article, prince,” he said, “I admit that I wrote it, in

spite of the severe criticism of my poor friend, in whom I always

overlook many things because of his unfortunate state of health. But I

wrote and published it in the form of a letter, in the paper of a

friend. I showed it to no one but Burdovsky, and I did not read it all

through, even to him. He immediately gave me permission to publish it,

but you will admit that I might have done so without his consent.

Publicity is a noble, beneficent, and universal right. I hope, prince,

that you are too progressive to deny this?”

“I deny nothing, but you must confess that your article—”

“Is a bit thick, you mean? Well, in a way that is in the public

interest; you will admit that yourself, and after all one cannot

overlook a blatant fact. So much the worse for the guilty parties, but

the public welfare must come before everything. As to certain

inaccuracies and figures of speech, so to speak, you will also admit

that the motive, aim, and intention, are the chief thing. It is a

question, above all, of making a wholesome example; the individual case

can be examined afterwards; and as to the style—well, the thing was

meant to be humorous, so to speak, and, after all, everybody writes

like that; you must admit it yourself! Ha, ha!”

“But, gentlemen, I assure you that you are quite astray,” exclaimed the

prince. “You have published this article upon the supposition that I

would never consent to satisfy Mr. Burdovsky. Acting on that

conviction, you have tried to intimidate me by this publication and to

be revenged for my supposed refusal. But what did you know of my

intentions? It may be that I have resolved to satisfy Mr. Burdovsky’s

claim. I now declare openly, in the presence of these witnesses, that I

will do so.”

“The noble and intelligent word of an intelligent and most noble man,

at last!” exclaimed the boxer.

“Good God!” exclaimed Lizabetha Prokofievna involuntarily.

“This is intolerable,” growled the general.

“Allow me, gentlemen, allow me,” urged the prince.

“I will explain matters to you. Five weeks ago I received a visit from

Tchebaroff, your agent, Mr. Burdovsky. You have given a very flattering

description of him in your article, Mr. Keller,” he continued, turning

to the boxer with a smile, “but he did not please me at all. I saw at

once that Tchebaroff was the moving spirit in the matter, and, to speak

frankly, I thought he might have induced you, Mr. Burdovsky, to make

this claim, by taking advantage of your simplicity.”

“You have no right.... I am not simple,” stammered Burdovsky, much

agitated.

“You have no sort of right to suppose such things,” said Lebedeff’s

nephew in a tone of authority.

“It is most offensive!” shrieked Hippolyte; “it is an insulting

suggestion, false, and most ill-timed.”

“I beg your pardon, gentlemen; please excuse me,” said the prince. “I

thought absolute frankness on both sides would be best, but have it

your own way. I told Tchebaroff that, as I was not in Petersburg, I

would commission a friend to look into the matter without delay, and

that I would let you know, Mr. Burdovsky. Gentlemen, I have no

hesitation in telling you that it was the fact of Tchebaroff’s

intervention that made me suspect a fraud. Oh! do not take offence at

my words, gentlemen, for Heaven’s sake do not be so touchy!” cried the

prince, seeing that Burdovsky was getting excited again, and that the

rest were preparing to protest. “If I say I suspected a fraud, there is

nothing personal in that. I had never seen any of you then; I did not

even know your names; I only judged by Tchebaroff; I am speaking quite

generally—if you only knew how I have been ‘done’ since I came into my

fortune!”

“You are shockingly naive, prince,” said Lebedeff’s nephew in mocking

tones.

“Besides, though you are a prince and a millionaire, and even though

you may really be simple and good-hearted, you can hardly be outside

the general law,” Hippolyte declared loudly.

“Perhaps not; it is very possible,” the prince agreed hastily, “though

I do not know what general law you allude to. I will go on—only please

do not take offence without good cause. I assure you I do not mean to

offend you in the least. Really, it is impossible to speak three words

sincerely without your flying into a rage! At first I was amazed when

Tchebaroff told me that Pavlicheff had a son, and that he was in such a

miserable position. Pavlicheff was my benefactor, and my father’s

friend. Oh, Mr. Keller, why does your article impute things to my

father without the slightest foundation? He never squandered the funds

of his company nor ill-treated his subordinates, I am absolutely

certain of it; I cannot imagine how you could bring yourself to write

such a calumny! But your assertions concerning Pavlicheff are

absolutely intolerable! You do not scruple to make a libertine of that

noble man; you call him a sensualist as coolly as if you were speaking

the truth, and yet it would not be possible to find a chaster man. He

was even a scholar of note, and in correspondence with several

celebrated scientists, and spent large sums in the interests of

science. As to his kind heart and his good actions, you were right

indeed when you said that I was almost an idiot at that time, and could

hardly understand anything—(I could speak and understand Russian,

though),—but now I can appreciate what I remember—”

“Excuse me,” interrupted Hippolyte, “is not this rather sentimental?

You said you wished to come to the point; please remember that it is

after nine o’clock.”

“Very well, gentlemen—very well,” replied the prince. “At first I

received the news with mistrust, then I said to myself that I might be

mistaken, and that Pavlicheff might possibly have had a son. But I was

absolutely amazed at the readiness with which the son had revealed the

secret of his birth at the expense of his mother’s honour. For

Tchebaroff had already menaced me with publicity in our interview....”

“What nonsense!” Lebedeff’s nephew interrupted violently.

“You have no right—you have no right!” cried Burdovsky.

“The son is not responsible for the misdeeds of his father; and the

mother is not to blame,” added Hippolyte, with warmth.

“That seems to me all the more reason for sparing her,” said the prince

timidly.

“Prince, you are not only simple, but your simplicity is almost past

the limit,” said Lebedeff’s nephew, with a sarcastic smile.

“But what right had you?” said Hippolyte in a very strange tone.

“None—none whatever,” agreed the prince hastily. “I admit you are right

there, but it was involuntary, and I immediately said to myself that my

personal feelings had nothing to do with it,—that if I thought it right

to satisfy the demands of Mr. Burdovsky, out of respect for the memory

of Pavlicheff, I ought to do so in any case, whether I esteemed Mr.

Burdovsky or not. I only mentioned this, gentlemen, because it seemed

so unnatural to me for a son to betray his mother’s secret in such a

way. In short, that is what convinced me that Tchebaroff must be a

rogue, and that he had induced Mr. Burdovsky to attempt this fraud.”

“But this is intolerable!” cried the visitors, some of them starting to

their feet.

“Gentlemen, I supposed from this that poor Mr. Burdovsky must be a

simple-minded man, quite defenceless, and an easy tool in the hands of

rogues. That is why I thought it my duty to try and help him as

‘Pavlicheff’s son’; in the first place by rescuing him from the

influence of Tchebaroff, and secondly by making myself his friend. I

have resolved to give him ten thousand roubles; that is about the sum

which I calculate that Pavlicheff must have spent on me.”

“What, only ten thousand!” cried Hippolyte.

“Well, prince, your arithmetic is not up to much, or else you are

mighty clever at it, though you affect the air of a simpleton,” said

Lebedeff’s nephew.

“I will not accept ten thousand roubles,” said Burdovsky.

“Accept, Antip,” whispered the boxer eagerly, leaning past the back of

Hippolyte’s chair to give his friend this piece of advice. “Take it for

the present; we can see about more later on.”

“Look here, Mr. Muishkin,” shouted Hippolyte, “please understand that

we are not fools, nor idiots, as your guests seem to imagine; these

ladies who look upon us with such scorn, and especially this fine

gentleman” (pointing to Evgenie Pavlovitch) “whom I have not the honour

of knowing, though I think I have heard some talk about him—”

“Really, really, gentlemen,” cried the prince in great agitation, “you

are misunderstanding me again. In the first place, Mr. Keller, you have

greatly overestimated my fortune in your article. I am far from being a

millionaire. I have barely a tenth of what you suppose. Secondly, my

treatment in Switzerland was very far from costing tens of thousands of

roubles. Schneider received six hundred roubles a year, and he was only

paid for the first three years. As to the pretty governesses whom

Pavlicheff is supposed to have brought from Paris, they only exist in

Mr. Keller’s imagination; it is another calumny. According to my

calculations, the sum spent on me was very considerably under ten

thousand roubles, but I decided on that sum, and you must admit that in

paying a debt I could not offer Mr. Burdovsky more, however kindly

disposed I might be towards him; delicacy forbids it; I should seem to

be offering him charity instead of rightful payment. I don’t know how

you cannot see that, gentlemen! Besides, I had no intention of leaving

the matter there. I meant to intervene amicably later on and help to

improve poor Mr. Burdovsky’s position. It is clear that he has been

deceived, or he would never have agreed to anything so vile as the

scandalous revelations about his mother in Mr. Keller’s article. But,

gentlemen, why are you getting angry again? Are we never to come to an

understanding? Well, the event has proved me right! I have just seen

with my own eyes the proof that my conjecture was correct!” he added,

with increasing eagerness.

He meant to calm his hearers, and did not perceive that his words had

only increased their irritation.

“What do you mean? What are you convinced of?” they demanded angrily.

“In the first place, I have had the opportunity of getting a correct

idea of Mr. Burdovsky. I see what he is for myself. He is an innocent

man, deceived by everyone! A defenceless victim, who deserves

indulgence! Secondly, Gavrila Ardalionovitch, in whose hands I had

placed the matter, had his first interview with me barely an hour ago.

I had not heard from him for some time, as I was away, and have been

ill for three days since my return to St. Petersburg. He tells me that

he has exposed the designs of Tchebaroff and has proof that justifies

my opinion of him. I know, gentlemen, that many people think me an

idiot. Counting upon my reputation as a man whose purse-strings are

easily loosened, Tchebaroff thought it would be a simple matter to

fleece me, especially by trading on my gratitude to Pavlicheff. But the

main point is—listen, gentlemen, let me finish!—the main point is that

Mr. Burdovsky is not Pavlicheff’s son at all. Gavrila Ardalionovitch

has just told me of his discovery, and assures me that he has positive

proofs. Well, what do you think of that? It is scarcely credible, even

after all the tricks that have been played upon me. Please note that we

have positive proofs! I can hardly believe it myself, I assure you; I

do not yet believe it; I am still doubtful, because Gavrila

Ardalionovitch has not had time to go into details; but there can be no

further doubt that Tchebaroff is a rogue! He has deceived poor Mr.

Burdovsky, and all of you, gentlemen, who have come forward so nobly to

support your friend—(he evidently needs support, I quite see that!). He

has abused your credulity and involved you all in an attempted fraud,

for when all is said and done this claim is nothing else!”

“What! a fraud? What, he is not Pavlicheff’s son? Impossible!”

These exclamations but feebly expressed the profound bewilderment into

which the prince’s words had plunged Burdovsky’s companions.

“Certainly it is a fraud! Since Mr. Burdovsky is not Pavlicheff’s son,

his claim is neither more nor less than attempted fraud (supposing, of

course, that he had known the truth), but the fact is that he has been

deceived. I insist on this point in order to justify him; I repeat that

his simple-mindedness makes him worthy of pity, and that he cannot

stand alone; otherwise he would have behaved like a scoundrel in this

matter. But I feel certain that he does not understand it! I was just

the same myself before I went to Switzerland; I stammered incoherently;

one tries to express oneself and cannot. I understand that. I am all

the better able to pity Mr. Burdovsky, because I know from experience

what it is to be like that, and so I have a right to speak. Well,

though there is no such person as ‘Pavlicheff’s son,’ and it is all

nothing but a humbug, yet I will keep to my decision, and I am prepared

to give up ten thousand roubles in memory of Pavlicheff. Before Mr.

Burdovsky made this claim, I proposed to found a school with this

money, in memory of my benefactor, but I shall honour his memory quite

as well by giving the ten thousand roubles to Mr. Burdovsky, because,

though he was not Pavlicheff’s son, he was treated almost as though he

were. That is what gave a rogue the opportunity of deceiving him; he

really did think himself Pavlicheff’s son. Listen, gentlemen; this

matter must be settled; keep calm; do not get angry; and sit down!

Gavrila Ardalionovitch will explain everything to you at once, and I

confess that I am very anxious to hear all the details myself. He says

that he has even been to Pskoff to see your mother, Mr. Burdovsky; she

is not dead, as the article which was just read to us makes out. Sit

down, gentlemen, sit down!”

The prince sat down, and at length prevailed upon Burdovsky’s company

to do likewise. During the last ten or twenty minutes, exasperated by

continual interruptions, he had raised his voice, and spoken with great

vehemence. Now, no doubt, he bitterly regretted several words and

expressions which had escaped him in his excitement. If he had not been

driven beyond the limits of endurance, he would not have ventured to

express certain conjectures so openly. He had no sooner sat down than

his heart was torn by sharp remorse. Besides insulting Burdovsky with

the supposition, made in the presence of witnesses, that he was

suffering from the complaint for which he had himself been treated in

Switzerland, he reproached himself with the grossest indelicacy in

having offered him the ten thousand roubles before everyone. “I ought

to have waited till to-morrow and offered him the money when we were

alone,” thought Muishkin. “Now it is too late, the mischief is done!

Yes, I am an idiot, an absolute idiot!” he said to himself, overcome

with shame and regret.

Till then Gavrila Ardalionovitch had sat apart in silence. When the

prince called upon him, he came and stood by his side, and in a calm,

clear voice began to render an account of the mission confided to him.

All conversation ceased instantly. Everyone, especially the Burdovsky

party, listened with the utmost curiosity.

IX.

“You will not deny, I am sure,” said Gavrila Ardalionovitch, turning to

Burdovsky, who sat looking at him with wide-open eyes, perplexed and

astonished. “You will not deny, seriously, that you were born just two

years after your mother’s legal marriage to Mr. Burdovsky, your father.

Nothing would be easier than to prove the date of your birth from

well-known facts; we can only look on Mr. Keller’s version as a work of

imagination, and one, moreover, extremely offensive both to you and

your mother. Of course he distorted the truth in order to strengthen

your claim, and to serve your interests. Mr. Keller said that he

previously consulted you about his article in the paper, but did not

read it to you as a whole. Certainly he could not have read that

passage...”

“As a matter of fact, I did not read it,” interrupted the boxer, “but

its contents had been given me on unimpeachable authority, and I...”

“Excuse me, Mr. Keller,” interposed Gavrila Ardalionovitch. “Allow me

to speak. I assure you your article shall be mentioned in its proper

place, and you can then explain everything, but for the moment I would

rather not anticipate. Quite accidentally, with the help of my sister,

Varvara Ardalionovna Ptitsin, I obtained from one of her intimate

friends, Madame Zoubkoff, a letter written to her twenty-five years

ago, by Nicolai Andreevitch Pavlicheff, then abroad. After getting into

communication with this lady, I went by her advice to Timofei

Fedorovitch Viazovkin, a retired colonel, and one of Pavlicheff’s

oldest friends. He gave me two more letters written by the latter when

he was still in foreign parts. These three documents, their dates, and

the facts mentioned in them, prove in the most undeniable manner, that

eighteen months before your birth, Nicolai Andreevitch went abroad,

where he remained for three consecutive years. Your mother, as you are

well aware, has never been out of Russia.... It is too late to read the

letters now; I am content to state the fact. But if you desire it, come

to me tomorrow morning, bring witnesses and writing experts with you,

and I will prove the absolute truth of my story. From that moment the

question will be decided.”

These words caused a sensation among the listeners, and there was a

general movement of relief. Burdovsky got up abruptly.

“If that is true,” said he, “I have been deceived, grossly deceived,

but not by Tchebaroff: and for a long time past, a long time. I do not

wish for experts, not I, nor to go to see you. I believe you. I give it

up.... But I refuse the ten thousand roubles. Good-bye.”

“Wait five minutes more, Mr. Burdovsky,” said Gavrila Ardalionovitch

pleasantly. “I have more to say. Some rather curious and important

facts have come to light, and it is absolutely necessary, in my

opinion, that you should hear them. You will not regret, I fancy, to

have the whole matter thoroughly cleared up.”

Burdovsky silently resumed his seat, and bent his head as though in

profound thought. His friend, Lebedeff’s nephew, who had risen to

accompany him, also sat down again. He seemed much disappointed, though

as self-confident as ever. Hippolyte looked dejected and sulky, as well

as surprised. He had just been attacked by a violent fit of coughing,

so that his handkerchief was stained with blood. The boxer looked

thoroughly frightened.

“Oh, Antip!” cried he in a miserable voice, “I did say to you the other

day—the day before yesterday—that perhaps you were not really

Pavlicheff’s son!”

There were sounds of half-smothered laughter at this.

“Now, that is a valuable piece of information, Mr. Keller,” replied

Gania. “However that may be, I have private information which convinces

me that Mr. Burdovsky, though doubtless aware of the date of his birth,

knew nothing at all about Pavlicheff’s sojourn abroad. Indeed, he

passed the greater part of his life out of Russia, returning at

intervals for short visits. The journey in question is in itself too

unimportant for his friends to recollect it after more than twenty

years; and of course Mr. Burdovsky could have known nothing about it,

for he was not born. As the event has proved, it was not impossible to

find evidence of his absence, though I must confess that chance has

helped me in a quest which might very well have come to nothing. It was

really almost impossible for Burdovsky or Tchebaroff to discover these

facts, even if it had entered their heads to try. Naturally they never

dreamt...”

Here the voice of Hippolyte suddenly intervened.

“Allow me, Mr. Ivolgin,” he said irritably. “What is the good of all

this rigmarole? Pardon me. All is now clear, and we acknowledge the

truth of your main point. Why go into these tedious details? You wish

perhaps to boast of the cleverness of your investigation, to cry up

your talents as detective? Or perhaps your intention is to excuse

Burdovsky, by proving that he took up the matter in ignorance? Well, I

consider that extremely impudent on your part! You ought to know that

Burdovsky has no need of being excused or justified by you or anyone

else! It is an insult! The affair is quite painful enough for him

without that. Will nothing make you understand?”

“Enough! enough! Mr. Terentieff,” interrupted Gania.

“Don’t excite yourself; you seem very ill, and I am sorry for that. I

am almost done, but there are a few facts to which I must briefly

refer, as I am convinced that they ought to be clearly explained once

for all....” A movement of impatience was noticed in his audience as he

resumed: “I merely wish to state, for the information of all concerned,

that the reason for Mr. Pavlicheff’s interest in your mother, Mr.

Burdovsky, was simply that she was the sister of a serf-girl with whom

he was deeply in love in his youth, and whom most certainly he would

have married but for her sudden death. I have proofs that this

circumstance is almost, if not quite, forgotten. I may add that when

your mother was about ten years old, Pavlicheff took her under his

care, gave her a good education, and later, a considerable dowry. His

relations were alarmed, and feared he might go so far as to marry her,

but she gave her hand to a young land-surveyor named Burdovsky when she

reached the age of twenty. I can even say definitely that it was a

marriage of affection. After his wedding your father gave up his

occupation as land-surveyor, and with his wife’s dowry of fifteen

thousand roubles went in for commercial speculations. As he had had no

experience, he was cheated on all sides, and took to drink in order to

forget his troubles. He shortened his life by his excesses, and eight

years after his marriage he died. Your mother says herself that she was

left in the direst poverty, and would have died of starvation had it

not been for Pavlicheff, who generously allowed her a yearly pension of

six hundred roubles. Many people recall his extreme fondness for you as

a little boy. Your mother confirms this, and agrees with others in

thinking that he loved you the more because you were a sickly child,

stammering in your speech, and almost deformed—for it is known that all

his life Nicolai Andreevitch had a partiality for unfortunates of every

kind, especially children. In my opinion this is most important. I may

add that I discovered yet another fact, the last on which I employed my

detective powers. Seeing how fond Pavlicheff was of you,—it was thanks

to him you went to school, and also had the advantage of special

teachers—his relations and servants grew to believe that you were his

son, and that your father had been betrayed by his wife. I may point

out that this idea was only accredited generally during the last years

of Pavlicheff’s life, when his next-of-kin were trembling about the

succession, when the earlier story was quite forgotten, and when all

opportunity for discovering the truth had seemingly passed away. No

doubt you, Mr. Burdovsky, heard this conjecture, and did not hesitate

to accept it as true. I have had the honour of making your mother’s

acquaintance, and I find that she knows all about these reports. What

she does not know is that you, her son, should have listened to them so

complaisantly. I found your respected mother at Pskoff, ill and in deep

poverty, as she has been ever since the death of your benefactor. She

told me with tears of gratitude how you had supported her; she expects

much of you, and believes fervently in your future success...”

“Oh, this is unbearable!” said Lebedeff’s nephew impatiently. “What is

the good of all this romancing?”

“It is revolting and unseemly!” cried Hippolyte, jumping up in a fury.

Burdovsky alone sat silent and motionless.

“What is the good of it?” repeated Gavrila Ardalionovitch, with

pretended surprise. “Well, firstly, because now perhaps Mr. Burdovsky

is quite convinced that Mr. Pavlicheff’s love for him came simply from

generosity of soul, and not from paternal duty. It was most necessary

to impress this fact upon his mind, considering that he approved of the

article written by Mr. Keller. I speak thus because I look on you, Mr.

Burdovsky, as an honourable man. Secondly, it appears that there was no

intention of cheating in this case, even on the part of Tchebaroff. I

wish to say this quite plainly, because the prince hinted a while ago

that I too thought it an attempt at robbery and extortion. On the

contrary, everyone has been quite sincere in the matter, and although

Tchebaroff may be somewhat of a rogue, in this business he has acted

simply as any sharp lawyer would do under the circumstances. He looked

at it as a case that might bring him in a lot of money, and he did not

calculate badly; because on the one hand he speculated on the

generosity of the prince, and his gratitude to the late Mr. Pavlicheff,

and on the other to his chivalrous ideas as to the obligations of

honour and conscience. As to Mr. Burdovsky, allowing for his

principles, we may acknowledge that he engaged in the business with

very little personal aim in view. At the instigation of Tchebaroff and

his other friends, he decided to make the attempt in the service of

truth, progress, and humanity. In short, the conclusion may be drawn

that, in spite of all appearances, Mr. Burdovsky is a man of

irreproachable character, and thus the prince can all the more readily

offer him his friendship, and the assistance of which he spoke just

now...”

“Hush! hush! Gavrila Ardalionovitch!” cried Muishkin in dismay, but it

was too late.

“I said, and I have repeated it over and over again,” shouted Burdovsky

furiously, “that I did not want the money. I will not take it...

why...I will not... I am going away!”

He was rushing hurriedly from the terrace, when Lebedeff’s nephew

seized his arms, and said something to him in a low voice. Burdovsky

turned quickly, and drawing an addressed but unsealed envelope from his

pocket, he threw it down on a little table beside the prince.

“There’s the money!... How dare you?... The money!”

“Those are the two hundred and fifty roubles you dared to send him as a

charity, by the hands of Tchebaroff,” explained Doktorenko.

“The article in the newspaper put it at fifty!” cried Colia.

“I beg your pardon,” said the prince, going up to Burdovsky. “I have

done you a great wrong, but I did not send you that money as a charity,

believe me. And now I am again to blame. I offended you just now.” (The

prince was much distressed; he seemed worn out with fatigue, and spoke

almost incoherently.) “I spoke of swindling... but I did not apply that

to you. I was deceived .... I said you were... afflicted... like me...

But you are not like me... you give lessons... you support your mother.

I said you had dishonoured your mother, but you love her. She says so

herself... I did not know... Gavrila Ardalionovitch did not tell me

that... Forgive me! I dared to offer you ten thousand roubles, but I

was wrong. I ought to have done it differently, and now... there is no

way of doing it, for you despise me...”

“I declare, this is a lunatic asylum!” cried Lizabetha Prokofievna.

“Of course it is a lunatic asylum!” repeated Aglaya sharply, but her

words were overpowered by other voices. Everybody was talking loudly,

making remarks and comments; some discussed the affair gravely, others

laughed. Ivan Fedorovitch Epanchin was extremely indignant. He stood

waiting for his wife with an air of offended dignity. Lebedeff’s nephew

took up the word again.

“Well, prince, to do you justice, you certainly know how to make the

most of your—let us call it infirmity, for the sake of politeness; you

have set about offering your money and friendship in such a way that no

self-respecting man could possibly accept them. This is an excess of

ingenuousness or of malice—you ought to know better than anyone which

word best fits the case.”

“Allow me, gentlemen,” said Gavrila Ardalionovitch, who had just

examined the contents of the envelope, “there are only a hundred

roubles here, not two hundred and fifty. I point this out, prince, to

prevent misunderstanding.”

“Never mind, never mind,” said the prince, signing to him to keep

quiet.

“But we do mind,” said Lebedeff’s nephew vehemently. “Prince, your

‘never mind’ is an insult to us. We have nothing to hide; our actions

can bear daylight. It is true that there are only a hundred roubles

instead of two hundred and fifty, but it is all the same.”

“Why, no, it is hardly the same,” remarked Gavrila Ardalionovitch, with

an air of ingenuous surprise.

“Don’t interrupt, we are not such fools as you think, Mr. Lawyer,”

cried Lebedeff’s nephew angrily. “Of course there is a difference

between a hundred roubles and two hundred and fifty, but in this case

the principle is the main point, and that a hundred and fifty roubles

are missing is only a side issue. The point to be emphasized is that

Burdovsky will not accept your highness’s charity; he flings it back in

your face, and it scarcely matters if there are a hundred roubles or

two hundred and fifty. Burdovsky has refused ten thousand roubles; you

heard him. He would not have returned even a hundred roubles if he was

dishonest! The hundred and fifty roubles were paid to Tchebaroff for

his travelling expenses. You may jeer at our stupidity and at our

inexperience in business matters; you have done all you could already

to make us look ridiculous; but do not dare to call us dishonest. The

four of us will club together every day to repay the hundred and fifty

roubles to the prince, if we have to pay it in instalments of a rouble

at a time, but we will repay it, with interest. Burdovsky is poor, he

has no millions. After his journey to see the prince Tchebaroff sent in

his bill. We counted on winning... Who would not have done the same in

such a case?”

“Who indeed?” exclaimed Prince S.

“I shall certainly go mad, if I stay here!” cried Lizabetha

Prokofievna.

“It reminds me,” said Evgenie Pavlovitch, laughing, “of the famous plea

of a certain lawyer who lately defended a man for murdering six people

in order to rob them. He excused his client on the score of poverty.

‘It is quite natural,’ he said in conclusion, ‘considering the state of

misery he was in, that he should have thought of murdering these six

people; which of you, gentlemen, would not have done the same in his

place?’”

“Enough,” cried Lizabetha Prokofievna abruptly, trembling with anger,

“we have had enough of this balderdash!”

In a state of terrible excitement she threw back her head, with flaming

eyes, casting looks of contempt and defiance upon the whole company, in

which she could no longer distinguish friend from foe. She had

restrained herself so long that she felt forced to vent her rage on

somebody. Those who knew Lizabetha Prokofievna saw at once how it was

with her. “She flies into these rages sometimes,” said Ivan Fedorovitch

to Prince S. the next day, “but she is not often so violent as she was

yesterday; it does not happen more than once in three years.”

“Be quiet, Ivan Fedorovitch! Leave me alone!” cried Mrs. Epanchin. “Why

do you offer me your arm now? You had not sense enough to take me away

before. You are my husband, you are a father, it was your duty to drag

me away by force, if in my folly I refused to obey you and go quietly.

You might at least have thought of your daughters. We can find our way

out now without your help. Here is shame enough for a year! Wait a

moment ‘till I thank the prince! Thank you, prince, for the

entertainment you have given us! It was most amusing to hear these

young men... It is vile, vile! A chaos, a scandal, worse than a

nightmare! Is it possible that there can be many such people on earth?

Be quiet, Aglaya! Be quiet, Alexandra! It is none of your business!

Don’t fuss round me like that, Evgenie Pavlovitch; you exasperate me!

So, my dear,” she cried, addressing the prince, “you go so far as to

beg their pardon! He says, ‘Forgive me for offering you a fortune.’ And

you, you mountebank, what are you laughing at?” she cried, turning

suddenly on Lebedeff’s nephew. “‘We refuse ten thousand roubles; we do

not beseech, we demand!’ As if he did not know that this idiot will

call on them tomorrow to renew his offers of money and friendship. You

will, won’t you? You will? Come, will you, or won’t you?”

“I shall,” said the prince, with gentle humility.

“You hear him! You count upon it, too,” she continued, turning upon

Doktorenko. “You are as sure of him now as if you had the money in your

pocket. And there you are playing the swaggerer to throw dust in our

eyes! No, my dear sir, you may take other people in! I can see through

all your airs and graces, I see your game!”

“Lizabetha Prokofievna!” exclaimed the prince.

“Come, Lizabetha Prokofievna, it is quite time for us to be going, we

will take the prince with us,” said Prince S. with a smile, in the

coolest possible way.

The girls stood apart, almost frightened; their father was positively

horrified. Mrs. Epanchin’s language astonished everybody. Some who

stood a little way off smiled furtively, and talked in whispers.

Lebedeff wore an expression of utmost ecstasy.

“Chaos and scandal are to be found everywhere, madame,” remarked

Doktorenko, who was considerably put out of countenance.

“Not like this! Nothing like the spectacle you have just given us,

sir,” answered Lizabetha Prokofievna, with a sort of hysterical rage.

“Leave me alone, will you?” she cried violently to those around her,

who were trying to keep her quiet. “No, Evgenie Pavlovitch, if, as you

said yourself just now, a lawyer said in open court that he found it

quite natural that a man should murder six people because he was in

misery, the world must be coming to an end. I had not heard of it

before. Now I understand everything. And this stutterer, won’t he turn

out a murderer?” she cried, pointing to Burdovsky, who was staring at

her with stupefaction. “I bet he will! He will have none of your money,

possibly, he will refuse it because his conscience will not allow him

to accept it, but he will go murdering you by night and walking off

with your cashbox, with a clear conscience! He does not call it a

dishonest action but ‘the impulse of a noble despair’; ‘a negation’; or

the devil knows what! Bah! everything is upside down, everyone walks

head downwards. A young girl, brought up at home, suddenly jumps into a

cab in the middle of the street, saying: ‘Good-bye, mother, I married

Karlitch, or Ivanitch, the other day!’ And you think it quite right?

You call such conduct estimable and natural? The ‘woman question’? Look

here,” she continued, pointing to Colia, “the other day that

whippersnapper told me that this was the whole meaning of the ‘woman

question.’ But even supposing that your mother is a fool, you are none

the less, bound to treat her with humanity. Why did you come here

tonight so insolently? ‘Give us our rights, but don’t dare to speak in

our presence. Show us every mark of deepest respect, while we treat you

like the scum of the earth.’ The miscreants have written a tissue of

calumny in their article, and these are the men who seek for truth, and

do battle for the right! ‘We do not beseech, we demand, you will get no

thanks from us, because you will be acting to satisfy your own

conscience!’ What morality! But, good heavens! if you declare that the

prince’s generosity will, excite no gratitude in you, he might answer

that he is not, bound to be grateful to Pavlicheff, who also was only

satisfying his own conscience. But you counted on the prince’s,

gratitude towards Pavlicheff; you never lent him any money; he owes you

nothing; then what were you counting upon if not on his gratitude? And

if you appeal to that sentiment in others, why should you expect to be

exempted from it? They are mad! They say society is savage and inhuman

because it despises a young girl who has been seduced. But if you call

society inhuman you imply that the young girl is made to suffer by its

censure. How then, can you hold her up to the scorn of society in the

newspapers without realizing that you are making her suffering, still

greater? Madmen! Vain fools! They don’t believe in God, they don’t

believe in Christ! But you are so eaten up by pride and vanity, that

you will end by devouring each other—that is my prophecy! Is not this

absurd? Is it not monstrous chaos? And after all this, that shameless

creature will go and beg their pardon! Are there many people like you?

What are you smiling at? Because I am not ashamed to disgrace myself

before you?—Yes, I am disgraced—it can’t be helped now! But don’t you

jeer at me, you scum!” (this was aimed at Hippolyte). “He is almost at

his last gasp, yet he corrupts others. You, have got hold of this lad—”

(she pointed to Colia); “you, have turned his head, you have taught him

to be an atheist, you don’t believe in God, and you are not too old to

be whipped, sir! A plague upon you! And so, Prince Lef Nicolaievitch,

you will call on them tomorrow, will you?” she asked the prince

breathlessly, for the second time.

“Yes.”

“Then I will never speak to you again.” She made a sudden movement to

go, and then turned quickly back. “And you will call on that atheist?”

she continued, pointing to Hippolyte. “How dare you grin at me like

that?” she shouted furiously, rushing at the invalid, whose mocking

smile drove her to distraction.

Exclamations arose on all sides.

“Lizabetha Prokofievna! Lizabetha Prokofievna! Lizabetha Prokofievna!”

“Mother, this is disgraceful!” cried Aglaya.

Mrs. Epanchin had approached Hippolyte and seized him firmly by the

arm, while her eyes, blazing with fury, were fixed upon his face.

“Do not distress yourself, Aglaya Ivanovitch,” he answered calmly;

“your mother knows that one cannot strike a dying man. I am ready to

explain why I was laughing. I shall be delighted if you will let me—”

A violent fit of coughing, which lasted a full minute, prevented him

from finishing his sentence.

“He is dying, yet he will not stop holding forth!” cried Lizabetha

Prokofievna. She loosed her hold on his arm, almost terrified, as she

saw him wiping the blood from his lips. “Why do you talk? You ought to

go home to bed.”

“So I will,” he whispered hoarsely. “As soon as I get home I will go to

bed at once; and I know I shall be dead in a fortnight; Botkine told me

so himself last week. That is why I should like to say a few farewell

words, if you will let me.”

“But you must be mad! It is ridiculous! You should take care of

yourself; what is the use of holding a conversation now? Go home to

bed, do!” cried Mrs. Epanchin in horror.

“When I do go to bed I shall never get up again,” said Hippolyte, with

a smile. “I meant to take to my bed yesterday and stay there till I

died, but as my legs can still carry me, I put it off for two days, so

as to come here with them to-day—but I am very tired.”

“Oh, sit down, sit down, why are you standing?”

Lizabetha Prokofievna placed a chair for him with her own hands.

“Thank you,” he said gently. “Sit opposite to me, and let us talk. We

must have a talk now, Lizabetha Prokofievna; I am very anxious for it.”

He smiled at her once more. “Remember that today, for the last time, I

am out in the air, and in the company of my fellow-men, and that in a

fortnight I shall certainly be no longer in this world. So, in a way,

this is my farewell to nature and to men. I am not very sentimental,

but do you know, I am quite glad that all this has happened at

Pavlofsk, where at least one can see a green tree.”

“But why talk now?” replied Lizabetha Prokofievna, more and more

alarmed; “You are quite feverish. Just now you would not stop shouting,

and now you can hardly breathe. You are gasping.”

“I shall have time to rest. Why will you not grant my last wish? Do you

know, Lizabetha Prokofievna, that I have dreamed of meeting you for a

long while? I had often heard of you from Colia; he is almost the only

person who still comes to see me. You are an original and eccentric

woman; I have seen that for myself—Do you know, I have even been rather

fond of you?”

“Good heavens! And I very nearly struck him!”

“You were prevented by Aglaya Ivanovna. I think I am not mistaken? That

is your daughter, Aglaya Ivanovna? She is so beautiful that I

recognized her directly, although I had never seen her before. Let me,

at least, look on beauty for the last time in my life,” he said with a

wry smile. “You are here with the prince, and your husband, and a large

company. Why should you refuse to gratify my last wish?”

“Give me a chair!” cried Lizabetha Prokofievna, but she seized one for

herself and sat down opposite to Hippolyte. “Colia, you must go home

with him,” she commanded, “and tomorrow I will come my self.”

“Will you let me ask the prince for a cup of tea?... I am exhausted. Do

you know what you might do, Lizabetha Prokofievna? I think you wanted

to take the prince home with you for tea. Stay here, and let us spend

the evening together. I am sure the prince will give us all some tea.

Forgive me for being so free and easy—but I know you are kind, and the

prince is kind, too. In fact, we are all good-natured people—it is

really quite comical.”

The prince bestirred himself to give orders. Lebedeff hurried out,

followed by Vera.

“It is quite true,” said Mrs. Epanchin decisively. “Talk, but not too

loud, and don’t excite yourself. You have made me sorry for you.

Prince, you don’t deserve that I should stay and have tea with you, yet

I will, all the same, but I won’t apologize. I apologize to nobody!

Nobody! It is absurd! However, forgive me, prince, if I blew you

up—that is, if you like, of course. But please don’t let me keep

anyone,” she added suddenly to her husband and daughters, in a tone of

resentment, as though they had grievously offended her. “I can come

home alone quite well.”

But they did not let her finish, and gathered round her eagerly. The

prince immediately invited everyone to stay for tea, and apologized for

not having thought of it before. The general murmured a few polite

words, and asked Lizabetha Prokofievna if she did not feel cold on the

terrace. He very nearly asked Hippolyte how long he had been at the

University, but stopped himself in time. Evgenie Pavlovitch and Prince

S. suddenly grew extremely gay and amiable. Adelaida and Alexandra had

not recovered from their surprise, but it was now mingled with

satisfaction; in short, everyone seemed very much relieved that

Lizabetha Prokofievna had got over her paroxysm. Aglaya alone still

frowned, and sat apart in silence. All the other guests stayed on as

well; no one wanted to go, not even General Ivolgin, but Lebedeff said

something to him in passing which did not seem to please him, for he

immediately went and sulked in a corner. The prince took care to offer

tea to Burdovsky and his friends as well as the rest. The invitation

made them rather uncomfortable. They muttered that they would wait for

Hippolyte, and went and sat by themselves in a distant corner of the

verandah. Tea was served at once; Lebedeff had no doubt ordered it for

himself and his family before the others arrived. It was striking

eleven.

X.

After moistening his lips with the tea which Vera Lebedeff brought him,

Hippolyte set the cup down on the table, and glanced round. He seemed

confused and almost at a loss.

“Just look, Lizabetha Prokofievna,” he began, with a kind of feverish

haste; “these china cups are supposed to be extremely valuable.

Lebedeff always keeps them locked up in his china-cupboard; they were

part of his wife’s dowry. Yet he has brought them out tonight—in your

honour, of course! He is so pleased—” He was about to add something

else, but could not find the words.

“There, he is feeling embarrassed; I expected as much,” whispered

Evgenie Pavlovitch suddenly in the prince’s ear. “It is a bad sign;

what do you think? Now, out of spite, he will come out with something

so outrageous that even Lizabetha Prokofievna will not be able to stand

it.”

Muishkin looked at him inquiringly.

“You do not care if he does?” added Evgenie Pavlovitch. “Neither do I;

in fact, I should be glad, merely as a proper punishment for our dear

Lizabetha Prokofievna. I am very anxious that she should get it,

without delay, and I shall stay till she does. You seem feverish.”

“Never mind; by-and-by; yes, I am not feeling well,” said the prince

impatiently, hardly listening. He had just heard Hippolyte mention his

own name.

“You don’t believe it?” said the invalid, with a nervous laugh. “I

don’t wonder, but the prince will have no difficulty in believing it;

he will not be at all surprised.”

“Do you hear, prince—do you hear that?” said Lizabetha Prokofievna,

turning towards him.

There was laughter in the group around her, and Lebedeff stood before

her gesticulating wildly.

“He declares that your humbug of a landlord revised this gentleman’s

article—the article that was read aloud just now—in which you got such

a charming dressing-down.”

The prince regarded Lebedeff with astonishment.

“Why don’t you say something?” cried Lizabetha Prokofievna, stamping

her foot.

“Well,” murmured the prince, with his eyes still fixed on Lebedeff, “I

can see now that he did.”

“Is it true?” she asked eagerly.

“Absolutely, your excellency,” said Lebedeff, without the least

hesitation.

Mrs. Epanchin almost sprang up in amazement at his answer, and at the

assurance of his tone.

“He actually seems to boast of it!” she cried.

“I am base—base!” muttered Lebedeff, beating his breast, and hanging

his head.

“What do I care if you are base or not? He thinks he has only to say,

‘I am base,’ and there is an end of it. As to you, prince, are you not

ashamed?—I repeat, are you not ashamed, to mix with such riff-raff? I

will never forgive you!”

“The prince will forgive me!” said Lebedeff with emotional conviction.

Keller suddenly left his seat, and approached Lizabetha Prokofievna.

“It was only out of generosity, madame,” he said in a resonant voice,

“and because I would not betray a friend in an awkward position, that I

did not mention this revision before; though you heard him yourself

threatening to kick us down the steps. To clear the matter up, I

declare now that I did have recourse to his assistance, and that I paid

him six roubles for it. But I did not ask him to correct my style; I

simply went to him for information concerning the facts, of which I was

ignorant to a great extent, and which he was competent to give. The

story of the gaiters, the appetite in the Swiss professor’s house, the

substitution of fifty roubles for two hundred and fifty—all such

details, in fact, were got from him. I paid him six roubles for them;

but he did not correct the style.”

“I must state that I only revised the first part of the article,”

interposed Lebedeff with feverish impatience, while laughter rose from

all around him; “but we fell out in the middle over one idea, so I

never corrected the second part. Therefore I cannot be held responsible

for the numerous grammatical blunders in it.”

“That is all he thinks of!” cried Lizabetha Prokofievna.

“May I ask when this article was revised?” said Evgenie Pavlovitch to

Keller.

“Yesterday morning,” he replied, “we had an interview which we all gave

our word of honour to keep secret.”

“The very time when he was cringing before you and making protestations

of devotion! Oh, the mean wretches! I will have nothing to do with your

Pushkin, and your daughter shall not set foot in my house!”

Lizabetha Prokofievna was about to rise, when she saw Hippolyte

laughing, and turned upon him with irritation.

“Well, sir, I suppose you wanted to make me look ridiculous?”

“Heaven forbid!” he answered, with a forced smile. “But I am more than

ever struck by your eccentricity, Lizabetha Prokofievna. I admit that I

told you of Lebedeff’s duplicity, on purpose. I knew the effect it

would have on you,—on you alone, for the prince will forgive him. He

has probably forgiven him already, and is racking his brains to find

some excuse for him—is not that the truth, prince?”

He gasped as he spoke, and his strange agitation seemed to increase.

“Well?” said Mrs. Epanchin angrily, surprised at his tone; “well, what

more?”

“I have heard many things of the kind about you...they delighted me...

I have learned to hold you in the highest esteem,” continued Hippolyte.

His words seemed tinged with a kind of sarcastic mockery, yet he was

extremely agitated, casting suspicious glances around him, growing

confused, and constantly losing the thread of his ideas. All this,

together with his consumptive appearance, and the frenzied expression

of his blazing eyes, naturally attracted the attention of everyone

present.

“I might have been surprised (though I admit I know nothing of the

world), not only that you should have stayed on just now in the company

of such people as myself and my friends, who are not of your class, but

that you should let these... young ladies listen to such a scandalous

affair, though no doubt novel-reading has taught them all there is to

know. I may be mistaken; I hardly know what I am saying; but surely no

one but you would have stayed to please a whippersnapper (yes, a

whippersnapper; I admit it) to spend the evening and take part in

everything—only to be ashamed of it tomorrow. (I know I express myself

badly.) I admire and appreciate it all extremely, though the expression

on the face of his excellency, your husband, shows that he thinks it

very improper. He-he!” He burst out laughing, and was seized with a fit

of coughing which lasted for two minutes and prevented him from

speaking.

“He has lost his breath now!” said Lizabetha Prokofievna coldly,

looking at him with more curiosity than pity: “Come, my dear boy, that

is quite enough—let us make an end of this.”

Ivan Fedorovitch, now quite out of patience, interrupted suddenly. “Let

me remark in my turn, sir,” he said in tones of deep annoyance, “that

my wife is here as the guest of Prince Lef Nicolaievitch, our friend

and neighbour, and that in any case, young man, it is not for you to

pass judgment on the conduct of Lizabetha Prokofievna, or to make

remarks aloud in my presence concerning what feelings you think may be

read in my face. Yes, my wife stayed here,” continued the general, with

increasing irritation, “more out of amazement than anything else.

Everyone can understand that a collection of such strange young men

would attract the attention of a person interested in contemporary

life. I stayed myself, just as I sometimes stop to look on in the

street when I see something that may be regarded as-as-as-”

“As a curiosity,” suggested Evgenie Pavlovitch, seeing his excellency

involved in a comparison which he could not complete.

“That is exactly the word I wanted,” said the general with

satisfaction—“a curiosity. However, the most astonishing and, if I may

so express myself, the most painful, thing in this matter, is that you

cannot even understand, young man, that Lizabetha Prokofievna, only

stayed with you because you are ill,—if you really are dying—moved by

the pity awakened by your plaintive appeal, and that her name,

character, and social position place her above all risk of

contamination. Lizabetha Prokofievna!” he continued, now crimson with

rage, “if you are coming, we will say goodnight to the prince, and—”

“Thank you for the lesson, general,” said Hippolyte, with unexpected

gravity, regarding him thoughtfully.

“Two minutes more, if you please, dear Ivan Fedorovitch,” said

Lizabetha Prokofievna to her husband; “it seems to me that he is in a

fever and delirious; you can see by his eyes what a state he is in; it

is impossible to let him go back to Petersburg tonight. Can you put him

up, Lef Nicolaievitch? I hope you are not bored, dear prince,” she

added suddenly to Prince S. “Alexandra, my dear, come here! Your hair

is coming down.”

She arranged her daughter’s hair, which was not in the least

disordered, and gave her a kiss. This was all that she had called her

for.

“I thought you were capable of development,” said Hippolyte, coming out

of his fit of abstraction. “Yes, that is what I meant to say,” he

added, with the satisfaction of one who suddenly remembers something he

had forgotten. “Here is Burdovsky, sincerely anxious to protect his

mother; is not that so? And he himself is the cause of her disgrace.

The prince is anxious to help Burdovsky and offers him friendship and a

large sum of money, in the sincerity of his heart. And here they stand

like two sworn enemies—ha, ha, ha! You all hate Burdovsky because his

behaviour with regard to his mother is shocking and repugnant to you;

do you not? Is not that true? Is it not true? You all have a passion

for beauty and distinction in outward forms; that is all you care for,

isn’t it? I have suspected for a long time that you cared for nothing

else! Well, let me tell you that perhaps there is not one of you who

loved your mother as Burdovsky loved his. As to you, prince, I know

that you have sent money secretly to Burdovsky’s mother through Gania.

Well, I bet now,” he continued with an hysterical laugh, “that

Burdovsky will accuse you of indelicacy, and reproach you with a want

of respect for his mother! Yes, that is quite certain! Ha, ha, ha!”

He caught his breath, and began to cough once more.

“Come, that is enough! That is all now; you have no more to say? Now go

to bed; you are burning with fever,” said Lizabetha Prokofievna

impatiently. Her anxious eyes had never left the invalid. “Good

heavens, he is going to begin again!”

“You are laughing, I think? Why do you keep laughing at me?” said

Hippolyte irritably to Evgenie Pavlovitch, who certainly was laughing.

“I only want to know, Mr. Hippolyte—excuse me, I forget your surname.”

“Mr. Terentieff,” said the prince.

“Oh yes, Mr. Terentieff. Thank you prince. I heard it just now, but had

forgotten it. I want to know, Mr. Terentieff, if what I have heard

about you is true. It seems you are convinced that if you could speak

to the people from a window for a quarter of an hour, you could make

them all adopt your views and follow you?”

“I may have said so,” answered Hippolyte, as if trying to remember.

“Yes, I certainly said so,” he continued with sudden animation, fixing

an unflinching glance on his questioner. “What of it?”

“Nothing. I was only seeking further information, to put the finishing

touch.”

Evgenie Pavlovitch was silent, but Hippolyte kept his eyes fixed upon

him, waiting impatiently for more.

“Well, have you finished?” said Lizabetha Prokofievna to Evgenie. “Make

haste, sir; it is time he went to bed. Have you more to say?” She was

very angry.

“Yes, I have a little more,” said Evgenie Pavlovitch, with a smile. “It

seems to me that all you and your friends have said, Mr. Terentieff,

and all you have just put forward with such undeniable talent, may be

summed up in the triumph of right above all, independent of everything

else, to the exclusion of everything else; perhaps even before having

discovered what constitutes the right. I may be mistaken?”

“You are certainly mistaken; I do not even understand you. What else?”

Murmurs arose in the neighbourhood of Burdovsky and his companions;

Lebedeff’s nephew protested under his breath.

“I have nearly finished,” replied Evgenie Pavlovitch.

“I will only remark that from these premises one could conclude that

might is right—I mean the right of the clenched fist, and of personal

inclination. Indeed, the world has often come to that conclusion.

Prudhon upheld that might is right. In the American War some of the

most advanced Liberals took sides with the planters on the score that

the blacks were an inferior race to the whites, and that might was the

right of the white race.”

“Well?”

“You mean, no doubt, that you do not deny that might is right?”

“What then?”

“You are at least logical. I would only point out that from the right

of might, to the right of tigers and crocodiles, or even Daniloff and

Gorsky, is but a step.”

“I know nothing about that; what else?”

Hippolyte was scarcely listening. He kept saying “well?” and “what

else?” mechanically, without the least curiosity, and by mere force of

habit.

“Why, nothing else; that is all.”

“However, I bear you no grudge,” said Hippolyte suddenly, and, hardly

conscious of what he was doing, he held out his hand with a smile. The

gesture took Evgenie Pavlovitch by surprise, but with the utmost

gravity he touched the hand that was offered him in token of

forgiveness.

“I can but thank you,” he said, in a tone too respectful to be sincere,

“for your kindness in letting me speak, for I have often noticed that

our Liberals never allow other people to have an opinion of their own,

and immediately answer their opponents with abuse, if they do not have

recourse to arguments of a still more unpleasant nature.”

“What you say is quite true,” observed General Epanchin; then, clasping

his hands behind his back, he returned to his place on the terrace

steps, where he yawned with an air of boredom.

“Come, sir, that will do; you weary me,” said Lizabetha Prokofievna

suddenly to Evgenie Pavlovitch.

Hippolyte rose all at once, looking troubled and almost frightened.

“It is time for me to go,” he said, glancing round in perplexity. “I

have detained you... I wanted to tell you everything... I thought you

all... for the last time... it was a whim...”

He evidently had sudden fits of returning animation, when he awoke from

his semi-delirium; then, recovering full self-possession for a few

moments, he would speak, in disconnected phrases which had perhaps

haunted him for a long while on his bed of suffering, during weary,

sleepless nights.

“Well, good-bye,” he said abruptly. “You think it is easy for me to say

good-bye to you? Ha, ha!”

Feeling that his question was somewhat gauche, he smiled angrily. Then

as if vexed that he could not ever express what he really meant, he

said irritably, in a loud voice:

“Excellency, I have the honour of inviting you to my funeral; that is,

if you will deign to honour it with your presence. I invite you all,

gentlemen, as well as the general.”

He burst out laughing again, but it was the laughter of a madman.

Lizabetha Prokofievna approached him anxiously and seized his arm. He

stared at her for a moment, still laughing, but soon his face grew

serious.

“Do you know that I came here to see those trees?” pointing to the

trees in the park. “It is not ridiculous, is it? Say that it is not

ridiculous!” he demanded urgently of Lizabetha Prokofievna. Then he

seemed to be plunged in thought. A moment later he raised his head, and

his eyes sought for someone. He was looking for Evgenie Pavlovitch, who

was close by on his right as before, but he had forgotten this, and his

eyes ranged over the assembled company. “Ah! you have not gone!” he

said, when he caught sight of him at last. “You kept on laughing just

now, because I thought of speaking to the people from the window for a

quarter of an hour. But I am not eighteen, you know; lying on that bed,

and looking out of that window, I have thought of all sorts of things

for such a long time that... a dead man has no age, you know. I was

saying that to myself only last week, when I was awake in the night. Do

you know what you fear most? You fear our sincerity more than anything,

although you despise us! The idea crossed my mind that night... You

thought I was making fun of you just now, Lizabetha Prokofievna? No,

the idea of mockery was far from me; I only meant to praise you. Colia

told me the prince called you a child—very well—but let me see, I had

something else to say...” He covered his face with his hands and tried

to collect his thoughts.

“Ah, yes—you were going away just now, and I thought to myself: ‘I

shall never see these people again—never again! This is the last time I

shall see the trees, too. I shall see nothing after this but the red

brick wall of Meyer’s house opposite my window. Tell them about it—try

to tell them,’ I thought. ‘Here is a beautiful young girl—you are a

dead man; make them understand that. Tell them that a dead man may say

anything—and Mrs. Grundy will not be angry—ha-ha! You are not

laughing?” He looked anxiously around. “But you know I get so many

queer ideas, lying there in bed. I have grown convinced that nature is

full of mockery—you called me an atheist just now, but you know this

nature... why are you laughing again? You are very cruel!” he added

suddenly, regarding them all with mournful reproach. “I have not

corrupted Colia,” he concluded in a different and very serious tone, as

if remembering something again.

“Nobody here is laughing at you. Calm yourself,” said Lizabetha

Prokofievna, much moved. “You shall see a new doctor tomorrow; the

other was mistaken; but sit down, do not stand like that! You are

delirious—” Oh, what shall we do with him she cried in anguish, as she

made him sit down again in the arm-chair.

A tear glistened on her cheek. At the sight of it Hippolyte seemed

amazed. He lifted his hand timidly and, touched the tear with his

finger, smiling like a child.

“I... you,” he began joyfully. “You cannot tell how I... he always

spoke so enthusiastically of you, Colia here; I liked his enthusiasm. I

was not corrupting him! But I must leave him, too—I wanted to leave

them all—there was not one of them—not one! I wanted to be a man of

action—I had a right to be. Oh! what a lot of things I wanted! Now I

want nothing; I renounce all my wants; I swore to myself that I would

want nothing; let them seek the truth without me! Yes, nature is full

of mockery! Why”—he continued with sudden warmth—“does she create the

choicest beings only to mock at them? The only human being who is

recognized as perfect, when nature showed him to mankind, was given the

mission to say things which have caused the shedding of so much blood

that it would have drowned mankind if it had all been shed at once! Oh!

it is better for me to die! I should tell some dreadful lie too; nature

would so contrive it! I have corrupted nobody. I wanted to live for the

happiness of all men, to find and spread the truth. I used to look out

of my window at the wall of Meyer’s house, and say to myself that if I

could speak for a quarter of an hour I would convince the whole world,

and now for once in my life I have come into contact with... you—if not

with the others! And what is the result? Nothing! The sole result is

that you despise me! Therefore I must be a fool, I am useless, it is

time I disappeared! And I shall leave not even a memory! Not a sound,

not a trace, not a single deed! I have not spread a single truth!... Do

not laugh at the fool! Forget him! Forget him forever! I beseech you,

do not be so cruel as to remember! Do you know that if I were not

consumptive, I would kill myself?”

Though he seemed to wish to say much more, he became silent. He fell

back into his chair, and, covering his face with his hands, began to

sob like a little child.

“Oh! what on earth are we to do with him?” cried Lizabetha Prokofievna.

She hastened to him and pressed his head against her bosom, while he

sobbed convulsively.

“Come, come, come! There, you must not cry, that will do. You are a

good child! God will forgive you, because you knew no better. Come now,

be a man! You know presently you will be ashamed.”

Hippolyte raised his head with an effort, saying:

“I have little brothers and sisters, over there, poor avid innocent.

She will corrupt them! You are a saint! You are a child yourself—save

them! Snatch them from that... she is... it is shameful! Oh! help them!

God will repay you a hundredfold. For the love of God, for the love of

Christ!”

“Speak, Ivan Fedorovitch! What are we to do?” cried Lizabetha

Prokofievna, irritably. “Please break your majestic silence! I tell

you, if you cannot come to some decision, I will stay here all night

myself. You have tyrannized over me enough, you autocrat!”

She spoke angrily, and in great excitement, and expected an immediate

reply. But in such a case, no matter how many are present, all prefer

to keep silence: no one will take the initiative, but all reserve their

comments till afterwards. There were some present—Varvara Ardalionovna,

for instance—who would have willingly sat there till morning without

saying a word. Varvara had sat apart all the evening without opening

her lips, but she listened to everything with the closest attention;

perhaps she had her reasons for so doing.

“My dear,” said the general, “it seems to me that a sick-nurse would be

of more use here than an excitable person like you. Perhaps it would be

as well to get some sober, reliable man for the night. In any case we

must consult the prince, and leave the patient to rest at once.

Tomorrow we can see what can be done for him.”

“It is nearly midnight; we are going. Will he come with us, or is he to

stay here?” Doktorenko asked crossly of the prince.

“You can stay with him if you like,” said Muishkin.

“There is plenty of room here.”

Suddenly, to the astonishment of all, Keller went quickly up to the

general.

“Excellency,” he said, impulsively, “if you want a reliable man for the

night, I am ready to sacrifice myself for my friend—such a soul as he

has! I have long thought him a great man, excellency! My article showed

my lack of education, but when he criticizes he scatters pearls!”

Ivan Fedorovitch turned from the boxer with a gesture of despair.

“I shall be delighted if he will stay; it would certainly be difficult

for him to get back to Petersburg,” said the prince, in answer to the

eager questions of Lizabetha Prokofievna.

“But you are half asleep, are you not? If you don’t want him, I will

take him back to my house! Why, good gracious! He can hardly stand up

himself! What is it? Are you ill?”

Not finding the prince on his death-bed, Lizabetha Prokofievna had been

misled by his appearance to think him much better than he was. But his

recent illness, the painful memories attached to it, the fatigue of

this evening, the incident with “Pavlicheff’s son,” and now this scene

with Hippolyte, had all so worked on his oversensitive nature that he

was now almost in a fever. Moreover, a new trouble, almost a fear,

showed itself in his eyes; he watched Hippolyte anxiously as if

expecting something further.

Suddenly Hippolyte arose. His face, shockingly pale, was that of a man

overwhelmed with shame and despair. This was shown chiefly in the look

of fear and hatred which he cast upon the assembled company, and in the

wild smile upon his trembling lips. Then he cast down his eyes, and

with the same smile, staggered towards Burdovsky and Doktorenko, who

stood at the entrance to the verandah. He had decided to go with them.

“There! that is what I feared!” cried the prince. “It was inevitable!”

Hippolyte turned upon him, a prey to maniacal rage, which set all the

muscles of his face quivering.

“Ah! that is what you feared! It was inevitable, you say! Well, let me

tell you that if I hate anyone here—I hate you all,” he cried, in a

hoarse, strained voice—“but you, you, with your jesuitical soul, your

soul of sickly sweetness, idiot, beneficent millionaire—I hate you

worse than anything or anyone on earth! I saw through you and hated you

long ago; from the day I first heard of you. I hated you with my whole

heart. You have contrived all this! You have driven me into this state!

You have made a dying man disgrace himself. You, you, you are the cause

of my abject cowardice! I would kill you if I remained alive! I do not

want your benefits; I will accept none from anyone; do you hear? Not

from any one! I want nothing! I was delirious, do not dare to triumph!

I curse every one of you, once for all!”

Breath failed him here, and he was obliged to stop.

“He is ashamed of his tears!” whispered Lebedeff to Lizabetha

Prokofievna. “It was inevitable. Ah! what a wonderful man the prince

is! He read his very soul.”

But Mrs. Epanchin would not deign to look at Lebedeff. Drawn up

haughtily, with her head held high, she gazed at the “riff-raff,” with

scornful curiosity. When Hippolyte had finished, Ivan Fedorovitch

shrugged his shoulders, and his wife looked him angrily up and down, as

if to demand the meaning of his movement. Then she turned to the

prince.

“Thanks, prince, many thanks, eccentric friend of the family, for the

pleasant evening you have provided for us. I am sure you are quite

pleased that you have managed to mix us up with your extraordinary

affairs. It is quite enough, dear family friend; thank you for giving

us an opportunity of getting to know you so well.”

She arranged her cloak with hands that trembled with anger as she

waited for the “riff-raff” to go. The cab which Lebedeff’s son had gone

to fetch a quarter of an hour ago, by Doktorenko’s order, arrived at

that moment. The general thought fit to put in a word after his wife.

“Really, prince, I hardly expected after—after all our friendly

intercourse—and you see, Lizabetha Prokofievna—”

“Papa, how can you?” cried Adelaida, walking quickly up to the prince

and holding out her hand.

He smiled absently at her; then suddenly he felt a burning sensation in

his ear as an angry voice whispered:

“If you do not turn those dreadful people out of the house this very

instant, I shall hate you all my life—all my life!” It was Aglaya. She

seemed almost in a frenzy, but she turned away before the prince could

look at her. However, there was no one left to turn out of the house,

for they had managed meanwhile to get Hippolyte into the cab, and it

had driven off.

“Well, how much longer is this going to last, Ivan Fedorovitch? What do

you think? Shall I soon be delivered from these odious youths?”

“My dear, I am quite ready; naturally... the prince.”

Ivan Fedorovitch held out his hand to Muishkin, but ran after his wife,

who was leaving with every sign of violent indignation, before he had

time to shake it. Adelaida, her fiance, and Alexandra, said good-bye to

their host with sincere friendliness. Evgenie Pavlovitch did the same,

and he alone seemed in good spirits.

“What I expected has happened! But I am sorry, you poor fellow, that

you should have had to suffer for it,” he murmured, with a most

charming smile.

Aglaya left without saying good-bye. But the evening was not to end

without a last adventure. An unexpected meeting was yet in store for

Lizabetha Prokofievna.

She had scarcely descended the terrace steps leading to the high road

that skirts the park at Pavlofsk, when suddenly there dashed by a smart

open carriage, drawn by a pair of beautiful white horses. Having passed

some ten yards beyond the house, the carriage suddenly drew up, and one

of the two ladies seated in it turned sharp round as though she had

just caught sight of some acquaintance whom she particularly wished to

see.

“Evgenie Pavlovitch! Is that you?” cried a clear, sweet voice, which

caused the prince, and perhaps someone else, to tremble. “Well, I \_am\_

glad I’ve found you at last! I’ve sent to town for you twice today

myself! My messengers have been searching for you everywhere!”

Evgenie Pavlovitch stood on the steps like one struck by lightning.

Mrs. Epanchin stood still too, but not with the petrified expression of

Evgenie. She gazed haughtily at the audacious person who had addressed

her companion, and then turned a look of astonishment upon Evgenie

himself.

“There’s news!” continued the clear voice. “You need not be anxious

about Kupferof’s IOU’s—Rogojin has bought them up. I persuaded him

to!—I dare say we shall settle Biscup too, so it’s all right, you see!

\_Au revoir\_, tomorrow! And don’t worry!” The carriage moved on, and

disappeared.

“The woman’s mad!” cried Evgenie, at last, crimson with anger, and

looking confusedly around. “I don’t know what she’s talking about! What

IOU’s? Who is she?” Mrs. Epanchin continued to watch his face for a

couple of seconds; then she marched briskly and haughtily away towards

her own house, the rest following her.

A minute afterwards, Evgenie Pavlovitch reappeared on the terrace, in

great agitation.

“Prince,” he said, “tell me the truth; do you know what all this

means?”

“I know nothing whatever about it!” replied the latter, who was,

himself, in a state of nervous excitement.

“No?”

“No!”

“Well, nor do I!” said Evgenie Pavlovitch, laughing suddenly. “I

haven’t the slightest knowledge of any such IOU’s as she mentioned, I

swear I haven’t—What’s the matter, are you fainting?”

“Oh, no—no—I’m all right, I assure you!”

XI.

The anger of the Epanchin family was unappeased for three days. As

usual the prince reproached himself, and had expected punishment, but

he was inwardly convinced that Lizabetha Prokofievna could not be

seriously angry with him, and that she probably was more angry with

herself. He was painfully surprised, therefore, when three days passed

with no word from her. Other things also troubled and perplexed him,

and one of these grew more important in his eyes as the days went by.

He had begun to blame himself for two opposite tendencies—on the one

hand to extreme, almost “senseless,” confidence in his fellows, on the

other to a “vile, gloomy suspiciousness.”

By the end of the third day the incident of the eccentric lady and

Evgenie Pavlovitch had attained enormous and mysterious proportions in

his mind. He sorrowfully asked himself whether he had been the cause of

this new “monstrosity,” or was it... but he refrained from saying who

else might be in fault. As for the letters N.P.B., he looked on that as

a harmless joke, a mere childish piece of mischief—so childish that he

felt it would be shameful, almost dishonourable, to attach any

importance to it.

The day after these scandalous events, however, the prince had the

honour of receiving a visit from Adelaida and her fiance, Prince S.

They came, ostensibly, to inquire after his health. They had wandered

out for a walk, and called in “by accident,” and talked for almost the

whole of the time they were with him about a certain most lovely tree

in the park, which Adelaida had set her heart upon for a picture. This,

and a little amiable conversation on Prince S.’s part, occupied the

time, and not a word was said about last evening’s episodes. At length

Adelaida burst out laughing, apologized, and explained that they had

come incognito; from which, and from the circumstance that they said

nothing about the prince’s either walking back with them or coming to

see them later on, the latter inferred that he was in Mrs. Epanchin’s

black books. Adelaida mentioned a watercolour that she would much like

to show him, and explained that she would either send it by Colia, or

bring it herself the next day—which to the prince seemed very

suggestive.

At length, however, just as the visitors were on the point of

departing, Prince S. seemed suddenly to recollect himself. “Oh yes,

by-the-by,” he said, “do you happen to know, my dear Lef Nicolaievitch,

who that lady was who called out to Evgenie Pavlovitch last night, from

the carriage?”

“It was Nastasia Philipovna,” said the prince; “didn’t you know that? I

cannot tell you who her companion was.”

“But what on earth did she mean? I assure you it is a real riddle to

me—to me, and to others, too!” Prince S. seemed to be under the

influence of sincere astonishment.

“She spoke of some bills of Evgenie Pavlovitch’s,” said the prince,

simply, “which Rogojin had bought up from someone; and implied that

Rogojin would not press him.”

“Oh, I heard that much, my dear fellow! But the thing is so impossibly

absurd! A man of property like Evgenie to give IOU’s to a money-lender,

and to be worried about them! It is ridiculous. Besides, he cannot

possibly be on such intimate terms with Nastasia Philipovna as she gave

us to understand; that’s the principal part of the mystery! He has

given me his word that he knows nothing whatever about the matter, and

of course I believe him. Well, the question is, my dear prince, do you

know anything about it? Has any sort of suspicion of the meaning of it

come across you?”

“No, I know nothing whatever about it. I assure you I had nothing at

all to do with it.”

“Oh, prince, how strange you have become! I assure you, I hardly know

you for your old self. How can you suppose that I ever suggested you

could have had a finger in such a business? But you are not quite

yourself today, I can see.” He embraced the prince, and kissed him.

“What do you mean, though,” asked Muishkin, “‘by such a business’? I

don’t see any particular ‘business’ about it at all!”

“Oh, undoubtedly, this person wished somehow, and for some reason, to

do Evgenie Pavlovitch a bad turn, by attributing to him—before

witnesses—qualities which he neither has nor can have,” replied Prince

S. drily enough.

Muiskhin looked disturbed, but continued to gaze intently and

questioningly into Prince S.’s face. The latter, however, remained

silent.

“Then it was not simply a matter of bills?” Muishkin said at last, with

some impatience. “It was not as she said?”

“But I ask you, my dear sir, how can there be anything in common

between Evgenie Pavlovitch, and—her, and again Rogojin? I tell you he

is a man of immense wealth—as I know for a fact; and he has further

expectations from his uncle. Simply Nastasia Philipovna—”

Prince S. paused, as though unwilling to continue talking about

Nastasia Philipovna.

“Then at all events he knows her!” remarked the prince, after a

moment’s silence.

“Oh, that may be. He may have known her some time ago—two or three

years, at least. He used to know Totski. But it is impossible that

there should be any intimacy between them. She has not even been in the

place—many people don’t even know that she has returned from Moscow! I

have only observed her carriage about for the last three days or so.”

“It’s a lovely carriage,” said Adelaida.

“Yes, it was a beautiful turn-out, certainly!”

The visitors left the house, however, on no less friendly terms than

before. But the visit was of the greatest importance to the prince,

from his own point of view. Admitting that he had his suspicions, from

the moment of the occurrence of last night, perhaps even before, that

Nastasia had some mysterious end in view, yet this visit confirmed his

suspicions and justified his fears. It was all clear to him; Prince S.

was wrong, perhaps, in his view of the matter, but he was somewhere

near the truth, and was right in so far as that he understood there to

be an intrigue of some sort going on. Perhaps Prince S. saw it all more

clearly than he had allowed his hearers to understand. At all events,

nothing could be plainer than that he and Adelaida had come for the

express purpose of obtaining explanations, and that they suspected him

of being concerned in the affair. And if all this were so, then \_she\_

must have some terrible object in view! What was it? There was no

stopping \_her\_, as Muishkin knew from experience, in the performance of

anything she had set her mind on! “Oh, she is mad, mad!” thought the

poor prince.

But there were many other puzzling occurrences that day, which required

immediate explanation, and the prince felt very sad. A visit from Vera

Lebedeff distracted him a little. She brought the infant Lubotchka with

her as usual, and talked cheerfully for some time. Then came her

younger sister, and later the brother, who attended a school close by.

He informed Muishkin that his father had lately found a new

interpretation of the star called “wormwood,” which fell upon the

water-springs, as described in the Apocalypse. He had decided that it

meant the network of railroads spread over the face of Europe at the

present time. The prince refused to believe that Lebedeff could have

given such an interpretation, and they decided to ask him about it at

the earliest opportunity. Vera related how Keller had taken up his

abode with them on the previous evening. She thought he would remain

for some time, as he was greatly pleased with the society of General

Ivolgin and of the whole family. But he declared that he had only come

to them in order to complete his education! The prince always enjoyed

the company of Lebedeff’s children, and today it was especially

welcome, for Colia did not appear all day. Early that morning he had

started for Petersburg. Lebedeff also was away on business. But Gavrila

Ardalionovitch had promised to visit Muishkin, who eagerly awaited his

coming.

About seven in the evening, soon after dinner, he arrived. At the first

glance it struck the prince that he, at any rate, must know all the

details of last night’s affair. Indeed, it would have been impossible

for him to remain in ignorance considering the intimate relationship

between him, Varvara Ardalionovna, and Ptitsin. But although he and the

prince were intimate, in a sense, and although the latter had placed

the Burdovsky affair in his hands—and this was not the only mark of

confidence he had received—it seemed curious how many matters there

were that were tacitly avoided in their conversations. Muishkin thought

that Gania at times appeared to desire more cordiality and frankness.

It was apparent now, when he entered, that he was convinced that the

moment for breaking the ice between them had come at last.

But all the same Gania was in haste, for his sister was waiting at

Lebedeff’s to consult him on an urgent matter of business. If he had

anticipated impatient questions, or impulsive confidences, he was soon

undeceived. The prince was thoughtful, reserved, even a little

absent-minded, and asked none of the questions—one in particular—that

Gania had expected. So he imitated the prince’s demeanour, and talked

fast and brilliantly upon all subjects but the one on which their

thoughts were engaged. Among other things Gania told his host that

Nastasia Philipovna had been only four days in Pavlofsk, and that

everyone was talking about her already. She was staying with Daria

Alexeyevna, in an ugly little house in Mattrossky Street, but drove

about in the smartest carriage in the place. A crowd of followers had

pursued her from the first, young and old. Some escorted her on

horse-back when she took the air in her carriage.

She was as capricious as ever in the choice of her acquaintances, and

admitted few into her narrow circle. Yet she already had a numerous

following and many champions on whom she could depend in time of need.

One gentleman on his holiday had broken off his engagement on her

account, and an old general had quarrelled with his only son for the

same reason.

She was accompanied sometimes in her carriage by a girl of sixteen, a

distant relative of her hostess. This young lady sang very well; in

fact, her music had given a kind of notoriety to their little house.

Nastasia, however, was behaving with great discretion on the whole. She

dressed quietly, though with such taste as to drive all the ladies in

Pavlofsk mad with envy, of that, as well as of her beauty and her

carriage and horses.

“As for yesterday’s episode,” continued Gania, “of course it was

pre-arranged.” Here he paused, as though expecting to be asked how he

knew that. But the prince did not inquire. Concerning Evgenie

Pavlovitch, Gania stated, without being asked, that he believed the

former had not known Nastasia Philipovna in past years, but that he had

probably been introduced to her by somebody in the park during these

four days. As to the question of the IOU’s she had spoken of, there

might easily be something in that; for though Evgenie was undoubtedly a

man of wealth, yet certain of his affairs were equally undoubtedly in

disorder. Arrived at this interesting point, Gania suddenly broke off,

and said no more about Nastasia’s prank of the previous evening.

At last Varvara Ardalionovna came in search of her brother, and

remained for a few minutes. Without Muishkin’s asking her, she informed

him that Evgenie Pavlovitch was spending the day in Petersburg, and

perhaps would remain there over tomorrow; and that her husband had also

gone to town, probably in connection with Evgenie Pavlovitch’s affairs.

“Lizabetha Prokofievna is in a really fiendish temper today,” she

added, as she went out, “but the most curious thing is that Aglaya has

quarrelled with her whole family; not only with her father and mother,

but with her sisters also. It is not a good sign.” She said all this

quite casually, though it was extremely important in the eyes of the

prince, and went off with her brother. Regarding the episode of

“Pavlicheff’s son,” Gania had been absolutely silent, partly from a

kind of false modesty, partly, perhaps, to “spare the prince’s

feelings.” The latter, however, thanked him again for the trouble he

had taken in the affair.

Muishkin was glad enough to be left alone. He went out of the garden,

crossed the road, and entered the park. He wished to reflect, and to

make up his mind as to a certain “step.” This step was one of those

things, however, which are not thought out, as a rule, but decided for

or against hastily, and without much reflection. The fact is, he felt a

longing to leave all this and go away—go anywhere, if only it were far

enough, and at once, without bidding farewell to anyone. He felt a

presentiment that if he remained but a few days more in this place, and

among these people, he would be fixed there irrevocably and

permanently. However, in a very few minutes he decided that to run away

was impossible; that it would be cowardly; that great problems lay

before him, and that he had no right to leave them unsolved, or at

least to refuse to give all his energy and strength to the attempt to

solve them. Having come to this determination, he turned and went home,

his walk having lasted less than a quarter of an hour. At that moment

he was thoroughly unhappy.

Lebedeff had not returned, so towards evening Keller managed to

penetrate into the prince’s apartments. He was not drunk, but in a

confidential and talkative mood. He announced that he had come to tell

the story of his life to Muishkin, and had only remained at Pavlofsk

for that purpose. There was no means of turning him out; nothing short

of an earthquake would have removed him.

In the manner of one with long hours before him, he began his history;

but after a few incoherent words he jumped to the conclusion, which was

that “having ceased to believe in God Almighty, he had lost every

vestige of morality, and had gone so far as to commit a theft.” “Could

you imagine such a thing?” said he.

“Listen to me, Keller,” returned the prince. “If I were in your place,

I should not acknowledge that unless it were absolutely necessary for

some reason. But perhaps you are making yourself out to be worse than

you are, purposely?”

“I should tell it to no one but yourself, prince, and I only name it

now as a help to my soul’s evolution. When I die, that secret will die

with me! But, excellency, if you knew, if you only had the least idea,

how difficult it is to get money nowadays! Where to find it is the

question. Ask for a loan, the answer is always the same: ‘Give us gold,

jewels, or diamonds, and it will be quite easy.’ Exactly what one has

not got! Can you picture that to yourself? I got angry at last, and

said, ‘I suppose you would accept emeralds?’ ‘Certainly, we accept

emeralds with pleasure. Yes!’ ‘Well, that’s all right,’ said I. ‘Go to

the devil, you den of thieves!’ And with that I seized my hat, and

walked out.”

“Had you any emeralds?” asked the prince.

“What? I have emeralds? Oh, prince! with what simplicity, with what

almost pastoral simplicity, you look upon life!”

Could not something be made of this man under good influences? asked

the prince of himself, for he began to feel a kind of pity for his

visitor. He thought little of the value of his own personal influence,

not from a sense of humility, but from his peculiar way of looking at

things in general. Imperceptibly the conversation grew more animated

and more interesting, so that neither of the two felt anxious to bring

it to a close. Keller confessed, with apparent sincerity, to having

been guilty of many acts of such a nature that it astonished the prince

that he could mention them, even to him. At every fresh avowal he

professed the deepest repentance, and described himself as being

“bathed in tears”; but this did not prevent him from putting on a

boastful air at times, and some of his stories were so absurdly comical

that both he and the prince laughed like madmen.

“One point in your favour is that you seem to have a child-like mind,

and extreme truthfulness,” said the prince at last. “Do you know that

that atones for much?”

“I am assuredly noble-minded, and chivalrous to a degree!” said Keller,

much softened. “But, do you know, this nobility of mind exists in a

dream, if one may put it so? It never appears in practice or deed. Now,

why is that? I can never understand.”

“Do not despair. I think we may say without fear of deceiving

ourselves, that you have now given a fairly exact account of your life.

I, at least, think it would be impossible to add much to what you have

just told me.”

“Impossible?” cried Keller, almost pityingly. “Oh prince, how little

you really seem to understand human nature!”

“Is there really much more to be added?” asked the prince, with mild

surprise. “Well, what is it you really want of me? Speak out; tell me

why you came to make your confession to me?”

“What did I want? Well, to begin with, it is good to meet a man like

you. It is a pleasure to talk over my faults with you. I know you for

one of the best of men... and then... then...”

He hesitated, and appeared so much embarrassed that the prince helped

him out.

“Then you wanted me to lend you money?”

The words were spoken in a grave tone, and even somewhat shyly.

Keller started, gave an astonished look at the speaker, and thumped the

table with his fist.

“Well, prince, that’s enough to knock me down! It astounds me! Here you

are, as simple and innocent as a knight of the golden age, and yet...

yet... you read a man’s soul like a psychologist! Now, do explain it to

me, prince, because I... I really do not understand!... Of course, my

aim was to borrow money all along, and you... you asked the question as

if there was nothing blameable in it—as if you thought it quite

natural.”

“Yes... from you it is quite natural.”

“And you are not offended?”

“Why should I be offended?”

“Well, just listen, prince. I remained here last evening, partly

because I have a great admiration for the French archbishop Bourdaloue.

I enjoyed a discussion over him till three o’clock in the morning, with

Lebedeff; and then... then—I swear by all I hold sacred that I am

telling you the truth—then I wished to develop my soul in this frank

and heartfelt confession to you. This was my thought as I was sobbing

myself to sleep at dawn. Just as I was losing consciousness, tears in

my soul, tears on my face (I remember how I lay there sobbing), an idea

from hell struck me. ‘Why not, after confessing, borrow money from

him?’ You see, this confession was a kind of masterstroke; I intended

to use it as a means to your good grace and favour—and then—then I

meant to walk off with a hundred and fifty roubles. Now, do you not

call that base?”

“It is hardly an exact statement of the case,” said the prince in

reply. “You have confused your motives and ideas, as I need scarcely

say too often happens to myself. I can assure you, Keller, I reproach

myself bitterly for it sometimes. When you were talking just now I

seemed to be listening to something about myself. At times I have

imagined that all men were the same,” he continued earnestly, for he

appeared to be much interested in the conversation, “and that consoled

me in a certain degree, for a \_double\_ motive is a thing most difficult

to fight against. I have tried, and I know. God knows whence they

arise, these ideas that you speak of as base. I fear these double

motives more than ever just now, but I am not your judge, and in my

opinion it is going too far to give the name of baseness to it—what do

you think? You were going to employ your tears as a ruse in order to

borrow money, but you also say—in fact, you have sworn to the fact—that

independently of this your confession was made with an honourable

motive. As for the money, you want it for drink, do you not? After your

confession, that is weakness, of course; but, after all, how can anyone

give up a bad habit at a moment’s notice? It is impossible. What can we

do? It is best, I think, to leave the matter to your own conscience.

How does it seem to you?” As he concluded the prince looked curiously

at Keller; evidently this problem of double motives had often been

considered by him before.

“Well, how anybody can call you an idiot after that, is more than I can

understand!” cried the boxer.

The prince reddened slightly.

“Bourdaloue, the archbishop, would not have spared a man like me,”

Keller continued, “but you, you have judged me with humanity. To show

how grateful I am, and as a punishment, I will not accept a hundred and

fifty roubles. Give me twenty-five—that will be enough; it is all I

really need, for a fortnight at least. I will not ask you for more for

a fortnight. I should like to have given Agatha a present, but she does

not really deserve it. Oh, my dear prince, God bless you!”

At this moment Lebedeff appeared, having just arrived from Petersburg.

He frowned when he saw the twenty-five rouble note in Keller’s hand,

but the latter, having got the money, went away at once. Lebedeff began

to abuse him.

“You are unjust; I found him sincerely repentant,” observed the prince,

after listening for a time.

“What is the good of repentance like that? It is the same exactly as

mine yesterday, when I said, ‘I am base, I am base,’—words, and nothing

more!”

“Then they were only words on your part? I thought, on the contrary...”

“Well, I don’t mind telling you the truth—you only! Because you see

through a man somehow. Words and actions, truth and falsehood, are all

jumbled up together in me, and yet I am perfectly sincere. I feel the

deepest repentance, believe it or not, as you choose; but words and

lies come out in the infernal craving to get the better of other

people. It is always there—the notion of cheating people, and of using

my repentant tears to my own advantage! I assure you this is the truth,

prince! I would not tell any other man for the world! He would laugh

and jeer at me—but you, you judge a man humanely.”

“Why, Keller said the same thing to me nearly word for word a few

minutes ago!” cried Muishkin. “And you both seem inclined to boast

about it! You astonish me, but I think he is more sincere than you, for

you make a regular trade of it. Oh, don’t put on that pathetic

expression, and don’t put your hand on your heart! Have you anything to

say to me? You have not come for nothing...”

Lebedeff grinned and wriggled.

“I have been waiting all day for you, because I want to ask you a

question; and, for once in your life, please tell me the truth at once.

Had you anything to do with that affair of the carriage yesterday?”

Lebedeff began to grin again, rubbed his hands, sneezed, but spoke not

a word in reply.

“I see you had something to do with it.”

“Indirectly, quite indirectly! I am speaking the truth—I am indeed! I

merely told a certain person that I had people in my house, and that

such and such personages might be found among them.”

“I am aware that you sent your son to that house—he told me so himself

just now, but what is this intrigue?” said the prince, impatiently.

“It is not my intrigue!” cried Lebedeff, waving his hand.

“It was engineered by other people, and is, properly speaking, rather a

fantasy than an intrigue!”

“But what is it all about? Tell me, for Heaven’s sake! Cannot you

understand how nearly it touches me? Why are they blackening Evgenie

Pavlovitch’s reputation?”

Lebedeff grimaced and wriggled again.

“Prince!” said he. “Excellency! You won’t let me tell you the whole

truth; I have tried to explain; more than once I have begun, but you

have not allowed me to go on...”

The prince gave no answer, and sat deep in thought. Evidently he was

struggling to decide.

“Very well! Tell me the truth,” he said, dejectedly.

“Aglaya Ivanovna...” began Lebedeff, promptly.

“Be silent! At once!” interrupted the prince, red with indignation, and

perhaps with shame, too. “It is impossible and absurd! All that has

been invented by you, or fools like you! Let me never hear you say a

word again on that subject!”

Late in the evening Colia came in with a whole budget of Petersburg and

Pavlofsk news. He did not dwell much on the Petersburg part of it,

which consisted chiefly of intelligence about his friend Hippolyte, but

passed quickly to the Pavlofsk tidings. He had gone straight to the

Epanchins’ from the station.

“There’s the deuce and all going on there!” he said. “First of all

about the row last night, and I think there must be something new as

well, though I didn’t like to ask. Not a word about \_you\_, prince, the

whole time! The most interesting fact was that Aglaya had been

quarrelling with her people about Gania. Colia did not know any

details, except that it had been a terrible quarrel! Also Evgenie

Pavlovitch had called, and met with an excellent reception all round.

And another curious thing: Mrs. Epanchin was so angry that she called

Varia to her—Varia was talking to the girls—and turned her out of the

house ‘once for all’ she said. I heard it from Varia herself—Mrs.

Epanchin was quite polite, but firm; and when Varia said good-bye to

the girls, she told them nothing about it, and they didn’t know they

were saying goodbye for the last time. I’m sorry for Varia, and for

Gania too; he isn’t half a bad fellow, in spite of his faults, and I

shall never forgive myself for not liking him before! I don’t know

whether I ought to continue to go to the Epanchins’ now,” concluded

Colia—“I like to be quite independent of others, and of other people’s

quarrels if I can; but I must think over it.”

“I don’t think you need break your heart over Gania,” said the prince;

“for if what you say is true, he must be considered dangerous in the

Epanchin household, and if so, certain hopes of his must have been

encouraged.”

“What? What hopes?” cried Colia; “you surely don’t mean Aglaya?—oh,

no!—”

“You’re a dreadful sceptic, prince,” he continued, after a moment’s

silence. “I have observed of late that you have grown sceptical about

everything. You don’t seem to believe in people as you did, and are

always attributing motives and so on—am I using the word ‘sceptic’ in

its proper sense?”

“I believe so; but I’m not sure.”

“Well, I’ll change it, right or wrong; I’ll say that you are not

sceptical, but \_jealous\_. There! you are deadly jealous of Gania, over

a certain proud damsel! Come!” Colia jumped up, with these words, and

burst out laughing. He laughed as he had perhaps never laughed before,

and still more when he saw the prince flushing up to his temples. He

was delighted that the prince should be jealous about Aglaya. However,

he stopped immediately on seeing that the other was really hurt, and

the conversation continued, very earnestly, for an hour or more.

Next day the prince had to go to town, on business. Returning in the

afternoon, he happened upon General Epanchin at the station. The latter

seized his hand, glancing around nervously, as if he were afraid of

being caught in wrong-doing, and dragged him into a first-class

compartment. He was burning to speak about something of importance.

“In the first place, my dear prince, don’t be angry with me. I would

have come to see you yesterday, but I didn’t know how Lizabetha

Prokofievna would take it. My dear fellow, my house is simply a hell

just now, a sort of sphinx has taken up its abode there. We live in an

atmosphere of riddles; I can’t make head or tail of anything. As for

you, I feel sure you are the least to blame of any of us, though you

certainly have been the cause of a good deal of trouble. You see, it’s

all very pleasant to be a philanthropist; but it can be carried too

far. Of course I admire kind-heartedness, and I esteem my wife, but—”

The general wandered on in this disconnected way for a long time; it

was clear that he was much disturbed by some circumstance which he

could make nothing of.

“It is plain to me, that \_you\_ are not in it at all,” he continued, at

last, a little less vaguely, “but perhaps you had better not come to

our house for a little while. I ask you in the friendliest manner,

mind; just till the wind changes again. As for Evgenie Pavlovitch,” he

continued with some excitement, “the whole thing is a calumny, a dirty

calumny. It is simply a plot, an intrigue, to upset our plans and to

stir up a quarrel. You see, prince, I’ll tell you privately, Evgenie

and ourselves have not said a word yet, we have no formal

understanding, we are in no way bound on either side, but the word may

be said very soon, don’t you see, \_very\_ soon, and all this is most

injurious, and is meant to be so. Why? I’m sure I can’t tell you. She’s

an extraordinary woman, you see, an eccentric woman; I tell you I am so

frightened of that woman that I can’t sleep. What a carriage that was,

and where did it come from, eh? I declare, I was base enough to suspect

Evgenie at first; but it seems certain that that cannot be the case,

and if so, why is she interfering here? That’s the riddle, what does

she want? Is it to keep Evgenie to herself? But, my dear fellow, I

swear to you, I swear he doesn’t even \_know\_ her, and as for those

bills, why, the whole thing is an invention! And the familiarity of the

woman! It’s quite clear we must treat the impudent creature’s attempt

with disdain, and redouble our courtesy towards Evgenie. I told my wife

so.

“Now I’ll tell you my secret conviction. I’m certain that she’s doing

this to revenge herself on me, on account of the past, though I assure

you that all the time I was blameless. I blush at the very idea. And

now she turns up again like this, when I thought she had finally

disappeared! Where’s Rogojin all this time? I thought she was Mrs.

Rogojin, long ago.”

The old man was in a state of great mental perturbation. The whole of

the journey, which occupied nearly an hour, he continued in this

strain, putting questions and answering them himself, shrugging his

shoulders, pressing the prince’s hand, and assuring the latter that, at

all events, he had no suspicion whatever of \_him\_. This last assurance

was satisfactory, at all events. The general finished by informing him

that Evgenie’s uncle was head of one of the civil service departments,

and rich, very rich, and a gourmand. “And, well, Heaven preserve him,

of course—but Evgenie gets his money, don’t you see? But, for all this,

I’m uncomfortable, I don’t know why. There’s something in the air, I

feel there’s something nasty in the air, like a bat, and I’m by no

means comfortable.”

And it was not until the third day that the formal reconciliation

between the prince and the Epanchins took place, as said before.

XII.

It was seven in the evening, and the prince was just preparing to go

out for a walk in the park, when suddenly Mrs. Epanchin appeared on the

terrace.

“In the first place, don’t dare to suppose,” she began, “that I am

going to apologize. Nonsense! You were entirely to blame.”

The prince remained silent.

“Were you to blame, or not?”

“No, certainly not, no more than yourself, though at first I thought I

was.”

“Oh, very well, let’s sit down, at all events, for I don’t intend to

stand up all day. And remember, if you say, one word about ‘mischievous

urchins,’ I shall go away and break with you altogether. Now then, did

you, or did you not, send a letter to Aglaya, a couple of months or so

ago, about Easter-tide?”

“Yes!”

“What for? What was your object? Show me the letter.” Mrs. Epanchin’s

eyes flashed; she was almost trembling with impatience.

“I have not got the letter,” said the prince, timidly, extremely

surprised at the turn the conversation had taken. “If anyone has it, if

it still exists, Aglaya Ivanovna must have it.”

“No finessing, please. What did you write about?”

“I am not finessing, and I am not in the least afraid of telling you;

but I don’t see the slightest reason why I should not have written.”

“Be quiet, you can talk afterwards! What was the letter about? Why are

you blushing?”

The prince was silent. At last he spoke.

“I don’t understand your thoughts, Lizabetha Prokofievna; but I can see

that the fact of my having written is for some reason repugnant to you.

You must admit that I have a perfect right to refuse to answer your

questions; but, in order to show you that I am neither ashamed of the

letter, nor sorry that I wrote it, and that I am not in the least

inclined to blush about it” (here the prince’s blushes redoubled), “I

will repeat the substance of my letter, for I think I know it almost by

heart.”

So saying, the prince repeated the letter almost word for word, as he

had written it.

“My goodness, what utter twaddle, and what may all this nonsense have

signified, pray? If it had any meaning at all!” said Mrs. Epanchin,

cuttingly, after having listened with great attention.

“I really don’t absolutely know myself; I know my feeling was very

sincere. I had moments at that time full of life and hope.”

“What sort of hope?”

“It is difficult to explain, but certainly not the hopes you have in

your mind. Hopes—well, in a word, hopes for the future, and a feeling

of joy that \_there\_, at all events, I was not entirely a stranger and a

foreigner. I felt an ecstasy in being in my native land once more; and

one sunny morning I took up a pen and wrote her that letter, but why to

\_her\_, I don’t quite know. Sometimes one longs to have a friend near,

and I evidently felt the need of one then,” added the prince, and

paused.

“Are you in love with her?”

“N-no! I wrote to her as to a sister; I signed myself her brother.”

“Oh yes, of course, on purpose! I quite understand.”

“It is very painful to me to answer these questions, Lizabetha

Prokofievna.”

“I dare say it is; but that’s no affair of mine. Now then, assure me

truly as before Heaven, are you lying to me or not?”

“No, I am not lying.”

“Are you telling the truth when you say you are not in love?”

“I believe it is the absolute truth.”

“‘I believe,’ indeed! Did that mischievous urchin give it to her?”

“I asked Nicolai Ardalionovitch...”

“The urchin! the urchin!” interrupted Lizabetha Prokofievna in an angry

voice. “I do not want to know if it were Nicolai Ardalionovitch! The

urchin!”

“Nicolai Ardalionovitch...”

“The urchin, I tell you!”

“No, it was not the urchin: it was Nicolai Ardalionovitch,” said the

prince very firmly, but without raising his voice.

“Well, all right! All right, my dear! I shall put that down to your

account.”

She was silent a moment to get breath, and to recover her composure.

“Well!—and what’s the meaning of the ‘poor knight,’ eh?”

“I don’t know in the least; I wasn’t present when the joke was made. It

\_is\_ a joke. I suppose, and that’s all.”

“Well, that’s a comfort, at all events. You don’t suppose she could

take any interest in you, do you? Why, she called you an ‘idiot’

herself.”

“I think you might have spared me that,” murmured the prince

reproachfully, almost in a whisper.

“Don’t be angry; she is a wilful, mad, spoilt girl. If she likes a

person she will pitch into him, and chaff him. I used to be just such

another. But for all that you needn’t flatter yourself, my boy; she is

not for you. I don’t believe it, and it is not to be. I tell you so at

once, so that you may take proper precautions. Now, I want to hear you

swear that you are not married to that woman?”

“Lizabetha Prokofievna, what are you thinking of?” cried the prince,

almost leaping to his feet in amazement.

“Why? You very nearly were, anyhow.”

“Yes—I nearly was,” whispered the prince, hanging his head.

“Well then, have you come here for \_her?\_ Are you in love with \_her?\_

With \_that\_ creature?”

“I did not come to marry at all,” replied the prince.

“Is there anything you hold sacred?”

“There is.”

“Then swear by it that you did not come here to marry \_her!\_”

“I’ll swear it by whatever you please.”

“I believe you. You may kiss me; I breathe freely at last. But you must

know, my dear friend, Aglaya does not love you, and she shall never be

your wife while I am out of my grave. So be warned in time. Do you hear

me?”

“Yes, I hear.”

The prince flushed up so much that he could not look her in the face.

“I have waited for you with the greatest impatience (not that you were

worth it). Every night I have drenched my pillow with tears, not for

you, my friend, not for you, don’t flatter yourself! I have my own

grief, always the same, always the same. But I’ll tell you why I have

been awaiting you so impatiently, because I believe that Providence

itself sent you to be a friend and a brother to me. I haven’t a friend

in the world except Princess Bielokonski, and she is growing as stupid

as a sheep from old age. Now then, tell me, yes or no? Do you know why

she called out from her carriage the other night?”

“I give you my word of honour that I had nothing to do with the matter

and know nothing about it.”

“Very well, I believe you. I have my own ideas about it. Up to

yesterday morning I thought it was really Evgenie Pavlovitch who was to

blame; now I cannot help agreeing with the others. But why he was made

such a fool of I cannot understand. However, he is not going to marry

Aglaya, I can tell you that. He may be a very excellent fellow, but—so

it shall be. I was not at all sure of accepting him before, but now I

have quite made up my mind that I won’t have him. ‘Put me in my coffin

first and then into my grave, and then you may marry my daughter to

whomsoever you please,’ so I said to the general this very morning. You

see how I trust you, my boy.”

“Yes, I see and understand.”

Mrs. Epanchin gazed keenly into the prince’s eyes. She was anxious to

see what impression the news as to Evgenie Pavlovitch had made upon

him.

“Do you know anything about Gavrila Ardalionovitch?” she asked at last.

“Oh yes, I know a good deal.”

“Did you know he had communications with Aglaya?”

“No, I didn’t,” said the prince, trembling a little, and in great

agitation. “You say Gavrila Ardalionovitch has private communications

with Aglaya?—Impossible!”

“Only quite lately. His sister has been working like a rat to clear the

way for him all the winter.”

“I don’t believe it!” said the prince abruptly, after a short pause.

“Had it been so I should have known long ago.”

“Oh, of course, yes; he would have come and wept out his secret on your

bosom. Oh, you simpleton—you simpleton! Anyone can deceive you and take

you in like a—like a,—aren’t you ashamed to trust him? Can’t you see

that he humbugs you just as much as ever he pleases?”

“I know very well that he does deceive me occasionally, and he knows

that I know it, but—” The prince did not finish his sentence.

“And that’s why you trust him, eh? So I should have supposed. Good

Lord, was there ever such a man as you? Tfu! and are you aware, sir,

that this Gania, or his sister Varia, have brought her into

correspondence with Nastasia Philipovna?”

“Brought whom?” cried Muishkin.

“Aglaya.”

“I don’t believe it! It’s impossible! What object could they have?” He

jumped up from his chair in his excitement.

“Nor do I believe it, in spite of the proofs. The girl is self-willed

and fantastic, and insane! She’s wicked, wicked! I’ll repeat it for a

thousand years that she’s wicked; they \_all\_ are, just now, all my

daughters, even that ‘wet hen’ Alexandra. And yet I don’t believe it.

Because I don’t choose to believe it, perhaps; but I don’t. Why haven’t

you been?” she turned on the prince suddenly. “Why didn’t you come near

us all these three days, eh?”

The prince began to give his reasons, but she interrupted him again.

“Everybody takes you in and deceives you; you went to town yesterday. I

dare swear you went down on your knees to that rogue, and begged him to

accept your ten thousand roubles!”

“I never thought of doing any such thing. I have not seen him, and he

is not a rogue, in my opinion. I have had a letter from him.”

“Show it me!”

The prince took a paper from his pocket-book, and handed it to

Lizabetha Prokofievna. It ran as follows:

“Sir,

“In the eyes of the world I am sure that I have no cause for pride

or self-esteem. I am much too insignificant for that. But what may

be so to other men’s eyes is not so to yours. I am convinced that

you are better than other people. Doktorenko disagrees with me, but

I am content to differ from him on this point. I will never accept

one single copeck from you, but you have helped my mother, and I am

bound to be grateful to you for that, however weak it may seem. At

any rate, I have changed my opinion about you, and I think right to

inform you of the fact; but I also suppose that there can be no

further intercourse between us.

“Antip Burdovsky.

“P.S.—The two hundred roubles I owe you shall certainly be repaid in

time.”

“How extremely stupid!” cried Mrs. Epanchin, giving back the letter

abruptly. “It was not worth the trouble of reading. Why are you

smiling?”

“Confess that you are pleased to have read it.”

“What! Pleased with all that nonsense! Why, cannot you see that they

are all infatuated with pride and vanity?”

“He has acknowledged himself to be in the wrong. Don’t you see that the

greater his vanity, the more difficult this admission must have been on

his part? Oh, what a little child you are, Lizabetha Prokofievna!”

“Are you tempting me to box your ears for you, or what?”

“Not at all. I am only proving that you are glad about the letter. Why

conceal your real feelings? You always like to do it.”

“Never come near my house again!” cried Mrs. Epanchin, pale with rage.

“Don’t let me see as much as a \_shadow\_ of you about the place! Do you

hear?”

“Oh yes, and in three days you’ll come and invite me yourself. Aren’t

you ashamed now? These are your best feelings; you are only tormenting

yourself.”

“I’ll die before I invite you! I shall forget your very name! I’ve

forgotten it already!”

She marched towards the door.

“But I’m forbidden your house as it is, without your added threats!”

cried the prince after her.

“What? Who forbade you?”

She turned round so suddenly that one might have supposed a needle had

been stuck into her.

The prince hesitated. He perceived that he had said too much now.

“\_Who\_ forbade you?” cried Mrs. Epanchin once more.

“Aglaya Ivanovna told me—”

“When? Speak—quick!”

“She sent to say, yesterday morning, that I was never to dare to come

near the house again.”

Lizabetha Prokofievna stood like a stone.

“What did she send? Whom? Was it that boy? Was it a message?—quick!”

“I had a note,” said the prince.

“Where is it? Give it here, at once.”

The prince thought a moment. Then he pulled out of his waistcoat pocket

an untidy slip of paper, on which was scrawled:

“PRINCE LEF NICOLAIEVITCH,—If you think fit, after all that has passed,

to honour our house with a visit, I can assure you you will not find me

among the number of those who are in any way delighted to see you.

“Aglaya Epanchin.”

Mrs. Epanchin reflected a moment. The next minute she flew at the

prince, seized his hand, and dragged him after her to the door.

“Quick—come along!” she cried, breathless with agitation and

impatience. “Come along with me this moment!”

“But you declared I wasn’t—”

“Don’t be a simpleton. You behave just as though you weren’t a man at

all. Come on! I shall see, now, with my own eyes. I shall see all.”

“Well, let me get my hat, at least.”

“Here’s your miserable hat. He couldn’t even choose a respectable shape

for his hat! Come on! She did that because I took your part and said

you ought to have come—little vixen!—else she would never have sent you

that silly note. It’s a most improper note, I call it; most improper

for such an intelligent, well-brought-up girl to write. H’m! I dare say

she was annoyed that you didn’t come; but she ought to have known that

one can’t write like that to an idiot like you, for you’d be sure to

take it literally.” Mrs. Epanchin was dragging the prince along with

her all the time, and never let go of his hand for an instant. “What

are you listening for?” she added, seeing that she had committed

herself a little. “She wants a clown like you—she hasn’t seen one for

some time—to play with. That’s why she is anxious for you to come to

the house. And right glad I am that she’ll make a thorough good fool of

you. You deserve it; and she can do it—oh! she can, indeed!—as well as

most people.”

PART III

I.

The Epanchin family, or at least the more serious members of it, were

sometimes grieved because they seemed so unlike the rest of the world.

They were not quite certain, but had at times a strong suspicion that

things did not happen to them as they did to other people. Others led a

quiet, uneventful life, while they were subject to continual upheavals.

Others kept on the rails without difficulty; they ran off at the

slightest obstacle. Other houses were governed by a timid routine;

theirs was somehow different. Perhaps Lizabetha Prokofievna was alone

in making these fretful observations; the girls, though not wanting in

intelligence, were still young; the general was intelligent, too, but

narrow, and in any difficulty he was content to say, “H’m!” and leave

the matter to his wife. Consequently, on her fell the responsibility.

It was not that they distinguished themselves as a family by any

particular originality, or that their excursions off the track led to

any breach of the proprieties. Oh no.

There was nothing premeditated, there was not even any conscious

purpose in it all, and yet, in spite of everything, the family,

although highly respected, was not quite what every highly respected

family ought to be. For a long time now Lizabetha Prokofievna had had

it in her mind that all the trouble was owing to her “unfortunate

character,” and this added to her distress. She blamed her own stupid

unconventional “eccentricity.” Always restless, always on the go, she

constantly seemed to lose her way, and to get into trouble over the

simplest and more ordinary affairs of life.

We said at the beginning of our story, that the Epanchins were liked

and esteemed by their neighbours. In spite of his humble origin, Ivan

Fedorovitch himself was received everywhere with respect. He deserved

this, partly on account of his wealth and position, partly because,

though limited, he was really a very good fellow. But a certain

limitation of mind seems to be an indispensable asset, if not to all

public personages, at least to all serious financiers. Added to this,

his manner was modest and unassuming; he knew when to be silent, yet

never allowed himself to be trampled upon. Also—and this was more

important than all—he had the advantage of being under exalted

patronage.

As to Lizabetha Prokofievna, she, as the reader knows, belonged to an

aristocratic family. True, Russians think more of influential friends

than of birth, but she had both. She was esteemed and even loved by

people of consequence in society, whose example in receiving her was

therefore followed by others. It seems hardly necessary to remark that

her family worries and anxieties had little or no foundation, or that

her imagination increased them to an absurd degree; but if you have a

wart on your forehead or nose, you imagine that all the world is

looking at it, and that people would make fun of you because of it,

even if you had discovered America! Doubtless Lizabetha Prokofievna was

considered “eccentric” in society, but she was none the less esteemed:

the pity was that she was ceasing to believe in that esteem. When she

thought of her daughters, she said to herself sorrowfully that she was

a hindrance rather than a help to their future, that her character and

temper were absurd, ridiculous, insupportable. Naturally, she put the

blame on her surroundings, and from morning to night was quarrelling

with her husband and children, whom she really loved to the point of

self-sacrifice, even, one might say, of passion.

She was, above all distressed by the idea that her daughters might grow

up “eccentric,” like herself; she believed that no other society girls

were like them. “They are growing into Nihilists!” she repeated over

and over again. For years she had tormented herself with this idea, and

with the question: “Why don’t they get married?”

“It is to annoy their mother; that is their one aim in life; it can be

nothing else. The fact is it is all of a piece with these modern ideas,

that wretched woman’s question! Six months ago Aglaya took a fancy to

cut off her magnificent hair. Why, even I, when I was young, had

nothing like it! The scissors were in her hand, and I had to go down on

my knees and implore her... She did it, I know, from sheer mischief, to

spite her mother, for she is a naughty, capricious girl, a real spoiled

child spiteful and mischievous to a degree! And then Alexandra wanted

to shave her head, not from caprice or mischief, but, like a little

fool, simply because Aglaya persuaded her she would sleep better

without her hair, and not suffer from headache! And how many suitors

have they not had during the last five years! Excellent offers, too!

What more do they want? Why don’t they get married? For no other reason

than to vex their mother—none—none!”

But Lizabetha Prokofievna felt somewhat consoled when she could say

that one of her girls, Adelaida, was settled at last. “It will be one

off our hands!” she declared aloud, though in private she expressed

herself with greater tenderness. The engagement was both happy and

suitable, and was therefore approved in society. Prince S. was a

distinguished man, he had money, and his future wife was devoted to

him; what more could be desired? Lizabetha Prokofievna had felt less

anxious about this daughter, however, although she considered her

artistic tastes suspicious. But to make up for them she was, as her

mother expressed it, “merry,” and had plenty of “common-sense.” It was

Aglaya’s future which disturbed her most. With regard to her eldest

daughter, Alexandra, the mother never quite knew whether there was

cause for anxiety or not. Sometimes she felt as if there was nothing to

be expected from her. She was twenty-five now, and must be fated to be

an old maid, and “with such beauty, too!” The mother spent whole nights

in weeping and lamenting, while all the time the cause of her grief

slumbered peacefully. “What is the matter with her? Is she a Nihilist,

or simply a fool?”

But Lizabetha Prokofievna knew perfectly well how unnecessary was the

last question. She set a high value on Alexandra Ivanovna’s judgment,

and often consulted her in difficulties; but that she was a ‘wet hen’

she never for a moment doubted. “She is so calm; nothing rouses

her—though wet hens are not always calm! Oh! I can’t understand it!”

Her eldest daughter inspired Lizabetha with a kind of puzzled

compassion. She did not feel this in Aglaya’s case, though the latter

was her idol. It may be said that these outbursts and epithets, such as

“wet hen” (in which the maternal solicitude usually showed itself),

only made Alexandra laugh. Sometimes the most trivial thing annoyed

Mrs. Epanchin, and drove her into a frenzy. For instance, Alexandra

Ivanovna liked to sleep late, and was always dreaming, though her

dreams had the peculiarity of being as innocent and naive as those of a

child of seven; and the very innocence of her dreams annoyed her

mother. Once she dreamt of nine hens, and this was the cause of quite a

serious quarrel—no one knew why. Another time she had—it was most

unusual—a dream with a spark of originality in it. She dreamt of a monk

in a dark room, into which she was too frightened to go. Adelaida and

Aglaya rushed off with shrieks of laughter to relate this to their

mother, but she was quite angry, and said her daughters were all fools.

“H’m! she is as stupid as a fool! A veritable ‘wet hen’! Nothing

excites her; and yet she is not happy; some days it makes one miserable

only to look at her! Why is she unhappy, I wonder?” At times Lizabetha

Prokofievna put this question to her husband, and as usual she spoke in

the threatening tone of one who demands an immediate answer. Ivan

Fedorovitch would frown, shrug his shoulders, and at last give his

opinion: “She needs a husband!”

“God forbid that he should share your ideas, Ivan Fedorovitch!” his

wife flashed back. “Or that he should be as gross and churlish as you!”

The general promptly made his escape, and Lizabetha Prokofievna after a

while grew calm again. That evening, of course, she would be unusually

attentive, gentle, and respectful to her “gross and churlish” husband,

her “dear, kind Ivan Fedorovitch,” for she had never left off loving

him. She was even still “in love” with him. He knew it well, and for

his part held her in the greatest esteem.

But the mother’s great and continual anxiety was Aglaya. “She is

exactly like me—my image in everything,” said Mrs. Epanchin to herself.

“A tyrant! A real little demon! A Nihilist! Eccentric, senseless and

mischievous! Good Lord, how unhappy she will be!”

But as we said before, the fact of Adelaida’s approaching marriage was

balm to the mother. For a whole month she forgot her fears and worries.

Adelaida’s fate was settled; and with her name that of Aglaya’s was

linked, in society gossip. People whispered that Aglaya, too, was “as

good as engaged;” and Aglaya always looked so sweet and behaved so well

(during this period), that the mother’s heart was full of joy. Of

course, Evgenie Pavlovitch must be thoroughly studied first, before the

final step should be taken; but, really, how lovely dear Aglaya had

become—she actually grew more beautiful every day! And then—Yes, and

then—this abominable prince showed his face again, and everything went

topsy-turvy at once, and everyone seemed as mad as March hares.

What had really happened?

If it had been any other family than the Epanchins’, nothing particular

would have happened. But, thanks to Mrs. Epanchin’s invariable

fussiness and anxiety, there could not be the slightest hitch in the

simplest matters of everyday life, but she immediately foresaw the most

dreadful and alarming consequences, and suffered accordingly.

What then must have been her condition, when, among all the imaginary

anxieties and calamities which so constantly beset her, she now saw

looming ahead a serious cause for annoyance—something really likely to

arouse doubts and suspicions!

“How dared they, how \_dared\_ they write that hateful anonymous letter

informing me that Aglaya is in communication with Nastasia Philipovna?”

she thought, as she dragged the prince along towards her own house, and

again when she sat him down at the round table where the family was

already assembled. “How dared they so much as \_think\_ of such a thing?

I should \_die\_ with shame if I thought there was a particle of truth in

it, or if I were to show the letter to Aglaya herself! Who dares play

these jokes upon \_us\_, the Epanchins? \_Why\_ didn’t we go to the Yelagin

instead of coming down here? I \_told\_ you we had better go to the

Yelagin this summer, Ivan Fedorovitch. It’s all your fault. I dare say

it was that Varia who sent the letter. It’s all Ivan Fedorovitch.

\_That\_ woman is doing it all for him, I know she is, to show she can

make a fool of him now just as she did when he used to give her pearls.

“But after all is said, we are mixed up in it. Your daughters are mixed

up in it, Ivan Fedorovitch; young ladies in society, young ladies at an

age to be married; they were present, they heard everything there was

to hear. They were mixed up with that other scene, too, with those

dreadful youths. You must be pleased to remember they heard it all. I

cannot forgive that wretched prince. I never shall forgive him! And

why, if you please, has Aglaya had an attack of nerves for these last

three days? Why has she all but quarrelled with her sisters, even with

Alexandra—whom she respects so much that she always kisses her hands as

though she were her mother? What are all these riddles of hers that we

have to guess? What has Gavrila Ardalionovitch to do with it? Why did

she take upon herself to champion him this morning, and burst into

tears over it? Why is there an allusion to that cursed ‘poor knight’ in

the anonymous letter? And why did I rush off to him just now like a

lunatic, and drag him back here? I do believe I’ve gone mad at last.

What on earth have I done now? To talk to a young man about my

daughter’s secrets—and secrets having to do with himself, too! Thank

goodness, he’s an idiot, and a friend of the house! Surely Aglaya

hasn’t fallen in love with such a gaby! What an idea! Pfu! we ought all

to be put under glass cases—myself first of all—and be shown off as

curiosities, at ten copecks a peep!”

“I shall never forgive you for all this, Ivan Fedorovitch—never! Look

at her now. Why doesn’t she make fun of him? She said she would, and

she doesn’t. Look there! She stares at him with all her eyes, and

doesn’t move; and yet she told him not to come. He looks pale enough;

and that abominable chatterbox, Evgenie Pavlovitch, monopolizes the

whole of the conversation. Nobody else can get a word in. I could soon

find out all about everything if I could only change the subject.”

The prince certainly was very pale. He sat at the table and seemed to

be feeling, by turns, sensations of alarm and rapture.

Oh, how frightened he was of looking to one side—one particular

corner—whence he knew very well that a pair of dark eyes were watching

him intently, and how happy he was to think that he was once more among

them, and occasionally hearing that well-known voice, although she had

written and forbidden him to come again!

“What on earth will she say to me, I wonder?” he thought to himself.

He had not said a word yet; he sat silent and listened to Evgenie

Pavlovitch’s eloquence. The latter had never appeared so happy and

excited as on this evening. The prince listened to him, but for a long

time did not take in a word he said.

Excepting Ivan Fedorovitch, who had not as yet returned from town, the

whole family was present. Prince S. was there; and they all intended to

go out to hear the band very soon.

Colia arrived presently and joined the circle. “So he is received as

usual, after all,” thought the prince.

The Epanchins’ country-house was a charming building, built after the

model of a Swiss chalet, and covered with creepers. It was surrounded

on all sides by a flower garden, and the family sat, as a rule, on the

open verandah as at the prince’s house.

The subject under discussion did not appear to be very popular with the

assembly, and some would have been delighted to change it; but Evgenie

would not stop holding forth, and the prince’s arrival seemed to spur

him on to still further oratorical efforts.

Lizabetha Prokofievna frowned, but had not as yet grasped the subject,

which seemed to have arisen out of a heated argument. Aglaya sat apart,

almost in the corner, listening in stubborn silence.

“Excuse me,” continued Evgenie Pavlovitch hotly, “I don’t say a word

against liberalism. Liberalism is not a sin, it is a necessary part of

a great whole, which whole would collapse and fall to pieces without

it. Liberalism has just as much right to exist as has the most moral

conservatism; but I am attacking \_Russian\_ liberalism; and I attack it

for the simple reason that a Russian liberal is not a Russian liberal,

he is a non-Russian liberal. Show me a real Russian liberal, and I’ll

kiss him before you all, with pleasure.”

“If he cared to kiss you, that is,” said Alexandra, whose cheeks were

red with irritation and excitement.

“Look at that, now,” thought the mother to herself, “she does nothing

but sleep and eat for a year at a time, and then suddenly flies out in

the most incomprehensible way!”

The prince observed that Alexandra appeared to be angry with Evgenie,

because he spoke on a serious subject in a frivolous manner, pretending

to be in earnest, but with an under-current of irony.

“I was saying just now, before you came in, prince, that there has been

nothing national up to now, about our liberalism, and nothing the

liberals do, or have done, is in the least degree national. They are

drawn from two classes only, the old landowning class, and clerical

families—”

“How, nothing that they have done is Russian?” asked Prince S.

“It may be Russian, but it is not national. Our liberals are not

Russian, nor are our conservatives, and you may be sure that the nation

does not recognize anything that has been done by the landed gentry, or

by the seminarists, or what is to be done either.”

“Come, that’s good! How can you maintain such a paradox? If you are

serious, that is. I cannot allow such a statement about the landed

proprietors to pass unchallenged. Why, you are a landed proprietor

yourself!” cried Prince S. hotly.

“I suppose you’ll say there is nothing national about our literature

either?” said Alexandra.

“Well, I am not a great authority on literary questions, but I

certainly do hold that Russian literature is not Russian, except

perhaps Lomonosoff, Pouschkin and Gogol.”

“In the first place, that is a considerable admission, and in the

second place, one of the above was a peasant, and the other two were

both landed proprietors!”

“Quite so, but don’t be in such a hurry! For since it has been the part

of these three men, and only these three, to say something absolutely

their own, not borrowed, so by this very fact these three men become

really national. If any Russian shall have done or said anything really

and absolutely original, he is to be called national from that moment,

though he may not be able to talk the Russian language; still he is a

national Russian. I consider that an axiom. But we were not speaking of

literature; we began by discussing the socialists. Very well then, I

insist that there does not exist one single Russian socialist. There

does not, and there has never existed such a one, because all

socialists are derived from the two classes—the landed proprietors, and

the seminarists. All our eminent socialists are merely old liberals of

the class of landed proprietors, men who were liberals in the days of

serfdom. Why do you laugh? Give me their books, give me their studies,

their memoirs, and though I am not a literary critic, yet I will prove

as clear as day that every chapter and every word of their writings has

been the work of a former landed proprietor of the old school. You’ll

find that all their raptures, all their generous transports are

proprietary, all their woes and their tears, proprietary; all

proprietary or seminarist! You are laughing again, and you, prince, are

smiling too. Don’t you agree with me?”

It was true enough that everybody was laughing, the prince among them.

“I cannot tell you on the instant whether I agree with you or not,”

said the latter, suddenly stopping his laughter, and starting like a

schoolboy caught at mischief. “But, I assure you, I am listening to you

with extreme gratification.”

So saying, he almost panted with agitation, and a cold sweat stood upon

his forehead. These were his first words since he had entered the

house; he tried to lift his eyes, and look around, but dared not;

Evgenie Pavlovitch noticed his confusion, and smiled.

“I’ll just tell you one fact, ladies and gentlemen,” continued the

latter, with apparent seriousness and even exaltation of manner, but

with a suggestion of “chaff” behind every word, as though he were

laughing in his sleeve at his own nonsense—“a fact, the discovery of

which, I believe, I may claim to have made by myself alone. At all

events, no other has ever said or written a word about it; and in this

fact is expressed the whole essence of Russian liberalism of the sort

which I am now considering.

“In the first place, what is liberalism, speaking generally, but an

attack (whether mistaken or reasonable, is quite another question) upon

the existing order of things? Is this so? Yes. Very well. Then my

‘fact’ consists in this, that \_Russian\_ liberalism is not an attack

upon the existing order of things, but an attack upon the very essence

of things themselves—indeed, on the things themselves; not an attack on

the Russian order of things, but on Russia itself. My Russian liberal

goes so far as to reject Russia; that is, he hates and strikes his own

mother. Every misfortune and mishap of the mother-country fills him

with mirth, and even with ecstasy. He hates the national customs,

Russian history, and everything. If he has a justification, it is that

he does not know what he is doing, and believes that his hatred of

Russia is the grandest and most profitable kind of liberalism. (You

will often find a liberal who is applauded and esteemed by his fellows,

but who is in reality the dreariest, blindest, dullest of

conservatives, and is not aware of the fact.) This hatred for Russia

has been mistaken by some of our ‘Russian liberals’ for sincere love of

their country, and they boast that they see better than their

neighbours what real love of one’s country should consist in. But of

late they have grown, more candid and are ashamed of the expression

‘love of country,’ and have annihilated the very spirit of the words as

something injurious and petty and undignified. This is the truth, and I

hold by it; but at the same time it is a phenomenon which has not been

repeated at any other time or place; and therefore, though I hold to it

as a fact, yet I recognize that it is an accidental phenomenon, and may

likely enough pass away. There can be no such thing anywhere else as a

liberal who really hates his country; and how is this fact to be

explained among \_us?\_ By my original statement that a Russian liberal

is \_not\_ a \_Russian\_ liberal—that’s the only explanation that I can

see.”

“I take all that you have said as a joke,” said Prince S. seriously.

“I have not seen all kinds of liberals, and cannot, therefore, set

myself up as a judge,” said Alexandra, “but I have heard all you have

said with indignation. You have taken some accidental case and twisted

it into a universal law, which is unjust.”

“Accidental case!” said Evgenie Pavlovitch. “Do you consider it an

accidental case, prince?”

“I must also admit,” said the prince, “that I have not seen much, or

been very far into the question; but I cannot help thinking that you

are more or less right, and that Russian liberalism—that phase of it

which you are considering, at least—really is sometimes inclined to

hate Russia itself, and not only its existing order of things in

general. Of course this is only \_partially\_ the truth; you cannot lay

down the law for all...”

The prince blushed and broke off, without finishing what he meant to

say.

In spite of his shyness and agitation, he could not help being greatly

interested in the conversation. A special characteristic of his was the

naive candour with which he always listened to arguments which

interested him, and with which he answered any questions put to him on

the subject at issue. In the very expression of his face this naivete

was unmistakably evident, this disbelief in the insincerity of others,

and unsuspecting disregard of irony or humour in their words.

But though Evgenie Pavlovitch had put his questions to the prince with

no other purpose but to enjoy the joke of his simple-minded

seriousness, yet now, at his answer, he was surprised into some

seriousness himself, and looked gravely at Muishkin as though he had

not expected that sort of answer at all.

“Why, how strange!” he ejaculated. “You didn’t answer me seriously,

surely, did you?”

“Did not you ask me the question seriously” inquired the prince, in

amazement.

Everybody laughed.

“Oh, trust \_him\_ for that!” said Adelaida. “Evgenie Pavlovitch turns

everything and everybody he can lay hold of to ridicule. You should

hear the things he says sometimes, apparently in perfect seriousness.”

“In my opinion the conversation has been a painful one throughout, and

we ought never to have begun it,” said Alexandra. “We were all going

for a walk—”

“Come along then,” said Evgenie; “it’s a glorious evening. But, to

prove that this time I was speaking absolutely seriously, and

especially to prove this to the prince (for you, prince, have

interested me exceedingly, and I swear to you that I am not quite such

an ass as I like to appear sometimes, although I am rather an ass, I

admit), and—well, ladies and gentlemen, will you allow me to put just

one more question to the prince, out of pure curiosity? It shall be the

last. This question came into my mind a couple of hours since (you see,

prince, I do think seriously at times), and I made my own decision upon

it; now I wish to hear what the prince will say to it.”

“We have just used the expression ‘accidental case.’ This is a

significant phrase; we often hear it. Well, not long since everyone was

talking and reading about that terrible murder of six people on the

part of a—young fellow, and of the extraordinary speech of the counsel

for the defence, who observed that in the poverty-stricken condition of

the criminal it must have come \_naturally\_ into his head to kill these

six people. I do not quote his words, but that is the sense of them, or

something very like it. Now, in my opinion, the barrister who put

forward this extraordinary plea was probably absolutely convinced that

he was stating the most liberal, the most humane, the most enlightened

view of the case that could possibly be brought forward in these days.

Now, was this distortion, this capacity for a perverted way of viewing

things, a special or accidental case, or is such a general rule?”

Everyone laughed at this.

“A special case—accidental, of course!” cried Alexandra and Adelaida.

“Let me remind you once more, Evgenie,” said Prince S., “that your joke

is getting a little threadbare.”

“What do you think about it, prince?” asked Evgenie, taking no notice

of the last remark, and observing Muishkin’s serious eyes fixed upon

his face. “What do you think—was it a special or a usual case—the rule,

or an exception? I confess I put the question especially for you.”

“No, I don’t think it was a special case,” said the prince, quietly,

but firmly.

“My dear fellow!” cried Prince S., with some annoyance, “don’t you see

that he is chaffing you? He is simply laughing at you, and wants to

make game of you.”

“I thought Evgenie Pavlovitch was talking seriously,” said the prince,

blushing and dropping his eyes.

“My dear prince,” continued Prince S. “remember what you and I were

saying two or three months ago. We spoke of the fact that in our newly

opened Law Courts one could already lay one’s finger upon so many

talented and remarkable young barristers. How pleased you were with the

state of things as we found it, and how glad I was to observe your

delight! We both said it was a matter to be proud of; but this clumsy

defence that Evgenie mentions, this strange argument \_can\_, of course,

only be an accidental case—one in a thousand!”

The prince reflected a little, but very soon he replied, with absolute

conviction in his tone, though he still spoke somewhat shyly and

timidly:

“I only wished to say that this ‘distortion,’ as Evgenie Pavlovitch

expressed it, is met with very often, and is far more the general rule

than the exception, unfortunately for Russia. So much so, that if this

distortion were not the general rule, perhaps these dreadful crimes

would be less frequent.”

“Dreadful crimes? But I can assure you that crimes just as dreadful,

and probably more horrible, have occurred before our times, and at all

times, and not only here in Russia, but everywhere else as well. And in

my opinion it is not at all likely that such murders will cease to

occur for a very long time to come. The only difference is that in

former times there was less publicity, while now everyone talks and

writes freely about such things—which fact gives the impression that

such crimes have only now sprung into existence. That is where your

mistake lies—an extremely natural mistake, I assure you, my dear

fellow!” said Prince S.

“I know that there were just as many, and just as terrible, crimes

before our times. Not long since I visited a convict prison and made

acquaintance with some of the criminals. There were some even more

dreadful criminals than this one we have been speaking of—men who have

murdered a dozen of their fellow-creatures, and feel no remorse

whatever. But what I especially noticed was this, that the very most

hopeless and remorseless murderer—however hardened a criminal he may

be—still \_knows that he is a criminal\_; that is, he is conscious that

he has acted wickedly, though he may feel no remorse whatever. And they

were all like this. Those of whom Evgenie Pavlovitch has spoken, do not

admit that they are criminals at all; they think they had a right to do

what they did, and that they were even doing a good deed, perhaps. I

consider there is the greatest difference between the two cases. And

recollect—it was a \_youth\_, at the particular age which is most

helplessly susceptible to the distortion of ideas!”

Prince S. was now no longer smiling; he gazed at the prince in

bewilderment.

Alexandra, who had seemed to wish to put in her word when the prince

began, now sat silent, as though some sudden thought had caused her to

change her mind about speaking.

Evgenie Pavlovitch gazed at him in real surprise, and this time his

expression of face had no mockery in it whatever.

“What are you looking so surprised about, my friend?” asked Mrs.

Epanchin, suddenly. “Did you suppose he was stupider than yourself, and

was incapable of forming his own opinions, or what?”

“No! Oh no! Not at all!” said Evgenie. “But—how is it, prince, that

you—(excuse the question, will you?)—if you are capable of observing

and seeing things as you evidently do, how is it that you saw nothing

distorted or perverted in that claim upon your property, which you

acknowledged a day or two since; and which was full of arguments

founded upon the most distorted views of right and wrong?”

“I’ll tell you what, my friend,” cried Mrs. Epanchin, of a sudden,

“here are we all sitting here and imagining we are very clever, and

perhaps laughing at the prince, some of us, and meanwhile he has

received a letter this very day in which that same claimant renounces

his claim, and begs the prince’s pardon. There! \_we\_ don’t often get

that sort of letter; and yet we are not ashamed to walk with our noses

in the air before him.”

“And Hippolyte has come down here to stay,” said Colia, suddenly.

“What! has he arrived?” said the prince, starting up.

“Yes, I brought him down from town just after you had left the house.”

“There now! It’s just like him,” cried Lizabetha Prokofievna, boiling

over once more, and entirely oblivious of the fact that she had just

taken the prince’s part. “I dare swear that you went up to town

yesterday on purpose to get the little wretch to do you the great

honour of coming to stay at your house. You did go up to town, you know

you did—you said so yourself! Now then, did you, or did you not, go

down on your knees and beg him to come, confess!”

“No, he didn’t, for I saw it all myself,” said Colia. “On the contrary,

Hippolyte kissed his hand twice and thanked him; and all the prince

said was that he thought Hippolyte might feel better here in the

country!”

“Don’t, Colia,—what is the use of saying all that?” cried the prince,

rising and taking his hat.

“Where are you going to now?” cried Mrs. Epanchin.

“Never mind about him now, prince,” said Colia. “He is all right and

taking a nap after the journey. He is very happy to be here; but I

think perhaps it would be better if you let him alone for today,—he is

very sensitive now that he is so ill—and he might be embarrassed if you

show him too much attention at first. He is decidedly better today, and

says he has not felt so well for the last six months, and has coughed

much less, too.”

The prince observed that Aglaya came out of her corner and approached

the table at this point.

He did not dare look at her, but he was conscious, to the very tips of

his fingers, that she was gazing at him, perhaps angrily; and that she

had probably flushed up with a look of fiery indignation in her black

eyes.

“It seems to me, Mr. Colia, that you were very foolish to bring your

young friend down—if he is the same consumptive boy who wept so

profusely, and invited us all to his own funeral,” remarked Evgenie

Pavlovitch. “He talked so eloquently about the blank wall outside his

bedroom window, that I’m sure he will never support life here without

it.”

“I think so too,” said Mrs. Epanchin; “he will quarrel with you, and be

off,” and she drew her workbox towards her with an air of dignity,

quite oblivious of the fact that the family was about to start for a

walk in the park.

“Yes, I remember he boasted about the blank wall in an extraordinary

way,” continued Evgenie, “and I feel that without that blank wall he

will never be able to die eloquently; and he does so long to die

eloquently!”

“Oh, you must forgive him the blank wall,” said the prince, quietly.

“He has come down to see a few trees now, poor fellow.”

“Oh, I forgive him with all my heart; you may tell him so if you like,”

laughed Evgenie.

“I don’t think you should take it quite like that,” said the prince,

quietly, and without removing his eyes from the carpet. “I think it is

more a case of his forgiving you.”

“Forgiving me! why so? What have I done to need his forgiveness?”

“If you don’t understand, then—but of course, you do understand. He

wished—he wished to bless you all round and to have your

blessing—before he died—that’s all.”

“My dear prince,” began Prince S., hurriedly, exchanging glances with

some of those present, “you will not easily find heaven on earth, and

yet you seem to expect to. Heaven is a difficult thing to find

anywhere, prince; far more difficult than appears to that good heart of

yours. Better stop this conversation, or we shall all be growing quite

disturbed in our minds, and—”

“Let’s go and hear the band, then,” said Lizabetha Prokofievna, angrily

rising from her place.

The rest of the company followed her example.

II.

The prince suddenly approached Evgenie Pavlovitch.

“Evgenie Pavlovitch,” he said, with strange excitement and seizing the

latter’s hand in his own, “be assured that I esteem you as a generous

and honourable man, in spite of everything. Be assured of that.”

Evgenie Pavlovitch fell back a step in astonishment. For one moment it

was all he could do to restrain himself from bursting out laughing;

but, looking closer, he observed that the prince did not seem to be

quite himself; at all events, he was in a very curious state.

“I wouldn’t mind betting, prince,” he cried, “that you did not in the

least mean to say that, and very likely you meant to address someone

else altogether. What is it? Are you feeling unwell or anything?”

“Very likely, extremely likely, and you must be a very close observer

to detect the fact that perhaps I did not intend to come up to \_you\_ at

all.”

So saying he smiled strangely; but suddenly and excitedly he began

again:

“Don’t remind me of what I have done or said. Don’t! I am very much

ashamed of myself, I—”

“Why, what have you done? I don’t understand you.”

“I see you are ashamed of me, Evgenie Pavlovitch; you are blushing for

me; that’s a sign of a good heart. Don’t be afraid; I shall go away

directly.”

“What’s the matter with him? Do his fits begin like that?” said

Lizabetha Prokofievna, in a high state of alarm, addressing Colia.

“No, no, Lizabetha Prokofievna, take no notice of me. I am not going to

have a fit. I will go away directly; but I know I am afflicted. I was

twenty-four years an invalid, you see—the first twenty-four years of my

life—so take all I do and say as the sayings and actions of an invalid.

I’m going away directly, I really am—don’t be afraid. I am not

blushing, for I don’t think I need blush about it, need I? But I see

that I am out of place in society—society is better without me. It’s

not vanity, I assure you. I have thought over it all these last three

days, and I have made up my mind that I ought to unbosom myself

candidly before you at the first opportunity. There are certain things,

certain great ideas, which I must not so much as approach, as Prince S.

has just reminded me, or I shall make you all laugh. I have no sense of

proportion, I know; my words and gestures do not express my ideas—they

are a humiliation and abasement of the ideas, and therefore, I have no

right—and I am too sensitive. Still, I believe I am beloved in this

household, and esteemed far more than I deserve. But I can’t help

knowing that after twenty-four years of illness there must be some

trace left, so that it is impossible for people to refrain from

laughing at me sometimes; don’t you think so?”

He seemed to pause for a reply, for some verdict, as it were, and

looked humbly around him.

All present stood rooted to the earth with amazement at this unexpected

and apparently uncalled-for outbreak; but the poor prince’s painful and

rambling speech gave rise to a strange episode.

“Why do you say all this here?” cried Aglaya, suddenly. “Why do you

talk like this to \_them?\_”

She appeared to be in the last stages of wrath and irritation; her eyes

flashed. The prince stood dumbly and blindly before her, and suddenly

grew pale.

“There is not one of them all who is worthy of these words of yours,”

continued Aglaya. “Not one of them is worth your little finger, not one

of them has heart or head to compare with yours! You are more honest

than all, and better, nobler, kinder, wiser than all. There are some

here who are unworthy to bend and pick up the handkerchief you have

just dropped. Why do you humiliate yourself like this, and place

yourself lower than these people? Why do you debase yourself before

them? Why have you no pride?”

“My God! Who would ever have believed this?” cried Mrs. Epanchin,

wringing her hands.

“Hurrah for the ‘poor knight’!” cried Colia.

“Be quiet! How dare they laugh at me in your house?” said Aglaya,

turning sharply on her mother in that hysterical frame of mind that

rides recklessly over every obstacle and plunges blindly through

proprieties. “Why does everyone, everyone worry and torment me? Why

have they all been bullying me these three days about you, prince? I

will not marry you—never, and under no circumstances! Know that once

and for all; as if anyone could marry an absurd creature like you! Just

look in the glass and see what you look like, this very moment! Why,

\_why\_ do they torment me and say I am going to marry you? You must know

it; you are in the plot with them!”

“No one ever tormented you on the subject,” murmured Adelaida, aghast.

“No one ever thought of such a thing! There has never been a word said

about it!” cried Alexandra.

“Who has been annoying her? Who has been tormenting the child? Who

could have said such a thing to her? Is she raving?” cried Lizabetha

Prokofievna, trembling with rage, to the company in general.

“Every one of them has been saying it—every one of them—all these three

days! And I will never, never marry him!”

So saying, Aglaya burst into bitter tears, and, hiding her face in her

handkerchief, sank back into a chair.

“But he has never even—”

“I have never asked you to marry me, Aglaya Ivanovna!” said the prince,

of a sudden.

“\_What?\_” cried Mrs. Epanchin, raising her hands in horror. “\_What’s\_

that?”

She could not believe her ears.

“I meant to say—I only meant to say,” said the prince, faltering, “I

merely meant to explain to Aglaya Ivanovna—to have the honour to

explain, as it were—that I had no intention—never had—to ask the honour

of her hand. I assure you I am not guilty, Aglaya Ivanovna, I am not,

indeed. I never did wish to—I never thought of it at all—and never

shall—you’ll see it yourself—you may be quite assured of it. Some

wicked person has been maligning me to you; but it’s all right. Don’t

worry about it.”

So saying, the prince approached Aglaya.

She took the handkerchief from her face, glanced keenly at him, took in

what he had said, and burst out laughing—such a merry, unrestrained

laugh, so hearty and gay, that Adelaida could not contain herself. She,

too, glanced at the prince’s panic-stricken countenance, then rushed at

her sister, threw her arms round her neck, and burst into as merry a

fit of laughter as Aglaya’s own. They laughed together like a couple of

school-girls. Hearing and seeing this, the prince smiled happily, and

in accents of relief and joy, he exclaimed “Well, thank God—thank God!”

Alexandra now joined in, and it looked as though the three sisters were

going to laugh on for ever.

“They are insane,” muttered Lizabetha Prokofievna. “Either they

frighten one out of one’s wits, or else—”

But Prince S. was laughing now, too, so was Evgenie Pavlovitch, so was

Colia, and so was the prince himself, who caught the infection as he

looked round radiantly upon the others.

“Come along, let’s go out for a walk!” cried Adelaida. “We’ll all go

together, and the prince must absolutely go with us. You needn’t go

away, you dear good fellow! \_Isn’t\_ he a dear, Aglaya? Isn’t he,

mother? I must really give him a kiss for—for his explanation to Aglaya

just now. Mother, dear, I may kiss him, mayn’t I? Aglaya, may I kiss

\_your\_ prince?” cried the young rogue, and sure enough she skipped up

to the prince and kissed his forehead.

He seized her hands, and pressed them so hard that Adelaida nearly

cried out; he then gazed with delight into her eyes, and raising her

right hand to his lips with enthusiasm, kissed it three times.

“Come along,” said Aglaya. “Prince, you must walk with me. May he,

mother? This young cavalier, who won’t have me? You said you would

\_never\_ have me, didn’t you, prince? No—no, not like that; \_that’s\_ not

the way to give your arm. Don’t you know how to give your arm to a lady

yet? There—so. Now, come along, you and I will lead the way. Would you

like to lead the way with me alone, tête-à-tête?”

She went on talking and chatting without a pause, with occasional

little bursts of laughter between.

“Thank God—thank God!” said Lizabetha Prokofievna to herself, without

quite knowing why she felt so relieved.

“What extraordinary people they are!” thought Prince S., for perhaps

the hundredth time since he had entered into intimate relations with

the family; but—he liked these “extraordinary people,” all the same. As

for Prince Lef Nicolaievitch himself, Prince S. did not seem quite to

like him, somehow. He was decidedly preoccupied and a little disturbed

as they all started off.

Evgenie Pavlovitch seemed to be in a lively humour. He made Adelaida

and Alexandra laugh all the way to the Vauxhall; but they both laughed

so very readily and promptly that the worthy Evgenie began at last to

suspect that they were not listening to him at all.

At this idea, he burst out laughing all at once, in quite unaffected

mirth, and without giving any explanation.

The sisters, who also appeared to be in high spirits, never tired of

glancing at Aglaya and the prince, who were walking in front. It was

evident that their younger sister was a thorough puzzle to them both.

Prince S. tried hard to get up a conversation with Mrs. Epanchin upon

outside subjects, probably with the good intention of distracting and

amusing her; but he bored her dreadfully. She was absent-minded to a

degree, and answered at cross purposes, and sometimes not at all.

But the puzzle and mystery of Aglaya was not yet over for the evening.

The last exhibition fell to the lot of the prince alone. When they had

proceeded some hundred paces or so from the house, Aglaya said to her

obstinately silent cavalier in a quick half-whisper:

“Look to the right!”

The prince glanced in the direction indicated.

“Look closer. Do you see that bench, in the park there, just by those

three big trees—that green bench?”

The prince replied that he saw it.

“Do you like the position of it? Sometimes of a morning early, at seven

o’clock, when all the rest are still asleep, I come out and sit there

alone.”

The prince muttered that the spot was a lovely one.

“Now, go away, I don’t wish to have your arm any longer; or perhaps,

better, continue to give me your arm, and walk along beside me, but

don’t speak a word to me. I wish to think by myself.”

The warning was certainly unnecessary; for the prince would not have

said a word all the rest of the time whether forbidden to speak or not.

His heart beat loud and painfully when Aglaya spoke of the bench; could

she—but no! he banished the thought, after an instant’s deliberation.

At Pavlofsk, on weekdays, the public is more select than it is on

Sundays and Saturdays, when the townsfolk come down to walk about and

enjoy the park.

The ladies dress elegantly, on these days, and it is the fashion to

gather round the band, which is probably the best of our

pleasure-garden bands, and plays the newest pieces. The behaviour of

the public is most correct and proper, and there is an appearance of

friendly intimacy among the usual frequenters. Many come for nothing

but to look at their acquaintances, but there are others who come for

the sake of the music. It is very seldom that anything happens to break

the harmony of the proceedings, though, of course, accidents will

happen everywhere.

On this particular evening the weather was lovely, and there were a

large number of people present. All the places anywhere near the

orchestra were occupied.

Our friends took chairs near the side exit. The crowd and the music

cheered Mrs. Epanchin a little, and amused the girls; they bowed and

shook hands with some of their friends and nodded at a distance to

others; they examined the ladies’ dresses, noticed comicalities and

eccentricities among the people, and laughed and talked among

themselves. Evgenie Pavlovitch, too, found plenty of friends to bow to.

Several people noticed Aglaya and the prince, who were still together.

Before very long two or three young men had come up, and one or two

remained to talk; all of these young men appeared to be on intimate

terms with Evgenie Pavlovitch. Among them was a young officer, a

remarkably handsome fellow—very good-natured and a great chatterbox. He

tried to get up a conversation with Aglaya, and did his best to secure

her attention. Aglaya behaved very graciously to him, and chatted and

laughed merrily. Evgenie Pavlovitch begged the prince’s leave to

introduce their friend to him. The prince hardly realized what was

wanted of him, but the introduction came off; the two men bowed and

shook hands.

Evgenie Pavlovitch’s friend asked the prince some question, but the

latter did not reply, or if he did, he muttered something so strangely

indistinct that there was nothing to be made of it. The officer stared

intently at him, then glanced at Evgenie, divined why the latter had

introduced him, and gave his undivided attention to Aglaya again. Only

Evgenie Pavlovitch observed that Aglaya flushed up for a moment at

this.

The prince did not notice that others were talking and making

themselves agreeable to Aglaya; in fact, at moments, he almost forgot

that he was sitting by her himself. At other moments he felt a longing

to go away somewhere and be alone with his thoughts, and to feel that

no one knew where he was.

Or if that were impossible he would like to be alone at home, on the

terrace—without either Lebedeff or his children, or anyone else about

him, and to lie there and think—a day and night and another day again!

He thought of the mountains—and especially of a certain spot which he

used to frequent, whence he would look down upon the distant valleys

and fields, and see the waterfall, far off, like a little silver

thread, and the old ruined castle in the distance. Oh! how he longed to

be there now—alone with his thoughts—to think of one thing all his

life—one thing! A thousand years would not be too much time! And let

everyone here forget him—forget him utterly! How much better it would

have been if they had never known him—if all this could but prove to be

a dream. Perhaps it was a dream!

Now and then he looked at Aglaya for five minutes at a time, without

taking his eyes off her face; but his expression was very strange; he

would gaze at her as though she were an object a couple of miles

distant, or as though he were looking at her portrait and not at

herself at all.

“Why do you look at me like that, prince?” she asked suddenly, breaking

off her merry conversation and laughter with those about her. “I’m

afraid of you! You look as though you were just going to put out your

hand and touch my face to see if it’s real! Doesn’t he, Evgenie

Pavlovitch—doesn’t he look like that?”

The prince seemed surprised that he should have been addressed at all;

he reflected a moment, but did not seem to take in what had been said

to him; at all events, he did not answer. But observing that she and

the others had begun to laugh, he too opened his mouth and laughed with

them.

The laughter became general, and the young officer, who seemed a

particularly lively sort of person, simply shook with mirth.

Aglaya suddenly whispered angrily to herself the word—

“Idiot!”

“My goodness—surely she is not in love with such a—surely she isn’t

mad!” groaned Mrs. Epanchin, under her breath.

“It’s all a joke, mamma; it’s just a joke like the ‘poor

knight’—nothing more whatever, I assure you!” Alexandra whispered in

her ear. “She is chaffing him—making a fool of him, after her own

private fashion, that’s all! But she carries it just a little too

far—she is a regular little actress. How she frightened us just

now—didn’t she?—and all for a lark!”

“Well, it’s lucky she has happened upon an idiot, then, that’s all I

can say!” whispered Lizabetha Prokofievna, who was somewhat comforted,

however, by her daughter’s remark.

The prince had heard himself referred to as “idiot,” and had shuddered

at the moment; but his shudder, it so happened, was not caused by the

word applied to him. The fact was that in the crowd, not far from where

he was sitting, a pale familiar face, with curly black hair, and a

well-known smile and expression, had flashed across his vision for a

moment, and disappeared again. Very likely he had imagined it! There

only remained to him the impression of a strange smile, two eyes, and a

bright green tie. Whether the man had disappeared among the crowd, or

whether he had turned towards the Vauxhall, the prince could not say.

But a moment or two afterwards he began to glance keenly about him.

That first vision might only too likely be the forerunner of a second;

it was almost certain to be so. Surely he had not forgotten the

possibility of such a meeting when he came to the Vauxhall? True

enough, he had not remarked where he was coming to when he set out with

Aglaya; he had not been in a condition to remark anything at all.

Had he been more careful to observe his companion, he would have seen

that for the last quarter of an hour Aglaya had also been glancing

around in apparent anxiety, as though she expected to see someone, or

something particular, among the crowd of people. Now, at the moment

when his own anxiety became so marked, her excitement also increased

visibly, and when he looked about him, she did the same.

The reason for their anxiety soon became apparent. From that very side

entrance to the Vauxhall, near which the prince and all the Epanchin

party were seated, there suddenly appeared quite a large knot of

persons, at least a dozen.

Heading this little band walked three ladies, two of whom were

remarkably lovely; and there was nothing surprising in the fact that

they should have had a large troop of admirers following in their wake.

But there was something in the appearance of both the ladies and their

admirers which was peculiar, quite different for that of the rest of

the public assembled around the orchestra.

Nearly everyone observed the little band advancing, and all pretended

not to see or notice them, except a few young fellows who exchanged

glances and smiled, saying something to one another in whispers.

It was impossible to avoid noticing them, however, in reality, for they

made their presence only too conspicuous by laughing and talking

loudly. It was to be supposed that some of them were more than half

drunk, although they were well enough dressed, some even particularly

well. There were one or two, however, who were very strange-looking

creatures, with flushed faces and extraordinary clothes; some were

military men; not all were quite young; one or two were middle-aged

gentlemen of decidedly disagreeable appearance, men who are avoided in

society like the plague, decked out in large gold studs and rings, and

magnificently “got up,” generally.

Among our suburban resorts there are some which enjoy a specially high

reputation for respectability and fashion; but the most careful

individual is not absolutely exempt from the danger of a tile falling

suddenly upon his head from his neighbour’s roof.

Such a tile was about to descend upon the elegant and decorous public

now assembled to hear the music.

In order to pass from the Vauxhall to the band-stand, the visitor has

to descend two or three steps. Just at these steps the group paused, as

though it feared to proceed further; but very quickly one of the three

ladies, who formed its apex, stepped forward into the charmed circle,

followed by two members of her suite.

One of these was a middle-aged man of very respectable appearance, but

with the stamp of parvenu upon him, a man whom nobody knew, and who

evidently knew nobody. The other follower was younger and far less

respectable-looking.

No one else followed the eccentric lady; but as she descended the steps

she did not even look behind her, as though it were absolutely the same

to her whether anyone were following or not. She laughed and talked

loudly, however, just as before. She was dressed with great taste, but

with rather more magnificence than was needed for the occasion,

perhaps.

She walked past the orchestra, to where an open carriage was waiting,

near the road.

The prince had not seen \_her\_ for more than three months. All these

days since his arrival from Petersburg he had intended to pay her a

visit, but some mysterious presentiment had restrained him. He could

not picture to himself what impression this meeting with her would make

upon him, though he had often tried to imagine it, with fear and

trembling. One fact was quite certain, and that was that the meeting

would be painful.

Several times during the last six months he had recalled the effect

which the first sight of this face had had upon him, when he only saw

its portrait. He recollected well that even the portrait face had left

but too painful an impression.

That month in the provinces, when he had seen this woman nearly every

day, had affected him so deeply that he could not now look back upon it

calmly. In the very look of this woman there was something which

tortured him. In conversation with Rogojin he had attributed this

sensation to pity—immeasurable pity, and this was the truth. The sight

of the portrait face alone had filled his heart full of the agony of

real sympathy; and this feeling of sympathy, nay, of actual

\_suffering\_, for her, had never left his heart since that hour, and was

still in full force. Oh yes, and more powerful than ever!

But the prince was not satisfied with what he had said to Rogojin. Only

at this moment, when she suddenly made her appearance before him, did

he realize to the full the exact emotion which she called up in him,

and which he had not described correctly to Rogojin.

And, indeed, there were no words in which he could have expressed his

horror, yes, \_horror\_, for he was now fully convinced from his own

private knowledge of her, that the woman was mad.

If, loving a woman above everything in the world, or at least having a

foretaste of the possibility of such love for her, one were suddenly to

behold her on a chain, behind bars and under the lash of a keeper, one

would feel something like what the poor prince now felt.

“What’s the matter?” asked Aglaya, in a whisper, giving his sleeve a

little tug.

He turned his head towards her and glanced at her black and (for some

reason) flashing eyes, tried to smile, and then, apparently forgetting

her in an instant, turned to the right once more, and continued to

watch the startling apparition before him.

Nastasia Philipovna was at this moment passing the young ladies’

chairs.

Evgenie Pavlovitch continued some apparently extremely funny and

interesting anecdote to Alexandra, speaking quickly and with much

animation. The prince remembered that at this moment Aglaya remarked in

a half-whisper:

“\_What\_ a—”

She did not finish her indefinite sentence; she restrained herself in a

moment; but it was enough.

Nastasia Philipovna, who up to now had been walking along as though she

had not noticed the Epanchin party, suddenly turned her head in their

direction, as though she had just observed Evgenie Pavlovitch sitting

there for the first time.

“Why, I declare, here he is!” she cried, stopping suddenly. “The man

one can’t find with all one’s messengers sent about the place, sitting

just under one’s nose, exactly where one never thought of looking! I

thought you were sure to be at your uncle’s by this time.”

Evgenie Pavlovitch flushed up and looked angrily at Nastasia

Philipovna, then turned his back on her.

“What! don’t you know about it yet? He doesn’t know—imagine that! Why,

he’s shot himself. Your uncle shot himself this very morning. I was

told at two this afternoon. Half the town must know it by now. They say

there are three hundred and fifty thousand roubles, government money,

missing; some say five hundred thousand. And I was under the impression

that he would leave you a fortune! He’s whistled it all away. A most

depraved old gentleman, really! Well, ta, ta!—bonne chance! Surely you

intend to be off there, don’t you? Ha, ha! You’ve retired from the army

in good time, I see! Plain clothes! Well done, sly rogue! Nonsense! I

see—you knew it all before—I dare say you knew all about it yesterday-”

Although the impudence of this attack, this public proclamation of

intimacy, as it were, was doubtless premeditated, and had its special

object, yet Evgenie Pavlovitch at first seemed to intend to make no

show of observing either his tormentor or her words. But Nastasia’s

communication struck him with the force of a thunderclap. On hearing of

his uncle’s death he suddenly grew as white as a sheet, and turned

towards his informant.

At this moment, Lizabetha Prokofievna rose swiftly from her seat,

beckoned her companions, and left the place almost at a run.

Only the prince stopped behind for a moment, as though in indecision;

and Evgenie Pavlovitch lingered too, for he had not collected his

scattered wits. But the Epanchins had not had time to get more than

twenty paces away when a scandalous episode occurred. The young

officer, Evgenie Pavlovitch’s friend who had been conversing with

Aglaya, said aloud in a great state of indignation:

“She ought to be whipped—that’s the only way to deal with creatures

like that—she ought to be whipped!”

This gentleman was a confidant of Evgenie’s, and had doubtless heard of

the carriage episode.

Nastasia turned to him. Her eyes flashed; she rushed up to a young man

standing near, whom she did not know in the least, but who happened to

have in his hand a thin cane. Seizing this from him, she brought it

with all her force across the face of her insulter.

All this occurred, of course, in one instant of time.

The young officer, forgetting himself, sprang towards her. Nastasia’s

followers were not by her at the moment (the elderly gentleman having

disappeared altogether, and the younger man simply standing aside and

roaring with laughter).

In another moment, of course, the police would have been on the spot,

and it would have gone hard with Nastasia Philipovna had not unexpected

aid appeared.

Muishkin, who was but a couple of steps away, had time to spring

forward and seize the officer’s arms from behind.

The officer, tearing himself from the prince’s grasp, pushed him so

violently backwards that he staggered a few steps and then subsided

into a chair.

But there were other defenders for Nastasia on the spot by this time.

The gentleman known as the “boxer” now confronted the enraged officer.

“Keller is my name, sir; ex-lieutenant,” he said, very loud. “If you

will accept me as champion of the fair sex, I am at your disposal.

English boxing has no secrets from me. I sympathize with you for the

insult you have received, but I can’t permit you to raise your hand

against a woman in public. If you prefer to meet me—as would be more

fitting to your rank—in some other manner, of course you understand me,

captain.”

But the young officer had recovered himself, and was no longer

listening. At this moment Rogojin appeared, elbowing through the crowd;

he took Nastasia’s hand, drew it through his arm, and quickly led her

away. He appeared to be terribly excited; he was trembling all over,

and was as pale as a corpse. As he carried Nastasia off, he turned and

grinned horribly in the officer’s face, and with low malice observed:

“Tfu! look what the fellow got! Look at the blood on his cheek! Ha,

ha!”

Recollecting himself, however, and seeing at a glance the sort of

people he had to deal with, the officer turned his back on both his

opponents, and courteously, but concealing his face with his

handkerchief, approached the prince, who was now rising from the chair

into which he had fallen.

“Prince Muishkin, I believe? The gentleman to whom I had the honour of

being introduced?”

“She is mad, insane—I assure you, she is mad,” replied the prince in

trembling tones, holding out both his hands mechanically towards the

officer.

“I cannot boast of any such knowledge, of course, but I wished to know

your name.”

He bowed and retired without waiting for an answer.

Five seconds after the disappearance of the last actor in this scene,

the police arrived. The whole episode had not lasted more than a couple

of minutes. Some of the spectators had risen from their places, and

departed altogether; some merely exchanged their seats for others a

little further off; some were delighted with the occurrence, and talked

and laughed over it for a long time.

In a word, the incident closed as such incidents do, and the band began

to play again. The prince walked away after the Epanchin party. Had he

thought of looking round to the left after he had been pushed so

unceremoniously into the chair, he would have observed Aglaya standing

some twenty yards away. She had stayed to watch the scandalous scene in

spite of her mother’s and sisters’ anxious cries to her to come away.

Prince S. ran up to her and persuaded her, at last, to come home with

them.

Lizabetha Prokofievna saw that she returned in such a state of

agitation that it was doubtful whether she had even heard their calls.

But only a couple of minutes later, when they had reached the park,

Aglaya suddenly remarked, in her usual calm, indifferent voice:

“I wanted to see how the farce would end.”

III.

The occurrence at the Vauxhall had filled both mother and daughters

with something like horror. In their excitement Lizabetha Prokofievna

and the girls were nearly running all the way home.

In her opinion there was so much disclosed and laid bare by the

episode, that, in spite of the chaotic condition of her mind, she was

able to feel more or less decided on certain points which, up to now,

had been in a cloudy condition.

However, one and all of the party realized that something important had

happened, and that, perhaps fortunately enough, something which had

hitherto been enveloped in the obscurity of guess-work had now begun to

come forth a little from the mists. In spite of Prince S.‘s assurances

and explanations, Evgenie Pavlovitch’s real character and position were

at last coming to light. He was publicly convicted of intimacy with

“that creature.” So thought Lizabetha Prokofievna and her two elder

daughters.

But the real upshot of the business was that the number of riddles to

be solved was augmented. The two girls, though rather irritated at

their mother’s exaggerated alarm and haste to depart from the scene,

had been unwilling to worry her at first with questions.

Besides, they could not help thinking that their sister Aglaya probably

knew more about the whole matter than both they and their mother put

together.

Prince S. looked as black as night, and was silent and moody. Mrs.

Epanchin did not say a word to him all the way home, and he did not

seem to observe the fact. Adelaida tried to pump him a little by

asking, “who was the uncle they were talking about, and what was it

that had happened in Petersburg?” But he had merely muttered something

disconnected about “making inquiries,” and that “of course it was all

nonsense.” “Oh, of course,” replied Adelaida, and asked no more

questions. Aglaya, too, was very quiet; and the only remark she made on

the way home was that they were “walking much too fast to be pleasant.”

Once she turned and observed the prince hurrying after them. Noticing

his anxiety to catch them up, she smiled ironically, and then looked

back no more. At length, just as they neared the house, General

Epanchin came out and met them; he had only just arrived from town.

His first word was to inquire after Evgenie Pavlovitch. But Lizabetha

stalked past him, and neither looked at him nor answered his question.

He immediately judged from the faces of his daughters and Prince S.

that there was a thunderstorm brewing, and he himself already bore

evidences of unusual perturbation of mind.

He immediately button-holed Prince S., and standing at the front door,

engaged in a whispered conversation with him. By the troubled aspect of

both of them, when they entered the house, and approached Mrs.

Epanchin, it was evident that they had been discussing very disturbing

news.

Little by little the family gathered together upstairs in Lizabetha

Prokofievna’s apartments, and Prince Muishkin found himself alone on

the verandah when he arrived. He settled himself in a corner and sat

waiting, though he knew not what he expected. It never struck him that

he had better go away, with all this disturbance in the house. He

seemed to have forgotten all the world, and to be ready to sit on where

he was for years on end. From upstairs he caught sounds of excited

conversation every now and then.

He could not say how long he sat there. It grew late and became quite

dark.

Suddenly Aglaya entered the verandah. She seemed to be quite calm,

though a little pale.

Observing the prince, whom she evidently did not expect to see there,

alone in the corner, she smiled, and approached him:

“What are you doing there?” she asked.

The prince muttered something, blushed, and jumped up; but Aglaya

immediately sat down beside him; so he reseated himself.

She looked suddenly, but attentively into his face, then at the window,

as though thinking of something else, and then again at him.

“Perhaps she wants to laugh at me,” thought the prince, “but no; for if

she did she certainly would do so.”

“Would you like some tea? I’ll order some,” she said, after a minute or

two of silence.

“N-no thanks, I don’t know—”

“Don’t know! How can you not know? By-the-by, look here—if someone were

to challenge you to a duel, what should you do? I wished to ask you

this—some time ago—”

“Why? Nobody would ever challenge me to a duel!”

“But if they were to, would you be dreadfully frightened?”

“I dare say I should be—much alarmed!”

“Seriously? Then are you a coward?”

“N-no!—I don’t think so. A coward is a man who is afraid and runs away;

the man who is frightened but does not run away, is not quite a

coward,” said the prince with a smile, after a moment’s thought.

“And you wouldn’t run away?”

“No—I don’t think I should run away,” replied the prince, laughing

outright at last at Aglaya’s questions.

“Though I am a woman, I should certainly not run away for anything,”

said Aglaya, in a slightly pained voice. “However, I see you are

laughing at me and twisting your face up as usual in order to make

yourself look more interesting. Now tell me, they generally shoot at

twenty paces, don’t they? At ten, sometimes? I suppose if at ten they

must be either wounded or killed, mustn’t they?”

“I don’t think they often kill each other at duels.”

“They killed Pushkin that way.”

“That may have been an accident.”

“Not a bit of it; it was a duel to the death, and he was killed.”

“The bullet struck so low down that probably his antagonist would never

have aimed at that part of him—people never do; he would have aimed at

his chest or head; so that probably the bullet hit him accidentally. I

have been told this by competent authorities.”

“Well, a soldier once told me that they were always ordered to aim at

the middle of the body. So you see they don’t aim at the chest or head;

they aim lower on purpose. I asked some officer about this afterwards,

and he said it was perfectly true.”

“That is probably when they fire from a long distance.”

“Can you shoot at all?”

“No, I have never shot in my life.”

“Can’t you even load a pistol?”

“No! That is, I understand how it’s done, of course, but I have never

done it.”

“Then, you don’t know how, for it is a matter that needs practice. Now

listen and learn; in the first place buy good powder, not damp (they

say it mustn’t be at all damp, but very dry), some fine kind it is—you

must ask for \_pistol\_ powder, not the stuff they load cannons with.

They say one makes the bullets oneself, somehow or other. Have you got

a pistol?”

“No—and I don’t want one,” said the prince, laughing.

“Oh, what \_nonsense!\_ You must buy one. French or English are the best,

they say. Then take a little powder, about a thimbleful, or perhaps

two, and pour it into the barrel. Better put plenty. Then push in a bit

of felt (it \_must\_ be felt, for some reason or other); you can easily

get a bit off some old mattress, or off a door; it’s used to keep the

cold out. Well, when you have pushed the felt down, put the bullet in;

do you hear now? The bullet last and the powder first, not the other

way, or the pistol won’t shoot. What are you laughing at? I wish you to

buy a pistol and practise every day, and you must learn to hit a mark

for \_certain\_; will you?”

The prince only laughed. Aglaya stamped her foot with annoyance.

Her serious air, however, during this conversation had surprised him

considerably. He had a feeling that he ought to be asking her

something, that there was something he wanted to find out far more

important than how to load a pistol; but his thoughts had all

scattered, and he was only aware that she was sitting by him, and

talking to him, and that he was looking at her; as to what she happened

to be saying to him, that did not matter in the least.

The general now appeared on the verandah, coming from upstairs. He was

on his way out, with an expression of determination on his face, and of

preoccupation and worry also.

“Ah! Lef Nicolaievitch, it’s you, is it? Where are you off to now?” he

asked, oblivious of the fact that the prince had not showed the least

sign of moving. “Come along with me; I want to say a word or two to

you.”

“\_Au revoir\_, then!” said Aglaya, holding out her hand to the prince.

It was quite dark now, and Muishkin could not see her face clearly, but

a minute or two later, when he and the general had left the villa, he

suddenly flushed up, and squeezed his right hand tightly.

It appeared that he and the general were going in the same direction.

In spite of the lateness of the hour, the general was hurrying away to

talk to someone upon some important subject. Meanwhile he talked

incessantly but disconnectedly to the prince, and continually brought

in the name of Lizabetha Prokofievna.

If the prince had been in a condition to pay more attention to what the

general was saying, he would have discovered that the latter was

desirous of drawing some information out of him, or indeed of asking

him some question outright; but that he could not make up his mind to

come to the point.

Muishkin was so absent, that from the very first he could not attend to

a word the other was saying; and when the general suddenly stopped

before him with some excited question, he was obliged to confess,

ignominiously, that he did not know in the least what he had been

talking about.

The general shrugged his shoulders.

“How strange everyone, yourself included, has become of late,” said he.

“I was telling you that I cannot in the least understand Lizabetha

Prokofievna’s ideas and agitations. She is in hysterics up there, and

moans and says that we have been ‘shamed and disgraced.’ How? Why?

When? By whom? I confess that I am very much to blame myself; I do not

conceal the fact; but the conduct, the outrageous behaviour of this

woman, must really be kept within limits, by the police if necessary,

and I am just on my way now to talk the question over and make some

arrangements. It can all be managed quietly and gently, even kindly,

and without the slightest fuss or scandal. I foresee that the future is

pregnant with events, and that there is much that needs explanation.

There is intrigue in the wind; but if on one side nothing is known, on

the other side nothing will be explained. If I have heard nothing about

it, nor have \_you\_, nor \_he\_, nor \_she\_—who \_has\_ heard about it, I

should like to know? How \_can\_ all this be explained except by the fact

that half of it is mirage or moonshine, or some hallucination of that

sort?”

“\_She\_ is insane,” muttered the prince, suddenly recollecting all that

had passed, with a spasm of pain at his heart.

“I too had that idea, and I slept in peace. But now I see that their

opinion is more correct. I do not believe in the theory of madness! The

woman has no common sense; but she is not only not insane, she is

artful to a degree. Her outburst of this evening about Evgenie’s uncle

proves that conclusively. It was \_villainous\_, simply jesuitical, and

it was all for some special purpose.”

“What about Evgenie’s uncle?”

“My goodness, Lef Nicolaievitch, why, you can’t have heard a single

word I said! Look at me, I’m still trembling all over with the dreadful

shock! It is that that kept me in town so late. Evgenie Pavlovitch’s

uncle—”

“Well?” cried the prince.

“Shot himself this morning, at seven o’clock. A respected, eminent old

man of seventy; and exactly point for point as she described it; a sum

of money, a considerable sum of government money, missing!”

“Why, how could she—”

“What, know of it? Ha, ha, ha! Why, there was a whole crowd round her

the moment she appeared on the scenes here. You know what sort of

people surround her nowadays, and solicit the honour of her

‘acquaintance.’ Of course she might easily have heard the news from

someone coming from town. All Petersburg, if not all Pavlofsk, knows it

by now. Look at the slyness of her observation about Evgenie’s uniform!

I mean, her remark that he had retired just in time! There’s a venomous

hint for you, if you like! No, no! there’s no insanity there! Of course

I refuse to believe that Evgenie Pavlovitch could have known beforehand

of the catastrophe; that is, that at such and such a day at seven

o’clock, and all that; but he might well have had a presentiment of the

truth. And I—all of us—Prince S. and everybody, believed that he was to

inherit a large fortune from this uncle. It’s dreadful, horrible! Mind,

I don’t suspect Evgenie of anything, be quite clear on that point; but

the thing is a little suspicious, nevertheless. Prince S. can’t get

over it. Altogether it is a very extraordinary combination of

circumstances.”

“What suspicion attaches to Evgenie Pavlovitch?”

“Oh, none at all! He has behaved very well indeed. I didn’t mean to

drop any sort of hint. His own fortune is intact, I believe. Lizabetha

Prokofievna, of course, refuses to listen to anything. That’s the worst

of it all, these family catastrophes or quarrels, or whatever you like

to call them. You know, prince, you are a friend of the family, so I

don’t mind telling you; it now appears that Evgenie Pavlovitch proposed

to Aglaya a month ago, and was refused.”

“Impossible!” cried the prince.

“Why? Do you know anything about it? Look here,” continued the general,

more agitated than ever, and trembling with excitement, “maybe I have

been letting the cat out of the bag too freely with you, if so, it is

because you are—that sort of man, you know! Perhaps you have some

special information?”

“I know nothing about Evgenie Pavlovitch!” said the prince.

“Nor do I! They always try to bury me underground when there’s anything

going on; they don’t seem to reflect that it is unpleasant to a man to

be treated so! I won’t stand it! We have just had a terrible

scene!—mind, I speak to you as I would to my own son! Aglaya laughs at

her mother. Her sisters guessed about Evgenie having proposed and been

rejected, and told Lizabetha.

“I tell you, my dear fellow, Aglaya is such an extraordinary, such a

self-willed, fantastical little creature, you wouldn’t believe it!

Every high quality, every brilliant trait of heart and mind, are to be

found in her, and, with it all, so much caprice and mockery, such wild

fancies—indeed, a little devil! She has just been laughing at her

mother to her very face, and at her sisters, and at Prince S., and

everybody—and of course she always laughs at me! You know I love the

child—I love her even when she laughs at me, and I believe the wild

little creature has a special fondness for me for that very reason. She

is fonder of me than any of the others. I dare swear she has had a good

laugh at \_you\_ before now! You were having a quiet talk just now, I

observed, after all the thunder and lightning upstairs. She was sitting

with you just as though there had been no row at all.”

The prince blushed painfully in the darkness, and closed his right hand

tightly, but he said nothing.

“My dear good Prince Lef Nicolaievitch,” began the general again,

suddenly, “both I and Lizabetha Prokofievna—(who has begun to respect

you once more, and me through you, goodness knows why!)—we both love

you very sincerely, and esteem you, in spite of any appearances to the

contrary. But you’ll admit what a riddle it must have been for us when

that calm, cold, little spitfire, Aglaya—(for she stood up to her

mother and answered her questions with inexpressible contempt, and mine

still more so, because, like a fool, I thought it my duty to assert

myself as head of the family)—when Aglaya stood up of a sudden and

informed us that ‘that madwoman’ (strangely enough, she used exactly

the same expression as you did) ‘has taken it into her head to marry me

to Prince Lef Nicolaievitch, and therefore is doing her best to choke

Evgenie Pavlovitch off, and rid the house of him.’ That’s what she

said. She would not give the slightest explanation; she burst out

laughing, banged the door, and went away. We all stood there with our

mouths open. Well, I was told afterwards of your little passage with

Aglaya this afternoon, and—and—dear prince—you are a good, sensible

fellow, don’t be angry if I speak out—she is laughing at you, my boy!

She is enjoying herself like a child, at your expense, and therefore,

since she is a child, don’t be angry with her, and don’t think anything

of it. I assure you, she is simply making a fool of you, just as she

does with one and all of us out of pure lack of something better to do.

Well—good-bye! You know our feelings, don’t you—our sincere feelings

for yourself? They are unalterable, you know, dear boy, under all

circumstances, but—Well, here we part; I must go down to the right.

Rarely have I sat so uncomfortably in my saddle, as they say, as I now

sit. And people talk of the charms of a country holiday!”

Left to himself at the cross-roads, the prince glanced around him,

quickly crossed the road towards the lighted window of a neighbouring

house, and unfolded a tiny scrap of paper which he had held clasped in

his right hand during the whole of his conversation with the general.

He read the note in the uncertain rays that fell from the window. It

was as follows:

“Tomorrow morning, I shall be at the green bench in the park at seven,

and shall wait there for you. I have made up my mind to speak to you

about a most important matter which closely concerns yourself.

“P.S.—I trust that you will not show this note to anyone. Though I am

ashamed of giving you such instructions, I feel that I must do so,

considering what you are. I therefore write the words, and blush for

your simple character.

“P.P.S.—It is the same green bench that I showed you before. There!

aren’t you ashamed of yourself? I felt that it was necessary to repeat

even that information.”

The note was written and folded anyhow, evidently in a great hurry, and

probably just before Aglaya had come down to the verandah.

In inexpressible agitation, amounting almost to fear, the prince

slipped quickly away from the window, away from the light, like a

frightened thief, but as he did so he collided violently with some

gentleman who seemed to spring from the earth at his feet.

“I was watching for you, prince,” said the individual.

“Is that you, Keller?” said the prince, in surprise.

“Yes, I’ve been looking for you. I waited for you at the Epanchins’

house, but of course I could not come in. I dogged you from behind as

you walked along with the general. Well, prince, here is Keller,

absolutely at your service—command him!—ready to sacrifice himself—even

to die in case of need.”

“But—why?”

“Oh, why?—Of course you’ll be challenged! That was young Lieutenant

Moloftsoff. I know him, or rather of him; he won’t pass an insult. He

will take no notice of Rogojin and myself, and, therefore, you are the

only one left to account for. You’ll have to pay the piper, prince. He

has been asking about you, and undoubtedly his friend will call on you

tomorrow—perhaps he is at your house already. If you would do me the

honour to have me for a second, prince, I should be happy. That’s why I

have been looking for you now.”

“Duel! You’ve come to talk about a duel, too!” The prince burst out

laughing, to the great astonishment of Keller. He laughed

unrestrainedly, and Keller, who had been on pins and needles, and in a

fever of excitement to offer himself as “second,” was very near being

offended.

“You caught him by the arms, you know, prince. No man of proper pride

can stand that sort of treatment in public.”

“Yes, and he gave me a fearful dig in the chest,” cried the prince,

still laughing. “What are we to fight about? I shall beg his pardon,

that’s all. But if we must fight—we’ll fight! Let him have a shot at

me, by all means; I should rather like it. Ha, ha, ha! I know how to

load a pistol now; do you know how to load a pistol, Keller? First, you

have to buy the powder, you know; it mustn’t be wet, and it mustn’t be

that coarse stuff that they load cannons with—it must be pistol powder.

Then you pour the powder in, and get hold of a bit of felt from some

door, and then shove the bullet in. But don’t shove the bullet in

before the powder, because the thing wouldn’t go off—do you hear,

Keller, the thing wouldn’t go off! Ha, ha, ha! Isn’t that a grand

reason, Keller, my friend, eh? Do you know, my dear fellow, I really

must kiss you, and embrace you, this very moment. Ha, ha! How was it

you so suddenly popped up in front of me as you did? Come to my house

as soon as you can, and we’ll have some champagne. We’ll all get drunk!

Do you know I have a dozen of champagne in Lebedeff’s cellar? Lebedeff

sold them to me the day after I arrived. I took the lot. We’ll invite

everybody! Are you going to do any sleeping tonight?”

“As much as usual, prince—why?”

“Pleasant dreams then—ha, ha!”

The prince crossed the road, and disappeared into the park, leaving the

astonished Keller in a state of ludicrous wonder. He had never before

seen the prince in such a strange condition of mind, and could not have

imagined the possibility of it.

“Fever, probably,” he said to himself, “for the man is all nerves, and

this business has been a little too much for him. He is not \_afraid\_,

that’s clear; that sort never funks! H’m! champagne! That was an

interesting item of news, at all events!—Twelve bottles! Dear me,

that’s a very respectable little stock indeed! I bet anything Lebedeff

lent somebody money on deposit of this dozen of champagne. Hum! he’s a

nice fellow, is this prince! I like this sort of man. Well, I needn’t

be wasting time here, and if it’s a case of champagne, why—there’s no

time like the present!”

That the prince was almost in a fever was no more than the truth. He

wandered about the park for a long while, and at last came to himself

in a lonely avenue. He was vaguely conscious that he had already paced

this particular walk—from that large, dark tree to the bench at the

other end—about a hundred yards altogether—at least thirty times

backwards and forwards.

As to recollecting what he had been thinking of all that time, he could

not. He caught himself, however, indulging in one thought which made

him roar with laughter, though there was nothing really to laugh at in

it; but he felt that he must laugh, and go on laughing.

It struck him that the idea of the duel might not have occurred to

Keller alone, but that his lesson in the art of pistol-loading might

have been not altogether accidental! “Pooh! nonsense!” he said to

himself, struck by another thought, of a sudden. “Why, she was

immensely surprised to find me there on the verandah, and laughed and

talked about \_tea!\_ And yet she had this little note in her hand,

therefore she must have known that I was sitting there. So why was she

surprised? Ha, ha, ha!”

He pulled the note out and kissed it; then paused and reflected. “How

strange it all is! how strange!” he muttered, melancholy enough now. In

moments of great joy, he invariably felt a sensation of melancholy come

over him—he could not tell why.

He looked intently around him, and wondered why he had come here; he

was very tired, so he approached the bench and sat down on it. Around

him was profound silence; the music in the Vauxhall was over. The park

seemed quite empty, though it was not, in reality, later than half-past

eleven. It was a quiet, warm, clear night—a real Petersburg night of

early June; but in the dense avenue, where he was sitting, it was

almost pitch dark.

If anyone had come up at this moment and told him that he was in love,

passionately in love, he would have rejected the idea with

astonishment, and, perhaps, with irritation. And if anyone had added

that Aglaya’s note was a love-letter, and that it contained an

appointment to a lover’s rendezvous, he would have blushed with shame

for the speaker, and, probably, have challenged him to a duel.

All this would have been perfectly sincere on his part. He had never

for a moment entertained the idea of the possibility of this girl

loving him, or even of such a thing as himself falling in love with

her. The possibility of being loved himself, “a man like me,” as he put

it, he ranked among ridiculous suppositions. It appeared to him that it

was simply a joke on Aglaya’s part, if there really were anything in it

at all; but that seemed to him quite natural. His preoccupation was

caused by something different.

As to the few words which the general had let slip about Aglaya

laughing at everybody, and at himself most of all—he entirely believed

them. He did not feel the slightest sensation of offence; on the

contrary, he was quite certain that it was as it should be.

His whole thoughts were now as to next morning early; he would see her;

he would sit by her on that little green bench, and listen to how

pistols were loaded, and look at her. He wanted nothing more.

The question as to what she might have to say of special interest to

himself occurred to him once or twice. He did not doubt, for a moment,

that she really had some such subject of conversation in store, but so

very little interested in the matter was he that it did not strike him

to wonder what it could be. The crunch of gravel on the path suddenly

caused him to raise his head.

A man, whose face it was difficult to see in the gloom, approached the

bench, and sat down beside him. The prince peered into his face, and

recognized the livid features of Rogojin.

“I knew you’d be wandering about somewhere here. I didn’t have to look

for you very long,” muttered the latter between his teeth.

It was the first time they had met since the encounter on the staircase

at the hotel.

Painfully surprised as he was at this sudden apparition of Rogojin, the

prince, for some little while, was unable to collect his thoughts.

Rogojin, evidently, saw and understood the impression he had made; and

though he seemed more or less confused at first, yet he began talking

with what looked like assumed ease and freedom. However, the prince

soon changed his mind on this score, and thought that there was not

only no affectation of indifference, but that Rogojin was not even

particularly agitated. If there were a little apparent awkwardness, it

was only in his words and gestures. The man could not change his heart.

“How did you—find me here?” asked the prince for the sake of saying

something.

“Keller told me (I found him at your place) that you were in the park.

‘Of course he is!’ I thought.”

“Why so?” asked the prince uneasily.

Rogojin smiled, but did not explain.

“I received your letter, Lef Nicolaievitch—what’s the good of all

that?—It’s no use, you know. I’ve come to you from \_her\_,—she bade me

tell you that she must see you, she has something to say to you. She

told me to find you today.”

“I’ll come tomorrow. Now I’m going home—are you coming to my house?”

“Why should I? I’ve given you the message.—Goodbye!”

“Won’t you come?” asked the prince in a gentle voice.

“What an extraordinary man you are! I wonder at you!” Rogojin laughed

sarcastically.

“Why do you hate me so?” asked the prince, sadly. “You know yourself

that all you suspected is quite unfounded. I felt you were still angry

with me, though. Do you know why? Because you tried to kill me—that’s

why you can’t shake off your wrath against me. I tell you that I only

remember the Parfen Rogojin with whom I exchanged crosses, and vowed

brotherhood. I wrote you this in yesterday’s letter, in order that you

might forget all that madness on your part, and that you might not feel

called to talk about it when we met. Why do you avoid me? Why do you

hold your hand back from me? I tell you again, I consider all that has

passed a delirium, an insane dream. I can understand all you did, and

all you felt that day, as if it were myself. What you were then

imagining was not the case, and could never be the case. Why, then,

should there be anger between us?”

“You don’t know what anger is!” laughed Rogojin, in reply to the

prince’s heated words.

He had moved a pace or two away, and was hiding his hands behind him.

“No, it is impossible for me to come to your house again,” he added

slowly.

“Why? Do you hate me so much as all that?”

“I don’t love you, Lef Nicolaievitch, and, therefore, what would be the

use of my coming to see you? You are just like a child—you want a

plaything, and it must be taken out and given you—and then you don’t

know how to work it. You are simply repeating all you said in your

letter, and what’s the use? Of course I believe every word you say, and

I know perfectly well that you neither did or ever can deceive me in

any way, and yet, I don’t love you. You write that you’ve forgotten

everything, and only remember your brother Parfen, with whom you

exchanged crosses, and that you don’t remember anything about the

Rogojin who aimed a knife at your throat. What do you know about my

feelings, eh?” (Rogojin laughed disagreeably.) “Here you are holding

out your brotherly forgiveness to me for a thing that I have perhaps

never repented of in the slightest degree. I did not think of it again

all that evening; all my thoughts were centred on something else—”

“Not think of it again? Of course you didn’t!” cried the prince. “And I

dare swear that you came straight away down here to Pavlofsk to listen

to the music and dog her about in the crowd, and stare at her, just as

you did today. There’s nothing surprising in that! If you hadn’t been

in that condition of mind that you could think of nothing but one

subject, you would, probably, never have raised your knife against me.

I had a presentiment of what you would do, that day, ever since I saw

you first in the morning. Do you know yourself what you looked like? I

knew you would try to murder me even at the very moment when we

exchanged crosses. What did you take me to your mother for? Did you

think to stay your hand by doing so? Perhaps you did not put your

thoughts into words, but you and I were thinking the same thing, or

feeling the same thing looming over us, at the same moment. What should

you think of me now if you had not raised your knife to me—the knife

which God averted from my throat? I would have been guilty of

suspecting you all the same—and you would have intended the murder all

the same; therefore we should have been mutually guilty in any case.

Come, don’t frown; you needn’t laugh at me, either. You say you haven’t

‘repented.’ Repented! You probably couldn’t, if you were to try; you

dislike me too much for that. Why, if I were an angel of light, and as

innocent before you as a babe, you would still loathe me if you

believed that \_she\_ loved me, instead of loving yourself. That’s

jealousy—that is the real jealousy.

“But do you know what I have been thinking out during this last week,

Parfen? I’ll tell you. What if she loves you now better than anyone?

And what if she torments you \_because\_ she loves you, and in proportion

to her love for you, so she torments you the more? She won’t tell you

this, of course; you must have eyes to see. Why do you suppose she

consents to marry you? She must have a reason, and that reason she will

tell you some day. Some women desire the kind of love you give her, and

she is probably one of these. Your love and your wild nature impress

her. Do you know that a woman is capable of driving a man crazy almost,

with her cruelties and mockeries, and feels not one single pang of

regret, because she looks at him and says to herself, ‘There! I’ll

torment this man nearly into his grave, and then, oh! how I’ll

compensate him for it all with my love!’”

Rogojin listened to the end, and then burst out laughing:

“Why, prince, I declare you must have had a taste of this sort of thing

yourself—haven’t you? I have heard tell of something of the kind, you

know; is it true?”

“What? What can you have heard?” said the prince, stammering.

Rogojin continued to laugh loudly. He had listened to the prince’s

speech with curiosity and some satisfaction. The speaker’s impulsive

warmth had surprised and even comforted him.

“Why, I’ve not only heard of it; I see it for myself,” he said. “When

have you ever spoken like that before? It wasn’t like yourself, prince.

Why, if I hadn’t heard this report about you, I should never have come

all this way into the park—at midnight, too!”

“I don’t understand you in the least, Parfen.”

“Oh, \_she\_ told me all about it long ago, and tonight I saw for myself.

I saw you at the music, you know, and whom you were sitting with. She

swore to me yesterday, and again today, that you are madly in love with

Aglaya Ivanovna. But that’s all the same to me, prince, and it’s not my

affair at all; for if you have ceased to love \_her\_, \_she\_ has not

ceased to love \_you\_. You know, of course, that she wants to marry you

to that girl? She’s sworn to it! Ha, ha! She says to me, ‘Until then I

won’t marry you. When they go to church, we’ll go too—and not before.’

What on earth does she mean by it? I don’t know, and I never did.

Either she loves you without limits or—yet, if she loves you, why does

she wish to marry you to another girl? She says, ‘I want to see him

happy,’ which is to say—she loves you.”

“I wrote, and I say to you once more, that she is not in her right

mind,” said the prince, who had listened with anguish to what Rogojin

said.

“Goodness knows—you may be wrong there! At all events, she named the

day this evening, as we left the gardens. ‘In three weeks,’ says she,

‘and perhaps sooner, we shall be married.’ She swore to it, took off

her cross and kissed it. So it all depends upon you now, prince, You

see! Ha, ha!”

“That’s all madness. What you say about me, Parfen, never can and never

will be. Tomorrow, I shall come and see you—”

“How can she be mad,” Rogojin interrupted, “when she is sane enough for

other people and only mad for you? How can she write letters to \_her\_,

if she’s mad? If she were insane they would observe it in her letters.”

“What letters?” said the prince, alarmed.

“She writes to \_her\_—and the girl reads the letters. Haven’t you

heard?—You are sure to hear; she’s sure to show you the letters

herself.”

“I won’t believe this!” cried the prince.

“Why, prince, you’ve only gone a few steps along this road, I perceive.

You are evidently a mere beginner. Wait a bit! Before long, you’ll have

your own detectives, you’ll watch day and night, and you’ll know every

little thing that goes on there—that is, if—”

“Drop that subject, Rogojin, and never mention it again. And listen: as

I have sat here, and talked, and listened, it has suddenly struck me

that tomorrow is my birthday. It must be about twelve o’clock, now;

come home with me—do, and we’ll see the day in! We’ll have some wine,

and you shall wish me—I don’t know what—but you, especially you, must

wish me a good wish, and I shall wish you full happiness in return.

Otherwise, hand me my cross back again. You didn’t return it to me next

day. Haven’t you got it on now?”

“Yes, I have,” said Rogojin.

“Come along, then. I don’t wish to meet my new year without you—my new

life, I should say, for a new life is beginning for me. Did you know,

Parfen, that a new life had begun for me?”

“I see for myself that it is so—and I shall tell \_her\_. But you are not

quite yourself, Lef Nicolaievitch.”

IV.

The prince observed with great surprise, as he approached his villa,

accompanied by Rogojin, that a large number of people were assembled on

his verandah, which was brilliantly lighted up. The company seemed

merry and were noisily laughing and talking—even quarrelling, to judge

from the sounds. At all events they were clearly enjoying themselves,

and the prince observed further on closer investigation—that all had

been drinking champagne. To judge from the lively condition of some of

the party, it was to be supposed that a considerable quantity of

champagne had been consumed already.

All the guests were known to the prince; but the curious part of the

matter was that they had all arrived on the same evening, as though

with one accord, although he had only himself recollected the fact that

it was his birthday a few moments since.

“You must have told somebody you were going to trot out the champagne,

and that’s why they are all come!” muttered Rogojin, as the two entered

the verandah. “We know all about that! You’ve only to whistle and they

come up in shoals!” he continued, almost angrily. He was doubtless

thinking of his own late experiences with his boon companions.

All surrounded the prince with exclamations of welcome, and, on hearing

that it was his birthday, with cries of congratulation and delight;

many of them were very noisy.

The presence of certain of those in the room surprised the prince

vastly, but the guest whose advent filled him with the greatest

wonder—almost amounting to alarm—was Evgenie Pavlovitch. The prince

could not believe his eyes when he beheld the latter, and could not

help thinking that something was wrong.

Lebedeff ran up promptly to explain the arrival of all these gentlemen.

He was himself somewhat intoxicated, but the prince gathered from his

long-winded periods that the party had assembled quite naturally, and

accidentally.

First of all Hippolyte had arrived, early in the evening, and feeling

decidedly better, had determined to await the prince on the verandah.

There Lebedeff had joined him, and his household had followed—that is,

his daughters and General Ivolgin. Burdovsky had brought Hippolyte, and

stayed on with him. Gania and Ptitsin had dropped in accidentally later

on; then came Keller, and he and Colia insisted on having champagne.

Evgenie Pavlovitch had only dropped in half an hour or so ago. Lebedeff

had served the champagne readily.

“My own though, prince, my own, mind,” he said, “and there’ll be some

supper later on; my daughter is getting it ready now. Come and sit

down, prince, we are all waiting for you, we want you with us. Fancy

what we have been discussing! You know the question, ‘to be or not to

be,’—out of Hamlet! A contemporary theme! Quite up-to-date! Mr.

Hippolyte has been eloquent to a degree. He won’t go to bed, but he has

only drunk a little champagne, and that can’t do him any harm. Come

along, prince, and settle the question. Everyone is waiting for you,

sighing for the light of your luminous intelligence...”

The prince noticed the sweet, welcoming look on Vera Lebedeff’s face,

as she made her way towards him through the crowd. He held out his hand

to her. She took it, blushing with delight, and wished him “a happy

life from that day forward.” Then she ran off to the kitchen, where her

presence was necessary to help in the preparations for supper. Before

the prince’s arrival she had spent some time on the terrace, listening

eagerly to the conversation, though the visitors, mostly under the

influence of wine, were discussing abstract subjects far beyond her

comprehension. In the next room her younger sister lay on a wooden

chest, sound asleep, with her mouth wide open; but the boy, Lebedeff’s

son, had taken up his position close beside Colia and Hippolyte, his

face lit up with interest in the conversation of his father and the

rest, to which he would willingly have listened for ten hours at a

stretch.

“I have waited for you on purpose, and am very glad to see you arrive

so happy,” said Hippolyte, when the prince came forward to press his

hand, immediately after greeting Vera.

“And how do you know that I am ‘so happy’?”

“I can see it by your face! Say ‘how do you do’ to the others, and come

and sit down here, quick—I’ve been waiting for you!” he added,

accentuating the fact that he had waited. On the prince’s asking, “Will

it not be injurious to you to sit out so late?” he replied that he

could not believe that he had thought himself dying three days or so

ago, for he never had felt better than this evening.

Burdovsky next jumped up and explained that he had come in by accident,

having escorted Hippolyte from town. He murmured that he was glad he

had “written nonsense” in his letter, and then pressed the prince’s

hand warmly and sat down again.

The prince approached Evgenie Pavlovitch last of all. The latter

immediately took his arm.

“I have a couple of words to say to you,” he began, “and those on a

very important matter; let’s go aside for a minute or two.”

“Just a couple of words!” whispered another voice in the prince’s other

ear, and another hand took his other arm. Muishkin turned, and to his

great surprise observed a red, flushed face and a droll-looking figure

which he recognized at once as that of Ferdishenko. Goodness knows

where he had turned up from!

“Do you remember Ferdishenko?” he asked.

“Where have you dropped from?” cried the prince.

“He is sorry for his sins now, prince,” cried Keller. “He did not want

to let you know he was here; he was hidden over there in the

corner,—but he repents now, he feels his guilt.”

“Why, what has he done?”

“I met him outside and brought him in—he’s a gentleman who doesn’t

often allow his friends to see him, of late—but he’s sorry now.”

“Delighted, I’m sure!—I’ll come back directly, gentlemen,—sit down

there with the others, please,—excuse me one moment,” said the host,

getting away with difficulty in order to follow Evgenie.

“You are very gay here,” began the latter, “and I have had quite a

pleasant half-hour while I waited for you. Now then, my dear Lef

Nicolaievitch, this is what’s the matter. I’ve arranged it all with

Moloftsoff, and have just come in to relieve your mind on that score.

You need be under no apprehensions. He was very sensible, as he should

be, of course, for I think he was entirely to blame himself.”

“What Moloftsoff?”

“The young fellow whose arms you held, don’t you know? He was so wild

with you that he was going to send a friend to you tomorrow morning.”

“What nonsense!”

“Of course it is nonsense, and in nonsense it would have ended,

doubtless; but you know these fellows, they—”

“Excuse me, but I think you must have something else that you wished to

speak about, Evgenie Pavlovitch?”

“Of course, I have!” said the other, laughing. “You see, my dear

fellow, tomorrow, very early in the morning, I must be off to town

about this unfortunate business (my uncle, you know!). Just imagine, my

dear sir, it is all true—word for word—and, of course, everybody knew

it excepting myself. All this has been such a blow to me that I have

not managed to call in at the Epanchins’. Tomorrow I shall not see them

either, because I shall be in town. I may not be here for three days or

more; in a word, my affairs are a little out of gear. But though my

town business is, of course, most pressing, still I determined not to

go away until I had seen you, and had a clear understanding with you

upon certain points; and that without loss of time. I will wait now, if

you will allow me, until the company departs; I may just as well, for I

have nowhere else to go to, and I shall certainly not do any sleeping

tonight; I’m far too excited. And finally, I must confess that, though

I know it is bad form to pursue a man in this way, I have come to beg

your friendship, my dear prince. You are an unusual sort of a person;

you don’t lie at every step, as some men do; in fact, you don’t lie at

all, and there is a matter in which I need a true and sincere friend,

for I really may claim to be among the number of bona fide unfortunates

just now.”

He laughed again.

“But the trouble is,” said the prince, after a slight pause for

reflection, “that goodness only knows when this party will break up.

Hadn’t we better stroll into the park? I’ll excuse myself, there’s no

danger of their going away.”

“No, no! I have my reasons for wishing them not to suspect us of being

engaged in any specially important conversation. There are gentry

present who are a little too much interested in us. You are not aware

of that perhaps, prince? It will be a great deal better if they see

that we are friendly just in an ordinary way. They’ll all go in a

couple of hours, and then I’ll ask you to give me twenty minutes—half

an hour at most.”

“By all means! I assure you I am delighted—you need not have entered

into all these explanations. As for your remarks about friendship with

me—thanks, very much indeed. You must excuse my being a little absent

this evening. Do you know, I cannot somehow be attentive to anything

just now?”

“I see, I see,” said Evgenie, smiling gently. His mirth seemed very

near the surface this evening.

“What do you see?” said the prince, startled.

“I don’t want you to suspect that I have simply come here to deceive

you and pump information out of you!” said Evgenie, still smiling, and

without making any direct reply to the question.

“Oh, but I haven’t the slightest doubt that you did come to pump me,”

said the prince, laughing himself, at last; “and I dare say you are

quite prepared to deceive me too, so far as that goes. But what of

that? I’m not afraid of you; besides, you’ll hardly believe it, I feel

as though I really didn’t care a scrap one way or the other, just

now!—And—and—and as you are a capital fellow, I am convinced of that, I

dare say we really shall end by being good friends. I like you very

much Evgenie Pavlovitch; I consider you a very good fellow indeed.”

“Well, in any case, you are a most delightful man to have to deal with,

be the business what it may,” concluded Evgenie. “Come along now, I’ll

drink a glass to your health. I’m charmed to have entered into alliance

with you. By-the-by,” he added suddenly, “has this young Hippolyte come

down to stay with you?”

“Yes.”

“He’s not going to die at once, I should think, is he?”

“Why?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I’ve been half an hour here with him, and he—”

Hippolyte had been waiting for the prince all this time, and had never

ceased looking at him and Evgenie Pavlovitch as they conversed in the

corner. He became much excited when they approached the table once

more. He was disturbed in his mind, it seemed; perspiration stood in

large drops on his forehead; in his gleaming eyes it was easy to read

impatience and agitation; his gaze wandered from face to face of those

present, and from object to object in the room, apparently without aim.

He had taken a part, and an animated one, in the noisy conversation of

the company; but his animation was clearly the outcome of fever. His

talk was almost incoherent; he would break off in the middle of a

sentence which he had begun with great interest, and forget what he had

been saying. The prince discovered to his dismay that Hippolyte had

been allowed to drink two large glasses of champagne; the one now

standing by him being the third. All this he found out afterwards; at

the moment he did not notice anything, very particularly.

“Do you know I am specially glad that today is your birthday!” cried

Hippolyte.

“Why?”

“You’ll soon see. D’you know I had a feeling that there would be a lot

of people here tonight? It’s not the first time that my presentiments

have been fulfilled. I wish I had known it was your birthday, I’d have

brought you a present—perhaps I have got a present for you! Who knows?

Ha, ha! How long is it now before daylight?”

“Not a couple of hours,” said Ptitsin, looking at his watch. “What’s

the good of daylight now? One can read all night in the open air

without it,” said someone.

“The good of it! Well, I want just to see a ray of the sun,” said

Hippolyte. “Can one drink to the sun’s health, do you think, prince?”

“Oh, I dare say one can; but you had better be calm and lie down,

Hippolyte—that’s much more important.”

“You are always preaching about resting; you are a regular nurse to me,

prince. As soon as the sun begins to ‘resound’ in the sky—what poet

said that? ‘The sun resounded in the sky.’ It is beautiful, though

there’s no sense in it!—then we will go to bed. Lebedeff, tell me, is

the sun the source of life? What does the source, or ‘spring,’ of life

really mean in the Apocalypse? You have heard of the ‘Star that is

called Wormwood,’ prince?”

“I have heard that Lebedeff explains it as the railroads that cover

Europe like a net.”

Everybody laughed, and Lebedeff got up abruptly.

“No! Allow me, that is not what we are discussing!” he cried, waving

his hand to impose silence. “Allow me! With these gentlemen... all

these gentlemen,” he added, suddenly addressing the prince, “on certain

points... that is...” He thumped the table repeatedly, and the laughter

increased. Lebedeff was in his usual evening condition, and had just

ended a long and scientific argument, which had left him excited and

irritable. On such occasions he was apt to evince a supreme contempt

for his opponents.

“It is not right! Half an hour ago, prince, it was agreed among us that

no one should interrupt, no one should laugh, that each person was to

express his thoughts freely; and then at the end, when everyone had

spoken, objections might be made, even by the atheists. We chose the

general as president. Now without some such rule and order, anyone

might be shouted down, even in the loftiest and most profound

thought....”

“Go on! Go on! Nobody is going to interrupt you!” cried several voices.

“Speak, but keep to the point!”

“What is this ‘star’?” asked another.

“I have no idea,” replied General Ivolgin, who presided with much

gravity.

“I love these arguments, prince,” said Keller, also more than half

intoxicated, moving restlessly in his chair. “Scientific and

political.” Then, turning suddenly towards Evgenie Pavlovitch, who was

seated near him: “Do you know, I simply adore reading the accounts of

the debates in the English parliament. Not that the discussions

themselves interest me; I am not a politician, you know; but it

delights me to see how they address each other ‘the noble lord who

agrees with me,’ ‘my honourable opponent who astonished Europe with his

proposal,’ ‘the noble viscount sitting opposite’—all these expressions,

all this parliamentarism of a free people, has an enormous attraction

for me. It fascinates me, prince. I have always been an artist in the

depths of my soul, I assure you, Evgenie Pavlovitch.”

“Do you mean to say,” cried Gania, from the other corner, “do you mean

to say that railways are accursed inventions, that they are a source of

ruin to humanity, a poison poured upon the earth to corrupt the springs

of life?”

Gavrila Ardalionovitch was in high spirits that evening, and it seemed

to the prince that his gaiety was mingled with triumph. Of course he

was only joking with Lebedeff, meaning to egg him on, but he grew

excited himself at the same time.

“Not the railways, oh dear, no!” replied Lebedeff, with a mixture of

violent anger and extreme enjoyment. “Considered alone, the railways

will not pollute the springs of life, but as a whole they are accursed.

The whole tendency of our latest centuries, in its scientific and

materialistic aspect, is most probably accursed.”

“Is it certainly accursed?... or do you only mean it might be? That is

an important point,” said Evgenie Pavlovitch.

“It is accursed, certainly accursed!” replied the clerk, vehemently.

“Don’t go so fast, Lebedeff; you are much milder in the morning,” said

Ptitsin, smiling.

“But, on the other hand, more frank in the evening! In the evening

sincere and frank,” repeated Lebedeff, earnestly. “More candid, more

exact, more honest, more honourable, and... although I may show you my

weak side, I challenge you all; you atheists, for instance! How are you

going to save the world? How find a straight road of progress, you men

of science, of industry, of cooperation, of trades unions, and all the

rest? How are you going to save it, I say? By what? By credit? What is

credit? To what will credit lead you?”

“You are too inquisitive,” remarked Evgenie Pavlovitch.

“Well, anyone who does not interest himself in questions such as this

is, in my opinion, a mere fashionable dummy.”

“But it will lead at least to solidarity, and balance of interests,”

said Ptitsin.

“You will reach that with nothing to help you but credit? Without

recourse to any moral principle, having for your foundation only

individual selfishness, and the satisfaction of material desires?

Universal peace, and the happiness of mankind as a whole, being the

result! Is it really so that I may understand you, sir?”

“But the universal necessity of living, of drinking, of eating—in

short, the whole scientific conviction that this necessity can only be

satisfied by universal co-operation and the solidarity of interests—is,

it seems to me, a strong enough idea to serve as a basis, so to speak,

and a ‘spring of life,’ for humanity in future centuries,” said Gavrila

Ardalionovitch, now thoroughly roused.

“The necessity of eating and drinking, that is to say, solely the

instinct of self-preservation...”

“Is not that enough? The instinct of self-preservation is the normal

law of humanity...”

“Who told you that?” broke in Evgenie Pavlovitch.

“It is a law, doubtless, but a law neither more nor less normal than

that of destruction, even self-destruction. Is it possible that the

whole normal law of humanity is contained in this sentiment of

self-preservation?”

“Ah!” cried Hippolyte, turning towards Evgenie Pavlovitch, and looking

at him with a queer sort of curiosity.

Then seeing that Radomski was laughing, he began to laugh himself,

nudged Colia, who was sitting beside him, with his elbow, and again

asked what time it was. He even pulled Colia’s silver watch out of his

hand, and looked at it eagerly. Then, as if he had forgotten

everything, he stretched himself out on the sofa, put his hands behind

his head, and looked up at the sky. After a minute or two he got up and

came back to the table to listen to Lebedeff’s outpourings, as the

latter passionately commentated on Evgenie Pavlovitch’s paradox.

“That is an artful and traitorous idea. A smart notion,” vociferated

the clerk, “thrown out as an apple of discord. But it is just. You are

a scoffer, a man of the world, a cavalry officer, and, though not

without brains, you do not realize how profound is your thought, nor

how true. Yes, the laws of self-preservation and of self-destruction

are equally powerful in this world. The devil will hold his empire over

humanity until a limit of time which is still unknown. You laugh? You

do not believe in the devil? Scepticism as to the devil is a French

idea, and it is also a frivolous idea. Do you know who the devil is? Do

you know his name? Although you don’t know his name you make a mockery

of his form, following the example of Voltaire. You sneer at his hoofs,

at his tail, at his horns—all of them the produce of your imagination!

In reality the devil is a great and terrible spirit, with neither

hoofs, nor tail, nor horns; it is you who have endowed him with these

attributes! But... he is not the question just now!”

“How do you know he is not the question now?” cried Hippolyte, laughing

hysterically.

“Another excellent idea, and worth considering!” replied Lebedeff.

“But, again, that is not the question. The question at this moment is

whether we have not weakened ‘the springs of life’ by the extension...”

“Of railways?” put in Colia eagerly.

“Not railways, properly speaking, presumptuous youth, but the general

tendency of which railways may be considered as the outward expression

and symbol. We hurry and push and hustle, for the good of humanity!

‘The world is becoming too noisy, too commercial!’ groans some solitary

thinker. ‘Undoubtedly it is, but the noise of waggons bearing bread to

starving humanity is of more value than tranquillity of soul,’ replies

another triumphantly, and passes on with an air of pride. As for me, I

don’t believe in these waggons bringing bread to humanity. For, founded

on no moral principle, these may well, even in the act of carrying

bread to humanity, coldly exclude a considerable portion of humanity

from enjoying it; that has been seen more than once.”

“What, these waggons may coldly exclude?” repeated someone.

“That has been seen already,” continued Lebedeff, not deigning to

notice the interruption. “Malthus was a friend of humanity, but, with

ill-founded moral principles, the friend of humanity is the devourer of

humanity, without mentioning his pride; for, touch the vanity of one of

these numberless philanthropists, and to avenge his self-esteem, he

will be ready at once to set fire to the whole globe; and to tell the

truth, we are all more or less like that. I, perhaps, might be the

first to set a light to the fuel, and then run away. But, again, I must

repeat, that is not the question.”

“What is it then, for goodness’ sake?”

“He is boring us!”

“The question is connected with the following anecdote of past times;

for I am obliged to relate a story. In our times, and in our country,

which I hope you love as much as I do, for as far as I am concerned, I

am ready to shed the last drop of my blood...

“Go on! Go on!”

“In our dear country, as indeed in the whole of Europe, a famine visits

humanity about four times a century, as far as I can remember; once in

every twenty-five years. I won’t swear to this being the exact figure,

but anyhow they have become comparatively rare.”

“Comparatively to what?”

“To the twelfth century, and those immediately preceding and following

it. We are told by historians that widespread famines occurred in those

days every two or three years, and such was the condition of things

that men actually had recourse to cannibalism, in secret, of course.

One of these cannibals, who had reached a good age, declared of his own

free will that during the course of his long and miserable life he had

personally killed and eaten, in the most profound secrecy, sixty monks,

not to mention several children; the number of the latter he thought

was about six, an insignificant total when compared with the enormous

mass of ecclesiastics consumed by him. As to adults, laymen that is to

say, he had never touched them.”

The president joined in the general outcry.

“That’s impossible!” said he in an aggrieved tone. “I am often

discussing subjects of this nature with him, gentlemen, but for the

most part he talks nonsense enough to make one deaf: this story has no

pretence of being true.”

“General, remember the siege of Kars! And you, gentlemen, I assure you

my anecdote is the naked truth. I may remark that reality, although it

is governed by invariable law, has at times a resemblance to falsehood.

In fact, the truer a thing is the less true it sounds.”

“But could anyone possibly eat sixty monks?” objected the scoffing

listeners.

“It is quite clear that he did not eat them all at once, but in a space

of fifteen or twenty years: from that point of view the thing is

comprehensible and natural...”

“Natural?”

“And natural,” repeated Lebedeff with pedantic obstinacy. “Besides, a

Catholic monk is by nature excessively curious; it would be quite easy

therefore to entice him into a wood, or some secret place, on false

pretences, and there to deal with him as said. But I do not dispute in

the least that the number of persons consumed appears to denote a spice

of greediness.”

“It is perhaps true, gentlemen,” said the prince, quietly. He had been

listening in silence up to that moment without taking part in the

conversation, but laughing heartily with the others from time to time.

Evidently he was delighted to see that everybody was amused, that

everybody was talking at once, and even that everybody was drinking. It

seemed as if he were not intending to speak at all, when suddenly he

intervened in such a serious voice that everyone looked at him with

interest.

“It is true that there were frequent famines at that time, gentlemen. I

have often heard of them, though I do not know much history. But it

seems to me that it must have been so. When I was in Switzerland I used

to look with astonishment at the many ruins of feudal castles perched

on the top of steep and rocky heights, half a mile at least above

sea-level, so that to reach them one had to climb many miles of stony

tracks. A castle, as you know, is, a kind of mountain of stones—a

dreadful, almost an impossible, labour! Doubtless the builders were all

poor men, vassals, and had to pay heavy taxes, and to keep up the

priesthood. How, then, could they provide for themselves, and when had

they time to plough and sow their fields? The greater number must,

literally, have died of starvation. I have sometimes asked myself how

it was that these communities were not utterly swept off the face of

the earth, and how they could possibly survive. Lebedeff is not

mistaken, in my opinion, when he says that there were cannibals in

those days, perhaps in considerable numbers; but I do not understand

why he should have dragged in the monks, nor what he means by that.”

“It is undoubtedly because, in the twelfth century, monks were the only

people one could eat; they were the fat, among many lean,” said Gavrila

Ardalionovitch.

“A brilliant idea, and most true!” cried Lebedeff, “for he never even

touched the laity. Sixty monks, and not a single layman! It is a

terrible idea, but it is historic, it is statistic; it is indeed one of

those facts which enables an intelligent historian to reconstruct the

physiognomy of a special epoch, for it brings out this further point

with mathematical accuracy, that the clergy were in those days sixty

times richer and more flourishing than the rest of humanity and perhaps

sixty times fatter also...”

“You are exaggerating, you are exaggerating, Lebedeff!” cried his

hearers, amid laughter.

“I admit that it is an historic thought, but what is your conclusion?”

asked the prince.

He spoke so seriously in addressing Lebedeff, that his tone contrasted

quite comically with that of the others. They were very nearly laughing

at him, too, but he did not notice it.

“Don’t you see he is a lunatic, prince?” whispered Evgenie Pavlovitch

in his ear. “Someone told me just now that he is a bit touched on the

subject of lawyers, that he has a mania for making speeches and intends

to pass the examinations. I am expecting a splendid burlesque now.”

“My conclusion is vast,” replied Lebedeff, in a voice like thunder.

“Let us examine first the psychological and legal position of the

criminal. We see that in spite of the difficulty of finding other food,

the accused, or, as we may say, my client, has often during his

peculiar life exhibited signs of repentance, and of wishing to give up

this clerical diet. Incontrovertible facts prove this assertion. He has

eaten five or six children, a relatively insignificant number, no

doubt, but remarkable enough from another point of view. It is manifest

that, pricked by remorse—for my client is religious, in his way, and

has a conscience, as I shall prove later—and desiring to extenuate his

sin as far as possible, he has tried six times at least to substitute

lay nourishment for clerical. That this was merely an experiment we can

hardly doubt: for if it had been only a question of gastronomic

variety, six would have been too few; why only six? Why not thirty? But

if we regard it as an experiment, inspired by the fear of committing

new sacrilege, then this number six becomes intelligible. Six attempts

to calm his remorse, and the pricking of his conscience, would amply

suffice, for these attempts could scarcely have been happy ones. In my

humble opinion, a child is too small; I should say, not sufficient;

which would result in four or five times more lay children than monks

being required in a given time. The sin, lessened on the one hand,

would therefore be increased on the other, in quantity, not in quality.

Please understand, gentlemen, that in reasoning thus, I am taking the

point of view which might have been taken by a criminal of the middle

ages. As for myself, a man of the late nineteenth century, I, of

course, should reason differently; I say so plainly, and therefore you

need not jeer at me nor mock me, gentlemen. As for you, general, it is

still more unbecoming on your part. In the second place, and giving my

own personal opinion, a child’s flesh is not a satisfying diet; it is

too insipid, too sweet; and the criminal, in making these experiments,

could have satisfied neither his conscience nor his appetite. I am

about to conclude, gentlemen; and my conclusion contains a reply to one

of the most important questions of that day and of our own! This

criminal ended at last by denouncing himself to the clergy, and giving

himself up to justice. We cannot but ask, remembering the penal system

of that day, and the tortures that awaited him—the wheel, the stake,

the fire!—we cannot but ask, I repeat, what induced him to accuse

himself of this crime? Why did he not simply stop short at the number

sixty, and keep his secret until his last breath? Why could he not

simply leave the monks alone, and go into the desert to repent? Or why

not become a monk himself? That is where the puzzle comes in! There

must have been something stronger than the stake or the fire, or even

than the habits of twenty years! There must have been an idea more

powerful than all the calamities and sorrows of this world, famine or

torture, leprosy or plague—an idea which entered into the heart,

directed and enlarged the springs of life, and made even that hell

supportable to humanity! Show me a force, a power like that, in this

our century of vices and railways! I might say, perhaps, in our century

of steamboats and railways, but I repeat in our century of vices and

railways, because I am drunk but truthful! Show me a single idea which

unites men nowadays with half the strength that it had in those

centuries, and dare to maintain that the ‘springs of life’ have not

been polluted and weakened beneath this ‘star,’ beneath this network in

which men are entangled! Don’t talk to me about your prosperity, your

riches, the rarity of famine, the rapidity of the means of transport!

There is more of riches, but less of force. The idea uniting heart and

soul to heart and soul exists no more. All is loose, soft, limp—we are

all of us limp.... Enough, gentlemen! I have done. That is not the

question. No, the question is now, excellency, I believe, to sit down

to the banquet you are about to provide for us!”

Lebedeff had roused great indignation in some of his auditors (it

should be remarked that the bottles were constantly uncorked during his

speech); but this unexpected conclusion calmed even the most turbulent

spirits. “That’s how a clever barrister makes a good point!” said he,

when speaking of his peroration later on. The visitors began to laugh

and chatter once again; the committee left their seats, and stretched

their legs on the terrace. Keller alone was still disgusted with

Lebedeff and his speech; he turned from one to another, saying in a

loud voice:

“He attacks education, he boasts of the fanaticism of the twelfth

century, he makes absurd grimaces, and added to that he is by no means

the innocent he makes himself out to be. How did he get the money to

buy this house, allow me to ask?”

In another corner was the general, holding forth to a group of hearers,

among them Ptitsin, whom he had buttonholed. “I have known,” said he,

“a real interpreter of the Apocalypse, the late Gregory Semeonovitch

Burmistroff, and he—he pierced the heart like a fiery flash! He began

by putting on his spectacles, then he opened a large black book; his

white beard, and his two medals on his breast, recalling acts of

charity, all added to his impressiveness. He began in a stern voice,

and before him generals, hard men of the world, bowed down, and ladies

fell to the ground fainting. But this one here—he ends by announcing a

banquet! That is not the real thing!”

Ptitsin listened and smiled, then turned as if to get his hat; but if

he had intended to leave, he changed his mind. Before the others had

risen from the table, Gania had suddenly left off drinking, and pushed

away his glass, a dark shadow seemed to come over his face. When they

all rose, he went and sat down by Rogojin. It might have been believed

that quite friendly relations existed between them. Rogojin, who had

also seemed on the point of going away now sat motionless, his head

bent, seeming to have forgotten his intention. He had drunk no wine,

and appeared absorbed in reflection. From time to time he raised his

eyes, and examined everyone present; one might have imagined that he

was expecting something very important to himself, and that he had

decided to wait for it. The prince had taken two or three glasses of

champagne, and seemed cheerful. As he rose he noticed Evgenie

Pavlovitch, and, remembering the appointment he had made with him,

smiled pleasantly. Evgenie Pavlovitch made a sign with his head towards

Hippolyte, whom he was attentively watching. The invalid was fast

asleep, stretched out on the sofa.

“Tell me, prince, why on earth did this boy intrude himself upon you?”

he asked, with such annoyance and irritation in his voice that the

prince was quite surprised. “I wouldn’t mind laying odds that he is up

to some mischief.”

“I have observed,” said the prince, “that he seems to be an object of

very singular interest to you, Evgenie Pavlovitch. Why is it?”

“You may add that I have surely enough to think of, on my own account,

without him; and therefore it is all the more surprising that I cannot

tear my eyes and thoughts away from his detestable physiognomy.”

“Oh, come! He has a handsome face.”

“Why, look at him—look at him now!”

The prince glanced again at Evgenie Pavlovitch with considerable

surprise.

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Hippolyte, who had fallen asleep during Lebedeff’s discourse, now

suddenly woke up, just as though someone had jogged him in the side. He

shuddered, raised himself on his arm, gazed around, and grew very pale.

A look almost of terror crossed his face as he recollected.

“What! are they all off? Is it all over? Is the sun up?” He trembled,

and caught at the prince’s hand. “What time is it? Tell me, quick, for

goodness’ sake! How long have I slept?” he added, almost in despair,

just as though he had overslept something upon which his whole fate

depended.

“You have slept seven or perhaps eight minutes,” said Evgenie

Pavlovitch.

Hippolyte gazed eagerly at the latter, and mused for a few moments.

“Oh, is that all?” he said at last. “Then I—”

He drew a long, deep breath of relief, as it seemed. He realized that

all was not over as yet, that the sun had not risen, and that the

guests had merely gone to supper. He smiled, and two hectic spots

appeared on his cheeks.

“So you counted the minutes while I slept, did you, Evgenie

Pavlovitch?” he said, ironically. “You have not taken your eyes off me

all the evening—I have noticed that much, you see! Ah, Rogojin! I’ve

just been dreaming about him, prince,” he added, frowning. “Yes, by the

by,” starting up, “where’s the orator? Where’s Lebedeff? Has he

finished? What did he talk about? Is it true, prince, that you once

declared that ‘beauty would save the world’? Great Heaven! The prince

says that beauty saves the world! And I declare that he only has such

playful ideas because he’s in love! Gentlemen, the prince is in love. I

guessed it the moment he came in. Don’t blush, prince; you make me

sorry for you. What beauty saves the world? Colia told me that you are

a zealous Christian; is it so? Colia says you call yourself a

Christian.”

The prince regarded him attentively, but said nothing.

“You don’t answer me; perhaps you think I am very fond of you?” added

Hippolyte, as though the words had been drawn from him.

“No, I don’t think that. I know you don’t love me.”

“What, after yesterday? Wasn’t I honest with you?”

“I knew yesterday that you didn’t love me.”

“Why so? why so? Because I envy you, eh? You always think that, I know.

But do you know why I am saying all this? Look here! I must have some

more champagne—pour me out some, Keller, will you?”

“No, you’re not to drink any more, Hippolyte. I won’t let you.” The

prince moved the glass away.

“Well perhaps you’re right,” said Hippolyte, musing. “They might

say—yet, devil take them! what does it matter?—prince, what can it

matter what people will say of us \_then\_, eh? I believe I’m half

asleep. I’ve had such a dreadful dream—I’ve only just remembered it.

Prince, I don’t wish you such dreams as that, though sure enough,

perhaps, I \_don’t\_ love you. Why wish a man evil, though you do not

love him, eh? Give me your hand—let me press it sincerely. There—you’ve

given me your hand—you must feel that I \_do\_ press it sincerely, don’t

you? I don’t think I shall drink any more. What time is it? Never mind,

I know the time. The time has come, at all events. What! they are

laying supper over there, are they? Then this table is free? Capital,

gentlemen! I—hem! these gentlemen are not listening. Prince, I will

just read over an article I have here. Supper is more interesting, of

course, but—”

Here Hippolyte suddenly, and most unexpectedly, pulled out of his

breast-pocket a large sealed paper. This imposing-looking document he

placed upon the table before him.

The effect of this sudden action upon the company was instantaneous.

Evgenie Pavlovitch almost bounded off his chair in excitement. Rogojin

drew nearer to the table with a look on his face as if he knew what was

coming. Gania came nearer too; so did Lebedeff and the others—the paper

seemed to be an object of great interest to the company in general.

“What have you got there?” asked the prince, with some anxiety.

“At the first glimpse of the rising sun, prince, I will go to bed. I

told you I would, word of honour! You shall see!” cried Hippolyte. “You

think I’m not capable of opening this packet, do you?” He glared

defiantly round at the audience in general.

The prince observed that he was trembling all over.

“None of us ever thought such a thing!” Muishkin replied for all. “Why

should you suppose it of us? And what are you going to read, Hippolyte?

What is it?”

“Yes, what is it?” asked others. The packet sealed with red wax seemed

to attract everyone, as though it were a magnet.

“I wrote this yesterday, myself, just after I saw you, prince, and told

you I would come down here. I wrote all day and all night, and finished

it this morning early. Afterwards I had a dream.”

“Hadn’t we better hear it tomorrow?” asked the prince timidly.

“Tomorrow ‘there will be no more time!’” laughed Hippolyte,

hysterically. “You needn’t be afraid; I shall get through the whole

thing in forty minutes, at most an hour! Look how interested everybody

is! Everybody has drawn near. Look! look at them all staring at my

sealed packet! If I hadn’t sealed it up it wouldn’t have been half so

effective! Ha, ha! that’s mystery, that is! Now then, gentlemen, shall

I break the seal or not? Say the word; it’s a mystery, I tell you—a

secret! Prince, you know who said there would be ‘no more time’? It was

the great and powerful angel in the Apocalypse.”

“Better not read it now,” said the prince, putting his hand on the

packet.

“No, don’t read it!” cried Evgenie suddenly. He appeared so strangely

disturbed that many of those present could not help wondering.

“Reading? None of your reading now!” said somebody; “it’s supper-time.”

“What sort of an article is it? For a paper? Probably it’s very dull,”

said another. But the prince’s timid gesture had impressed even

Hippolyte.

“Then I’m not to read it?” he whispered, nervously. “Am I not to read

it?” he repeated, gazing around at each face in turn. “What are you

afraid of, prince?” he turned and asked the latter suddenly.

“What should I be afraid of?”

“Has anyone a coin about them? Give me a twenty-copeck piece,

somebody!” And Hippolyte leapt from his chair.

“Here you are,” said Lebedeff, handing him one; he thought the boy had

gone mad.

“Vera Lukianovna,” said Hippolyte, “toss it, will you? Heads, I read,

tails, I don’t.”

Vera Lebedeff tossed the coin into the air and let it fall on the

table.

It was “heads.”

“Then I read it,” said Hippolyte, in the tone of one bowing to the fiat

of destiny. He could not have grown paler if a verdict of death had

suddenly been presented to him.

“But after all, what is it? Is it possible that I should have just

risked my fate by tossing up?” he went on, shuddering; and looked round

him again. His eyes had a curious expression of sincerity. “That is an

astonishing psychological fact,” he cried, suddenly addressing the

prince, in a tone of the most intense surprise. “It is... it is

something quite inconceivable, prince,” he repeated with growing

animation, like a man regaining consciousness. “Take note of it,

prince, remember it; you collect, I am told, facts concerning capital

punishment... They told me so. Ha, ha! My God, how absurd!” He sat down

on the sofa, put his elbows on the table, and laid his head on his

hands. “It is shameful—though what does it matter to me if it is

shameful?

“Gentlemen, gentlemen! I am about to break the seal,” he continued,

with determination. “I—I—of course I don’t insist upon anyone listening

if they do not wish to.”

With trembling fingers he broke the seal and drew out several sheets of

paper, smoothed them out before him, and began sorting them.

“What on earth does all this mean? What’s he going to read?” muttered

several voices. Others said nothing; but one and all sat down and

watched with curiosity. They began to think something strange might

really be about to happen. Vera stood and trembled behind her father’s

chair, almost in tears with fright; Colia was nearly as much alarmed as

she was. Lebedeff jumped up and put a couple of candles nearer to

Hippolyte, so that he might see better.

“Gentlemen, this—you’ll soon see what this is,” began Hippolyte, and

suddenly commenced his reading.

“It’s headed, ‘A Necessary Explanation,’ with the motto, ‘\_Après moi le

déluge!\_’ Oh, deuce take it all! Surely I can never have seriously

written such a silly motto as that? Look here, gentlemen, I beg to give

notice that all this is very likely terrible nonsense. It is only a few

ideas of mine. If you think that there is anything mysterious coming—or

in a word—”

“Better read on without any more beating about the bush,” said Gania.

“Affectation!” remarked someone else.

“Too much talk,” said Rogojin, breaking the silence for the first time.

Hippolyte glanced at him suddenly, and when their eyes met Rogojin

showed his teeth in a disagreeable smile, and said the following

strange words: “That’s not the way to settle this business, my friend;

that’s not the way at all.”

Of course nobody knew what Rogojin meant by this; but his words made a

deep impression upon all. Everyone seemed to see in a flash the same

idea.

As for Hippolyte, their effect upon him was astounding. He trembled so

that the prince was obliged to support him, and would certainly have

cried out, but that his voice seemed to have entirely left him for the

moment. For a minute or two he could not speak at all, but panted and

stared at Rogojin. At last he managed to ejaculate:

“Then it was \_you\_ who came—\_you\_—\_you?\_”

“Came where? What do you mean?” asked Rogojin, amazed. But Hippolyte,

panting and choking with excitement, interrupted him violently.

“\_You\_ came to me last week, in the night, at two o’clock, the day I

was with you in the morning! Confess it was you!”

“Last week? In the night? Have you gone cracked, my good friend?”

Hippolyte paused and considered a moment. Then a smile of

cunning—almost triumph—crossed his lips.

“It was you,” he murmured, almost in a whisper, but with absolute

conviction. “Yes, it was you who came to my room and sat silently on a

chair at my window for a whole hour—more! It was between one and two at

night; you rose and went out at about three. It was you, you! Why you

should have frightened me so, why you should have wished to torment me

like that, I cannot tell—but you it was.”

There was absolute hatred in his eyes as he said this, but his look of

fear and his trembling had not left him.

“You shall hear all this directly, gentlemen. I—I—listen!”

He seized his paper in a desperate hurry; he fidgeted with it, and

tried to sort it, but for a long while his trembling hands could not

collect the sheets together. “He’s either mad or delirious,” murmured

Rogojin. At last he began.

For the first five minutes the reader’s voice continued to tremble, and

he read disconnectedly and unevenly; but gradually his voice

strengthened. Occasionally a violent fit of coughing stopped him, but

his animation grew with the progress of the reading—as did also the

disagreeable impression which it made upon his audience,—until it

reached the highest pitch of excitement.

Here is the article.

MY NECESSARY EXPLANATION.

“\_Après moi le déluge.\_

“Yesterday morning the prince came to see me. Among other things he

asked me to come down to his villa. I knew he would come and persuade

me to this step, and that he would adduce the argument that it would be

easier for me to die ‘among people and green trees,’—as he expressed

it. But today he did not say ‘die,’ he said ‘live.’ It is pretty much

the same to me, in my position, which he says. When I asked him why he

made such a point of his ‘green trees,’ he told me, to my astonishment,

that he had heard that last time I was in Pavlofsk I had said that I

had come ‘to have a last look at the trees.’

“When I observed that it was all the same whether one died among trees

or in front of a blank brick wall, as here, and that it was not worth

making any fuss over a fortnight, he agreed at once. But he insisted

that the good air at Pavlofsk and the greenness would certainly cause a

physical change for the better, and that my excitement, and my

\_dreams\_, would be perhaps relieved. I remarked to him, with a smile,

that he spoke like a materialist, and he answered that he had always

been one. As he never tells a lie, there must be something in his

words. His smile is a pleasant one. I have had a good look at him. I

don’t know whether I like him or not; and I have no time to waste over

the question. The hatred which I felt for him for five months has

become considerably modified, I may say, during the last month. Who

knows, perhaps I am going to Pavlofsk on purpose to see him! But why do

I leave my chamber? Those who are sentenced to death should not leave

their cells. If I had not formed a final resolve, but had decided to

wait until the last minute, I should not leave my room, or accept his

invitation to come and die at Pavlofsk. I must be quick and finish this

explanation before tomorrow. I shall have no time to read it over and

correct it, for I must read it tomorrow to the prince and two or three

witnesses whom I shall probably find there.

“As it will be absolutely true, without a touch of falsehood, I am

curious to see what impression it will make upon me myself at the

moment when I read it out. This is my ‘last and solemn’—but why need I

call it that? There is no question about the truth of it, for it is not

worthwhile lying for a fortnight; a fortnight of life is not itself

worth having, which is a proof that I write nothing here but pure

truth.

(“N.B.—Let me remember to consider; am I mad at this moment, or not? or

rather at these moments? I have been told that consumptives sometimes

do go out of their minds for a while in the last stages of the malady.

I can prove this tomorrow when I read it out, by the impression it

makes upon the audience. I must settle this question once and for all,

otherwise I can’t go on with anything.)

“I believe I have just written dreadful nonsense; but there’s no time

for correcting, as I said before. Besides that, I have made myself a

promise not to alter a single word of what I write in this paper, even

though I find that I am contradicting myself every five lines. I wish

to verify the working of the natural logic of my ideas tomorrow during

the reading—whether I am capable of detecting logical errors, and

whether all that I have meditated over during the last six months be

true, or nothing but delirium.

“If two months since I had been called upon to leave my room and the

view of Meyer’s wall opposite, I verily believe I should have been

sorry. But now I have no such feeling, and yet I am leaving this room

and Meyer’s brick wall \_for ever\_. So that my conclusion, that it is

not worth while indulging in grief, or any other emotion, for a

fortnight, has proved stronger than my very nature, and has taken over

the direction of my feelings. But is it so? Is it the case that my

nature is conquered entirely? If I were to be put on the rack now, I

should certainly cry out. I should not say that it is not worth while

to yell and feel pain because I have but a fortnight to live.

“But is it true that I have but a fortnight of life left to me? I know

I told some of my friends that Doctor B. had informed me that this was

the case; but I now confess that I lied; B. has not even seen me.

However, a week ago, I called in a medical student, Kislorodoff, who is

a Nationalist, an Atheist, and a Nihilist, by conviction, and that is

why I had him. I needed a man who would tell me the bare truth without

any humbug or ceremony—and so he did—indeed, almost with pleasure

(which I thought was going a little too far).

“Well, he plumped out that I had about a month left me; it might be a

little more, he said, under favourable circumstances, but it might also

be considerably less. According to his opinion I might die quite

suddenly—tomorrow, for instance—there had been such cases. Only a day

or two since a young lady at Colomna who suffered from consumption, and

was about on a par with myself in the march of the disease, was going

out to market to buy provisions, when she suddenly felt faint, lay down

on the sofa, gasped once, and died.

“Kislorodoff told me all this with a sort of exaggerated devil-may-care

negligence, and as though he did me great honour by talking to me so,

because it showed that he considered me the same sort of exalted

Nihilistic being as himself, to whom death was a matter of no

consequence whatever, either way.

“At all events, the fact remained—a month of life and no more! That he

is right in his estimation I am absolutely persuaded.

“It puzzles me much to think how on earth the prince guessed yesterday

that I have had bad dreams. He said to me, ‘Your excitement and dreams

will find relief at Pavlofsk.’ Why did he say ‘dreams’? Either he is a

doctor, or else he is a man of exceptional intelligence and wonderful

powers of observation. (But that he is an ‘idiot,’ at bottom there can

be no doubt whatever.) It so happened that just before he arrived I had

a delightful little dream; one of a kind that I have hundreds of just

now. I had fallen asleep about an hour before he came in, and dreamed

that I was in some room, not my own. It was a large room, well

furnished, with a cupboard, chest of drawers, sofa, and my bed, a fine

wide bed covered with a silken counterpane. But I observed in the room

a dreadful-looking creature, a sort of monster. It was a little like a

scorpion, but was not a scorpion, but far more horrible, and especially

so, because there are no creatures anything like it in nature, and

because it had appeared to me for a purpose, and bore some mysterious

signification. I looked at the beast well; it was brown in colour and

had a shell; it was a crawling kind of reptile, about eight inches

long, and narrowed down from the head, which was about a couple of

fingers in width, to the end of the tail, which came to a fine point.

Out of its trunk, about a couple of inches below its head, came two

legs at an angle of forty-five degrees, each about three inches long,

so that the beast looked like a trident from above. It had eight hard

needle-like whiskers coming out from different parts of its body; it

went along like a snake, bending its body about in spite of the shell

it wore, and its motion was very quick and very horrible to look at. I

was dreadfully afraid it would sting me; somebody had told me, I

thought, that it was venomous; but what tormented me most of all was

the wondering and wondering as to who had sent it into my room, and

what was the mystery which I felt it contained.

“It hid itself under the cupboard and under the chest of drawers, and

crawled into the corners. I sat on a chair and kept my legs tucked

under me. Then the beast crawled quietly across the room and

disappeared somewhere near my chair. I looked about for it in terror,

but I still hoped that as my feet were safely tucked away it would not

be able to touch me.

“Suddenly I heard behind me, and about on a level with my head, a sort

of rattling sound. I turned sharp round and saw that the brute had

crawled up the wall as high as the level of my face, and that its

horrible tail, which was moving incredibly fast from side to side, was

actually touching my hair! I jumped up—and it disappeared. I did not

dare lie down on my bed for fear it should creep under my pillow. My

mother came into the room, and some friends of hers. They began to hunt

for the reptile and were more composed than I was; they did not seem to

be afraid of it. But they did not understand as I did.

“Suddenly the monster reappeared; it crawled slowly across the room and

made for the door, as though with some fixed intention, and with a slow

movement that was more horrible than ever.

“Then my mother opened the door and called my dog, Norma. Norma was a

great Newfoundland, and died five years ago.

“She sprang forward and stood still in front of the reptile as if she

had been turned to stone. The beast stopped too, but its tail and claws

still moved about. I believe animals are incapable of feeling

supernatural fright—if I have been rightly informed,—but at this moment

there appeared to me to be something more than ordinary about Norma’s

terror, as though it must be supernatural; and as though she felt, just

as I did myself, that this reptile was connected with some mysterious

secret, some fatal omen.

“Norma backed slowly and carefully away from the brute, which followed

her, creeping deliberately after her as though it intended to make a

sudden dart and sting her.

“In spite of Norma’s terror she looked furious, though she trembled in

all her limbs. At length she slowly bared her terrible teeth, opened

her great red jaws, hesitated—took courage, and seized the beast in her

mouth. It seemed to try to dart out of her jaws twice, but Norma caught

at it and half swallowed it as it was escaping. The shell cracked in

her teeth; and the tail and legs stuck out of her mouth and shook about

in a horrible manner. Suddenly Norma gave a piteous whine; the reptile

had bitten her tongue. She opened her mouth wide with the pain, and I

saw the beast lying across her tongue, and out of its body, which was

almost bitten in two, came a hideous white-looking substance, oozing

out into Norma’s mouth; it was of the consistency of a crushed

black-beetle. Just then I awoke and the prince entered the room.”

“Gentlemen!” said Hippolyte, breaking off here, “I have not done yet,

but it seems to me that I have written down a great deal here that is

unnecessary,—this dream—”

“You have indeed!” said Gania.

“There is too much about myself, I know, but—” As Hippolyte said this

his face wore a tired, pained look, and he wiped the sweat off his

brow.

“Yes,” said Lebedeff, “you certainly think a great deal too much about

yourself.”

“Well—gentlemen—I do not force anyone to listen! If any of you are

unwilling to sit it out, please go away, by all means!”

“He turns people out of a house that isn’t his own,” muttered Rogojin.

“Suppose we all go away?” said Ferdishenko suddenly.

Hippolyte clutched his manuscript, and gazing at the last speaker with

glittering eyes, said: “You don’t like me at all!” A few laughed at

this, but not all.

“Hippolyte,” said the prince, “give me the papers, and go to bed like a

sensible fellow. We’ll have a good talk tomorrow, but you really

mustn’t go on with this reading; it is not good for you!”

“How can I? How can I?” cried Hippolyte, looking at him in amazement.

“Gentlemen! I was a fool! I won’t break off again. Listen, everyone who

wants to!”

He gulped down some water out of a glass standing near, bent over the

table, in order to hide his face from the audience, and recommenced.

“The idea that it is not worth while living for a few weeks took

possession of me a month ago, when I was told that I had four weeks to

live, but only partially so at that time. The idea quite overmastered

me three days since, that evening at Pavlofsk. The first time that I

felt really impressed with this thought was on the terrace at the

prince’s, at the very moment when I had taken it into my head to make a

last trial of life. I wanted to see people and trees (I believe I said

so myself), I got excited, I maintained Burdovsky’s rights, ‘my

neighbour!’—I dreamt that one and all would open their arms, and

embrace me, that there would be an indescribable exchange of

forgiveness between us all! In a word, I behaved like a fool, and then,

at that very same instant, I felt my ‘last conviction.’ I ask myself

now how I could have waited six months for that conviction! I knew that

I had a disease that spares no one, and I really had no illusions; but

the more I realized my condition, the more I clung to life; I wanted to

live at any price. I confess I might well have resented that blind,

deaf fate, which, with no apparent reason, seemed to have decided to

crush me like a fly; but why did I not stop at resentment? Why did I

begin to live, knowing that it was not worthwhile to begin? Why did I

attempt to do what I knew to be an impossibility? And yet I could not

even read a book to the end; I had given up reading. What is the good

of reading, what is the good of learning anything, for just six months?

That thought has made me throw aside a book more than once.

“Yes, that wall of Meyer’s could tell a tale if it liked. There was no

spot on its dirty surface that I did not know by heart. Accursed wall!

and yet it is dearer to me than all the Pavlofsk trees!—That is—it

\_would\_ be dearer if it were not all the same to me, now!

“I remember now with what hungry interest I began to watch the lives of

other people—interest that I had never felt before! I used to wait for

Colia’s arrival impatiently, for I was so ill myself, then, that I

could not leave the house. I so threw myself into every little detail

of news, and took so much interest in every report and rumour, that I

believe I became a regular gossip! I could not understand, among other

things, how all these people—with so much life in and before them—do

not become \_rich\_—and I don’t understand it now. I remember being told

of a poor wretch I once knew, who had died of hunger. I was almost

beside myself with rage! I believe if I could have resuscitated him I

would have done so for the sole purpose of murdering him!

“Occasionally I was so much better that I could go out; but the streets

used to put me in such a rage that I would lock myself up for days

rather than go out, even if I were well enough to do so! I could not

bear to see all those preoccupied, anxious-looking creatures

continuously surging along the streets past me! Why are they always

anxious? What is the meaning of their eternal care and worry? It is

their wickedness, their perpetual detestable malice—that’s what it

is—they are all full of malice, malice!

“Whose fault is it that they are all miserable, that they don’t know

how to live, though they have fifty or sixty years of life before them?

Why did that fool allow himself to die of hunger with sixty years of

unlived life before him?

“And everyone of them shows his rags, his toil-worn hands, and yells in

his wrath: ‘Here are we, working like cattle all our lives, and always

as hungry as dogs, and there are others who do not work, and are fat

and rich!’ The eternal refrain! And side by side with them trots along

some wretched fellow who has known better days, doing light porter’s

work from morn to night for a living, always blubbering and saying that

‘his wife died because he had no money to buy medicine with,’ and his

children dying of cold and hunger, and his eldest daughter gone to the

bad, and so on. Oh! I have no pity and no patience for these fools of

people. Why can’t they be Rothschilds? Whose fault is it that a man has

not got millions of money like Rothschild? If he has life, all this

must be in his power! Whose fault is it that he does not know how to

live his life?

“Oh! it’s all the same to me now—\_now!\_ But at that time I would soak

my pillow at night with tears of mortification, and tear at my blanket

in my rage and fury. Oh, how I longed at that time to be turned

out—\_me\_, eighteen years old, poor, half-clothed, turned out into the

street, quite alone, without lodging, without work, without a crust of

bread, without relations, without a single acquaintance, in some large

town—hungry, beaten (if you like), but in good health—and \_then\_ I

would show them—

“What would I show them?

“Oh, don’t think that I have no sense of my own humiliation! I have

suffered already in reading so far. Which of you all does not think me

a fool at this moment—a young fool who knows nothing of life—forgetting

that to live as I have lived these last six months is to live longer

than grey-haired old men. Well, let them laugh, and say it is all

nonsense, if they please. They may say it is all fairy-tales, if they

like; and I have spent whole nights telling myself fairy-tales. I

remember them all. But how can I tell fairy-tales now? The time for

them is over. They amused me when I found that there was not even time

for me to learn the Greek grammar, as I wanted to do. ‘I shall die

before I get to the syntax,’ I thought at the first page—and threw the

book under the table. It is there still, for I forbade anyone to pick

it up.

“If this ‘Explanation’ gets into anybody’s hands, and they have

patience to read it through, they may consider me a madman, or a

schoolboy, or, more likely, a man condemned to die, who thought it only

natural to conclude that all men, excepting himself, esteem life far

too lightly, live it far too carelessly and lazily, and are, therefore,

one and all, unworthy of it. Well, I affirm that my reader is wrong

again, for my convictions have nothing to do with my sentence of death.

Ask them, ask any one of them, or all of them, what they mean by

happiness! Oh, you may be perfectly sure that if Columbus was happy, it

was not after he had discovered America, but when he was discovering

it! You may be quite sure that he reached the culminating point of his

happiness three days before he saw the New World with his actual eyes,

when his mutinous sailors wanted to tack about, and return to Europe!

What did the New World matter after all? Columbus had hardly seen it

when he died, and in reality he was entirely ignorant of what he had

discovered. The important thing is life—life and nothing else! What is

any ‘discovery’ whatever compared with the incessant, eternal discovery

of life?

“But what is the use of talking? I’m afraid all this is so commonplace

that my confession will be taken for a schoolboy exercise—the work of

some ambitious lad writing in the hope of his work ‘seeing the light’;

or perhaps my readers will say that ‘I had perhaps something to say,

but did not know how to express it.’

“Let me add to this that in every idea emanating from genius, or even

in every serious human idea—born in the human brain—there always

remains something—some sediment—which cannot be expressed to others,

though one wrote volumes and lectured upon it for five-and-thirty

years. There is always a something, a remnant, which will never come

out from your brain, but will remain there with you, and you alone, for

ever and ever, and you will die, perhaps, without having imparted what

may be the very essence of your idea to a single living soul.

“So that if I cannot now impart all that has tormented me for the last

six months, at all events you will understand that, having reached my

‘last convictions,’ I must have paid a very dear price for them. That

is what I wished, for reasons of my own, to make a point of in this my

‘Explanation.’

“But let me resume.”

VI.

“I will not deceive you. ‘Reality’ got me so entrapped in its meshes

now and again during the past six months, that I forgot my ‘sentence’

(or perhaps I did not wish to think of it), and actually busied myself

with affairs.

“A word as to my circumstances. When, eight months since, I became very

ill, I threw up all my old connections and dropped all my old

companions. As I was always a gloomy, morose sort of individual, my

friends easily forgot me; of course, they would have forgotten me all

the same, without that excuse. My position at home was solitary enough.

Five months ago I separated myself entirely from the family, and no one

dared enter my room except at stated times, to clean and tidy it, and

so on, and to bring me my meals. My mother dared not disobey me; she

kept the children quiet, for my sake, and beat them if they dared to

make any noise and disturb me. I so often complained of them that I

should think they must be very fond, indeed, of me by this time. I

think I must have tormented ‘my faithful Colia’ (as I called him) a

good deal too. He tormented me of late; I could see that he always bore

my tempers as though he had determined to ‘spare the poor invalid.’

This annoyed me, naturally. He seemed to have taken it into his head to

imitate the prince in Christian meekness! Surikoff, who lived above us,

annoyed me, too. He was so miserably poor, and I used to prove to him

that he had no one to blame but himself for his poverty. I used to be

so angry that I think I frightened him eventually, for he stopped

coming to see me. He was a most meek and humble fellow, was Surikoff.

(N.B.—They say that meekness is a great power. I must ask the prince

about this, for the expression is his.) But I remember one day in

March, when I went up to his lodgings to see whether it was true that

one of his children had been starved and frozen to death, I began to

hold forth to him about his poverty being his own fault, and, in the

course of my remarks, I accidentally smiled at the corpse of his child.

Well, the poor wretch’s lips began to tremble, and he caught me by the

shoulder, and pushed me to the door. ‘Go out,’ he said, in a whisper. I

went out, of course, and I declare I \_liked\_ it. I liked it at the very

moment when I was turned out. But his words filled me with a strange

sort of feeling of disdainful pity for him whenever I thought of them—a

feeling which I did not in the least desire to entertain. At the very

moment of the insult (for I admit that I did insult him, though I did

not mean to), this man could not lose his temper. His lips had

trembled, but I swear it was not with rage. He had taken me by the arm,

and said, ‘Go out,’ without the least anger. There was dignity, a great

deal of dignity, about him, and it was so inconsistent with the look of

him that, I assure you, it was quite comical. But there was no anger.

Perhaps he merely began to despise me at that moment.

“Since that time he has always taken off his hat to me on the stairs,

whenever I met him, which is a thing he never did before; but he always

gets away from me as quickly as he can, as though he felt confused. If

he did despise me, he despised me ‘meekly,’ after his own fashion.

“I dare say he only took his hat off out of fear, as it were, to the

son of his creditor; for he always owed my mother money. I thought of

having an explanation with him, but I knew that if I did, he would

begin to apologize in a minute or two, so I decided to let him alone.

“Just about that time, that is, the middle of March, I suddenly felt

very much better; this continued for a couple of weeks. I used to go

out at dusk. I like the dusk, especially in March, when the night frost

begins to harden the day’s puddles, and the gas is burning.

“Well, one night in the Shestilavochnaya, a man passed me with a paper

parcel under his arm. I did not take stock of him very carefully, but

he seemed to be dressed in some shabby summer dust-coat, much too light

for the season. When he was opposite the lamp-post, some ten yards

away, I observed something fall out of his pocket. I hurried forward to

pick it up, just in time, for an old wretch in a long kaftan rushed up

too. He did not dispute the matter, but glanced at what was in my hand

and disappeared.

“It was a large old-fashioned pocket-book, stuffed full; but I guessed,

at a glance, that it had anything in the world inside it, except money.

“The owner was now some forty yards ahead of me, and was very soon lost

in the crowd. I ran after him, and began calling out; but as I knew

nothing to say excepting ‘hey!’ he did not turn round. Suddenly he

turned into the gate of a house to the left; and when I darted in after

him, the gateway was so dark that I could see nothing whatever. It was

one of those large houses built in small tenements, of which there must

have been at least a hundred.

“When I entered the yard I thought I saw a man going along on the far

side of it; but it was so dark I could not make out his figure.

“I crossed to that corner and found a dirty dark staircase. I heard a

man mounting up above me, some way higher than I was, and thinking I

should catch him before his door would be opened to him, I rushed after

him. I heard a door open and shut on the fifth storey, as I panted

along; the stairs were narrow, and the steps innumerable, but at last I

reached the door I thought the right one. Some moments passed before I

found the bell and got it to ring.

“An old peasant woman opened the door; she was busy lighting the

‘samovar’ in a tiny kitchen. She listened silently to my questions, did

not understand a word, of course, and opened another door leading into

a little bit of a room, low and scarcely furnished at all, but with a

large, wide bed in it, hung with curtains. On this bed lay one

Terentich, as the woman called him, drunk, it appeared to me. On the

table was an end of candle in an iron candlestick, and a half-bottle of

vodka, nearly finished. Terentich muttered something to me, and signed

towards the next room. The old woman had disappeared, so there was

nothing for me to do but to open the door indicated. I did so, and

entered the next room.

“This was still smaller than the other, so cramped that I could

scarcely turn round; a narrow single bed at one side took up nearly all

the room. Besides the bed there were only three common chairs, and a

wretched old kitchen-table standing before a small sofa. One could

hardly squeeze through between the table and the bed.

“On the table, as in the other room, burned a tallow candle-end in an

iron candlestick; and on the bed there whined a baby of scarcely three

weeks old. A pale-looking woman was dressing the child, probably the

mother; she looked as though she had not as yet got over the trouble of

childbirth, she seemed so weak and was so carelessly dressed. Another

child, a little girl of about three years old, lay on the sofa, covered

over with what looked like a man’s old dress-coat.

“At the table stood a man in his shirt sleeves; he had thrown off his

coat; it lay upon the bed; and he was unfolding a blue paper parcel in

which were a couple of pounds of bread, and some little sausages.

“On the table along with these things were a few old bits of black

bread, and some tea in a pot. From under the bed there protruded an

open portmanteau full of bundles of rags. In a word, the confusion and

untidiness of the room were indescribable.

“It appeared to me, at the first glance, that both the man and the

woman were respectable people, but brought to that pitch of poverty

where untidiness seems to get the better of every effort to cope with

it, till at last they take a sort of bitter satisfaction in it. When I

entered the room, the man, who had entered but a moment before me, and

was still unpacking his parcels, was saying something to his wife in an

excited manner. The news was apparently bad, as usual, for the woman

began whimpering. The man’s face seemed to me to be refined and even

pleasant. He was dark-complexioned, and about twenty-eight years of

age; he wore black whiskers, and his lip and chin were shaved. He

looked morose, but with a sort of pride of expression. A curious scene

followed.

“There are people who find satisfaction in their own touchy feelings,

especially when they have just taken the deepest offence; at such

moments they feel that they would rather be offended than not. These

easily-ignited natures, if they are wise, are always full of remorse

afterwards, when they reflect that they have been ten times as angry as

they need have been.

“The gentleman before me gazed at me for some seconds in amazement, and

his wife in terror; as though there was something alarmingly

extraordinary in the fact that anyone could come to see them. But

suddenly he fell upon me almost with fury; I had had no time to mutter

more than a couple of words; but he had doubtless observed that I was

decently dressed and, therefore, took deep offence because I had dared

enter his den so unceremoniously, and spy out the squalor and

untidiness of it.

“Of course he was delighted to get hold of someone upon whom to vent

his rage against things in general.

“For a moment I thought he would assault me; he grew so pale that he

looked like a woman about to have hysterics; his wife was dreadfully

alarmed.

“‘How dare you come in so? Be off!’ he shouted, trembling all over with

rage and scarcely able to articulate the words. Suddenly, however, he

observed his pocketbook in my hand.

“‘I think you dropped this,’ I remarked, as quietly and drily as I

could. (I thought it best to treat him so.) For some while he stood

before me in downright terror, and seemed unable to understand. He then

suddenly grabbed at his side-pocket, opened his mouth in alarm, and

beat his forehead with his hand.

“‘My God!’ he cried, ‘where did you find it? How?’ I explained in as

few words as I could, and as drily as possible, how I had seen it and

picked it up; how I had run after him, and called out to him, and how I

had followed him upstairs and groped my way to his door.

“‘Gracious Heaven!’ he cried, ‘all our papers are in it! My dear sir,

you little know what you have done for us. I should have been

lost—lost!’

“I had taken hold of the door-handle meanwhile, intending to leave the

room without reply; but I was panting with my run upstairs, and my

exhaustion came to a climax in a violent fit of coughing, so bad that I

could hardly stand.

“I saw how the man dashed about the room to find me an empty chair, how

he kicked the rags off a chair which was covered up by them, brought it

to me, and helped me to sit down; but my cough went on for another

three minutes or so. When I came to myself he was sitting by me on

another chair, which he had also cleared of the rubbish by throwing it

all over the floor, and was watching me intently.

“‘I’m afraid you are ill?’ he remarked, in the tone which doctors use

when they address a patient. ‘I am myself a medical man’ (he did not

say ‘doctor’), with which words he waved his hands towards the room and

its contents as though in protest at his present condition. ‘I see that

you—’

“‘I’m in consumption,’ I said laconically, rising from my seat.

“He jumped up, too.

“‘Perhaps you are exaggerating—if you were to take proper measures

perhaps—”

“He was terribly confused and did not seem able to collect his

scattered senses; the pocket-book was still in his left hand.

“‘Oh, don’t mind me,’ I said. ‘Dr. B—— saw me last week’ (I lugged him

in again), ‘and my hash is quite settled; pardon me—’ I took hold of

the door-handle again. I was on the point of opening the door and

leaving my grateful but confused medical friend to himself and his

shame, when my damnable cough got hold of me again.

“My doctor insisted on my sitting down again to get my breath. He now

said something to his wife who, without leaving her place, addressed a

few words of gratitude and courtesy to me. She seemed very shy over it,

and her sickly face flushed up with confusion. I remained, but with the

air of a man who knows he is intruding and is anxious to get away. The

doctor’s remorse at last seemed to need a vent, I could see.

“‘If I—’ he began, breaking off abruptly every other moment, and

starting another sentence. ‘I—I am so very grateful to you, and I am so

much to blame in your eyes, I feel sure, I—you see—’ (he pointed to the

room again) ‘at this moment I am in such a position—’

“‘Oh!’ I said, ‘there’s nothing to see; it’s quite a clear case—you’ve

lost your post and have come up to make explanations and get another,

if you can!’

“‘How do you know that?’ he asked in amazement.

“‘Oh, it was evident at the first glance,’ I said ironically, but not

intentionally so. ‘There are lots of people who come up from the

provinces full of hope, and run about town, and have to live as best

they can.’

“He began to talk at once excitedly and with trembling lips; he began

complaining and telling me his story. He interested me, I confess; I

sat there nearly an hour. His story was a very ordinary one. He had

been a provincial doctor; he had a civil appointment, and had no sooner

taken it up than intrigues began. Even his wife was dragged into these.

He was proud, and flew into a passion; there was a change of local

government which acted in favour of his opponents; his position was

undermined, complaints were made against him; he lost his post and came

up to Petersburg with his last remaining money, in order to appeal to

higher authorities. Of course nobody would listen to him for a long

time; he would come and tell his story one day and be refused promptly;

another day he would be fed on false promises; again he would be

treated harshly; then he would be told to sign some documents; then he

would sign the paper and hand it in, and they would refuse to receive

it, and tell him to file a formal petition. In a word he had been

driven about from office to office for five months and had spent every

farthing he had; his wife’s last rags had just been pawned; and

meanwhile a child had been born to them and—and today I have a final

refusal to my petition, and I have hardly a crumb of bread left—I have

nothing left; my wife has had a baby lately—and I—I—’

“He sprang up from his chair and turned away. His wife was crying in

the corner; the child had begun to moan again. I pulled out my

note-book and began writing in it. When I had finished and rose from my

chair he was standing before me with an expression of alarmed

curiosity.

“‘I have jotted down your name,’ I told him, ‘and all the rest of

it—the place you served at, the district, the date, and all. I have a

friend, Bachmatoff, whose uncle is a councillor of state and has to do

with these matters, one Peter Matveyevitch Bachmatoff.’

“‘Peter Matveyevitch Bachmatoff!’ he cried, trembling all over with

excitement. ‘Why, nearly everything depends on that very man!’

“It is very curious, this story of the medical man, and my visit, and

the happy termination to which I contributed by accident! Everything

fitted in, as in a novel. I told the poor people not to put much hope

in me, because I was but a poor schoolboy myself—(I am not really, but

I humiliated myself as much as possible in order to make them less

hopeful)—but that I would go at once to the Vassili Ostroff and see my

friend; and that as I knew for certain that his uncle adored him, and

was absolutely devoted to him as the last hope and branch of the

family, perhaps the old man might do something to oblige his nephew.

“‘If only they would allow me to explain all to his excellency! If I

could but be permitted to tell my tale to him!” he cried, trembling

with feverish agitation, and his eyes flashing with excitement. I

repeated once more that I could not hold out much hope—that it would

probably end in smoke, and if I did not turn up next morning they must

make up their minds that there was no more to be done in the matter.

“They showed me out with bows and every kind of respect; they seemed

quite beside themselves. I shall never forget the expression of their

faces!

“I took a droshky and drove over to the Vassili Ostroff at once. For

some years I had been at enmity with this young Bachmatoff, at school.

We considered him an aristocrat; at all events I called him one. He

used to dress smartly, and always drove to school in a private trap. He

was a good companion, and was always merry and jolly, sometimes even

witty, though he was not very intellectual, in spite of the fact that

he was always top of the class; I myself was never top in anything! All

his companions were very fond of him, excepting myself. He had several

times during those years come up to me and tried to make friends; but I

had always turned sulkily away and refused to have anything to do with

him. I had not seen him for a whole year now; he was at the university.

When, at nine o’clock, or so, this evening, I arrived and was shown up

to him with great ceremony, he first received me with astonishment, and

not too affably, but he soon cheered up, and suddenly gazed intently at

me and burst out laughing.

“‘Why, what on earth can have possessed you to come and see \_me\_,

Terentieff?’ he cried, with his usual pleasant, sometimes audacious,

but never offensive familiarity, which I liked in reality, but for

which I also detested him. ‘Why what’s the matter?’ he cried in alarm.

‘Are you ill?’

“That confounded cough of mine had come on again; I fell into a chair,

and with difficulty recovered my breath. ‘It’s all right, it’s only

consumption’ I said. ‘I have come to you with a petition!’

“He sat down in amazement, and I lost no time in telling him the

medical man’s history; and explained that he, with the influence which

he possessed over his uncle, might do some good to the poor fellow.

“‘I’ll do it—I’ll do it, of course!’ he said. ‘I shall attack my uncle

about it tomorrow morning, and I’m very glad you told me the story. But

how was it that you thought of coming to me about it, Terentieff?’

“‘So much depends upon your uncle,’ I said. ‘And besides we have always

been enemies, Bachmatoff; and as you are a generous sort of fellow, I

thought you would not refuse my request because I was your enemy!’ I

added with irony.

“‘Like Napoleon going to England, eh?’ cried he, laughing. ‘I’ll do it

though—of course, and at once, if I can!’ he added, seeing that I rose

seriously from my chair at this point.

“And sure enough the matter ended as satisfactorily as possible. A

month or so later my medical friend was appointed to another post. He

got his travelling expenses paid, and something to help him to start

life with once more. I think Bachmatoff must have persuaded the doctor

to accept a loan from himself. I saw Bachmatoff two or three times,

about this period, the third time being when he gave a farewell dinner

to the doctor and his wife before their departure, a champagne dinner.

“Bachmatoff saw me home after the dinner and we crossed the Nicolai

bridge. We were both a little drunk. He told me of his joy, the joyful

feeling of having done a good action; he said that it was all thanks to

myself that he could feel this satisfaction; and held forth about the

foolishness of the theory that individual charity is useless.

“I, too, was burning to have my say!

“‘In Moscow,’ I said, ‘there was an old state counsellor, a civil

general, who, all his life, had been in the habit of visiting the

prisons and speaking to criminals. Every party of convicts on its way

to Siberia knew beforehand that on the Vorobeef Hills the “old general”

would pay them a visit. He did all he undertook seriously and

devotedly. He would walk down the rows of the unfortunate prisoners,

stop before each individual and ask after his needs—he never sermonized

them; he spoke kindly to them—he gave them money; he brought them all

sorts of necessaries for the journey, and gave them devotional books,

choosing those who could read, under the firm conviction that they

would read to those who could not, as they went along.

“‘He scarcely ever talked about the particular crimes of any of them,

but listened if any volunteered information on that point. All the

convicts were equal for him, and he made no distinction. He spoke to

all as to brothers, and every one of them looked upon him as a father.

When he observed among the exiles some poor woman with a child, he

would always come forward and fondle the little one, and make it laugh.

He continued these acts of mercy up to his very death; and by that time

all the criminals, all over Russia and Siberia, knew him!

“‘A man I knew who had been to Siberia and returned, told me that he

himself had been a witness of how the very most hardened criminals

remembered the old general, though, in point of fact, he could never,

of course, have distributed more than a few pence to each member of a

party. Their recollection of him was not sentimental or particularly

devoted. Some wretch, for instance, who had been a murderer—cutting the

throat of a dozen fellow-creatures, for instance; or stabbing six

little children for his own amusement (there have been such men!)—would

perhaps, without rhyme or reason, suddenly give a sigh and say, “I

wonder whether that old general is alive still!” Although perhaps he

had not thought of mentioning him for a dozen years before! How can one

say what seed of good may have been dropped into his soul, never to

die?’

“I continued in that strain for a long while, pointing out to

Bachmatoff how impossible it is to follow up the effects of any

isolated good deed one may do, in all its influences and subtle

workings upon the heart and after-actions of others.

“‘And to think that you are to be cut off from life!’ remarked

Bachmatoff, in a tone of reproach, as though he would like to find

someone to pitch into on my account.

“We were leaning over the balustrade of the bridge, looking into the

Neva at this moment.

“‘Do you know what has suddenly come into my head?’ said I,

suddenly—leaning further and further over the rail.

“‘Surely not to throw yourself into the river?’ cried Bachmatoff in

alarm. Perhaps he read my thought in my face.

“‘No, not yet. At present nothing but the following consideration. You

see I have some two or three months left me to live—perhaps four; well,

supposing that when I have but a month or two more, I take a fancy for

some “good deed” that needs both trouble and time, like this business

of our doctor friend, for instance: why, I shall have to give up the

idea of it and take to something else—some \_little\_ good deed, \_more

within my means\_, eh? Isn’t that an amusing idea!’

“Poor Bachmatoff was much impressed—painfully so. He took me all the

way home; not attempting to console me, but behaving with the greatest

delicacy. On taking leave he pressed my hand warmly and asked

permission to come and see me. I replied that if he came to me as a

‘comforter,’ so to speak (for he would be in that capacity whether he

spoke to me in a soothing manner or only kept silence, as I pointed out

to him), he would but remind me each time of my approaching death! He

shrugged his shoulders, but quite agreed with me; and we parted better

friends than I had expected.

“But that evening and that night were sown the first seeds of my ‘last

conviction.’ I seized greedily on my new idea; I thirstily drank in all

its different aspects (I did not sleep a wink that night!), and the

deeper I went into it the more my being seemed to merge itself in it,

and the more alarmed I became. A dreadful terror came over me at last,

and did not leave me all next day.

“Sometimes, thinking over this, I became quite numb with the terror of

it; and I might well have deduced from this fact, that my ‘last

conviction’ was eating into my being too fast and too seriously, and

would undoubtedly come to its climax before long. And for the climax I

needed greater determination than I yet possessed.

“However, within three weeks my determination was taken, owing to a

very strange circumstance.

“Here on my paper, I make a note of all the figures and dates that come

into my explanation. Of course, it is all the same to me, but just

now—and perhaps only at this moment—I desire that all those who are to

judge of my action should see clearly out of how logical a sequence of

deductions has at length proceeded my ‘last conviction.’

“I have said above that the determination needed by me for the

accomplishment of my final resolve, came to hand not through any

sequence of causes, but thanks to a certain strange circumstance which

had perhaps no connection whatever with the matter at issue. Ten days

ago Rogojin called upon me about certain business of his own with which

I have nothing to do at present. I had never seen Rogojin before, but

had often heard about him.

“I gave him all the information he needed, and he very soon took his

departure; so that, since he only came for the purpose of gaining the

information, the matter might have been expected to end there.

“But he interested me too much, and all that day I was under the

influence of strange thoughts connected with him, and I determined to

return his visit the next day.

“Rogojin was evidently by no means pleased to see me, and hinted,

delicately, that he saw no reason why our acquaintance should continue.

For all that, however, I spent a very interesting hour, and so, I dare

say, did he. There was so great a contrast between us that I am sure we

must both have felt it; anyhow, I felt it acutely. Here was I, with my

days numbered, and he, a man in the full vigour of life, living in the

present, without the slightest thought for ‘final convictions,’ or

numbers, or days, or, in fact, for anything but that which-which—well,

which he was mad about, if he will excuse me the expression—as a feeble

author who cannot express his ideas properly.

“In spite of his lack of amiability, I could not help seeing, in

Rogojin a man of intellect and sense; and although, perhaps, there was

little in the outside world which was of interest to him, still he was

clearly a man with eyes to see.

“I hinted nothing to him about my ‘final conviction,’ but it appeared

to me that he had guessed it from my words. He remained silent—he is a

terribly silent man. I remarked to him, as I rose to depart, that, in

spite of the contrast and the wide differences between us two, les

extremites se touchent (‘extremes meet,’ as I explained to him in

Russian); so that maybe he was not so far from my final conviction as

appeared.

“His only reply to this was a sour grimace. He rose and looked for my

cap, and placed it in my hand, and led me out of the house—that

dreadful gloomy house of his—to all appearances, of course, as though I

were leaving of my own accord, and he were simply seeing me to the door

out of politeness. His house impressed me much; it is like a

burial-ground, he seems to like it, which is, however, quite natural.

Such a full life as he leads is so overflowing with absorbing interests

that he has little need of assistance from his surroundings.

“The visit to Rogojin exhausted me terribly. Besides, I had felt ill

since the morning; and by evening I was so weak that I took to my bed,

and was in high fever at intervals, and even delirious. Colia sat with

me until eleven o’clock.

“Yet I remember all he talked about, and every word we said, though

whenever my eyes closed for a moment I could picture nothing but the

image of Surikoff just in the act of finding a million roubles. He

could not make up his mind what to do with the money, and tore his hair

over it. He trembled with fear that somebody would rob him, and at last

he decided to bury it in the ground. I persuaded him that, instead of

putting it all away uselessly underground, he had better melt it down

and make a golden coffin out of it for his starved child, and then dig

up the little one and put her into the golden coffin. Surikoff accepted

this suggestion, I thought, with tears of gratitude, and immediately

commenced to carry out my design.

“I thought I spat on the ground and left him in disgust. Colia told me,

when I quite recovered my senses, that I had not been asleep for a

moment, but that I had spoken to him about Surikoff the whole while.

“At moments I was in a state of dreadful weakness and misery, so that

Colia was greatly disturbed when he left me.

“When I arose to lock the door after him, I suddenly called to mind a

picture I had noticed at Rogojin’s in one of his gloomiest rooms, over

the door. He had pointed it out to me himself as we walked past it, and

I believe I must have stood a good five minutes in front of it. There

was nothing artistic about it, but the picture made me feel strangely

uncomfortable. It represented Christ just taken down from the cross. It

seems to me that painters as a rule represent the Saviour, both on the

cross and taken down from it, with great beauty still upon His face.

This marvellous beauty they strive to preserve even in His moments of

deepest agony and passion. But there was no such beauty in Rogojin’s

picture. This was the presentment of a poor mangled body which had

evidently suffered unbearable anguish even before its crucifixion, full

of wounds and bruises, marks of the violence of soldiers and people,

and of the bitterness of the moment when He had fallen with the

cross—all this combined with the anguish of the actual crucifixion.

“The face was depicted as though still suffering; as though the body,

only just dead, was still almost quivering with agony. The picture was

one of pure nature, for the face was not beautified by the artist, but

was left as it would naturally be, whosoever the sufferer, after such

anguish.

“I know that the earliest Christian faith taught that the Saviour

suffered actually and not figuratively, and that nature was allowed her

own way even while His body was on the cross.

“It is strange to look on this dreadful picture of the mangled corpse

of the Saviour, and to put this question to oneself: ‘Supposing that

the disciples, the future apostles, the women who had followed Him and

stood by the cross, all of whom believed in and worshipped

Him—supposing that they saw this tortured body, this face so mangled

and bleeding and bruised (and they \_must\_ have so seen it)—how could

they have gazed upon the dreadful sight and yet have believed that He

would rise again?’

“The thought steps in, whether one likes it or no, that death is so

terrible and so powerful, that even He who conquered it in His miracles

during life was unable to triumph over it at the last. He who called to

Lazarus, ‘Lazarus, come forth!’ and the dead man lived—He was now

Himself a prey to nature and death. Nature appears to one, looking at

this picture, as some huge, implacable, dumb monster; or still better—a

stranger simile—some enormous mechanical engine of modern days which

has seized and crushed and swallowed up a great and invaluable Being, a

Being worth nature and all her laws, worth the whole earth, which was

perhaps created merely for the sake of the advent of that Being.

“This blind, dumb, implacable, eternal, unreasoning force is well shown

in the picture, and the absolute subordination of all men and things to

it is so well expressed that the idea unconsciously arises in the mind

of anyone who looks at it. All those faithful people who were gazing at

the cross and its mutilated occupant must have suffered agony of mind

that evening; for they must have felt that all their hopes and almost

all their faith had been shattered at a blow. They must have separated

in terror and dread that night, though each perhaps carried away with

him one great thought which was never eradicated from his mind for ever

afterwards. If this great Teacher of theirs could have seen Himself

after the Crucifixion, how could He have consented to mount the Cross

and to die as He did? This thought also comes into the mind of the man

who gazes at this picture. I thought of all this by snatches probably

between my attacks of delirium—for an hour and a half or so before

Colia’s departure.

“Can there be an appearance of that which has no form? And yet it

seemed to me, at certain moments, that I beheld in some strange and

impossible form, that dark, dumb, irresistibly powerful, eternal force.

“I thought someone led me by the hand and showed me, by the light of a

candle, a huge, loathsome insect, which he assured me was that very

force, that very almighty, dumb, irresistible Power, and laughed at the

indignation with which I received this information. In my room they

always light the little lamp before my icon for the night; it gives a

feeble flicker of light, but it is strong enough to see by dimly, and

if you sit just under it you can even read by it. I think it was about

twelve or a little past that night. I had not slept a wink, and was

lying with my eyes wide open, when suddenly the door opened, and in

came Rogojin.

“He entered, and shut the door behind him. Then he silently gazed at me

and went quickly to the corner of the room where the lamp was burning

and sat down underneath it.

“I was much surprised, and looked at him expectantly.

“Rogojin only leaned his elbow on the table and silently stared at me.

So passed two or three minutes, and I recollect that his silence hurt

and offended me very much. Why did he not speak?

“That his arrival at this time of night struck me as more or less

strange may possibly be the case; but I remember I was by no means

amazed at it. On the contrary, though I had not actually told him my

thought in the morning, yet I know he understood it; and this thought

was of such a character that it would not be anything very remarkable,

if one were to come for further talk about it at any hour of night,

however late.

“I thought he must have come for this purpose.

“In the morning we had parted not the best of friends; I remember he

looked at me with disagreeable sarcasm once or twice; and this same

look I observed in his eyes now—which was the cause of the annoyance I

felt.

“I did not for a moment suspect that I was delirious and that this

Rogojin was but the result of fever and excitement. I had not the

slightest idea of such a theory at first.

“Meanwhile he continued to sit and stare jeeringly at me.

“I angrily turned round in bed and made up my mind that I would not say

a word unless he did; so I rested silently on my pillow determined to

remain dumb, if it were to last till morning. I felt resolved that he

should speak first. Probably twenty minutes or so passed in this way.

Suddenly the idea struck me—what if this is an apparition and not

Rogojin himself?

“Neither during my illness nor at any previous time had I ever seen an

apparition;—but I had always thought, both when I was a little boy, and

even now, that if I were to see one I should die on the spot—though I

don’t believe in ghosts. And yet \_now\_, when the idea struck me that

this was a ghost and not Rogojin at all, I was not in the least

alarmed. Nay—the thought actually irritated me. Strangely enough, the

decision of the question as to whether this were a ghost or Rogojin did

not, for some reason or other, interest me nearly so much as it ought

to have done;—I think I began to muse about something altogether

different. For instance, I began to wonder why Rogojin, who had been in

dressing-gown and slippers when I saw him at home, had now put on a

dress-coat and white waistcoat and tie? I also thought to myself, I

remember—‘if this is a ghost, and I am not afraid of it, why don’t I

approach it and verify my suspicions? Perhaps I am afraid—’ And no

sooner did this last idea enter my head than an icy blast blew over me;

I felt a chill down my backbone and my knees shook.

“At this very moment, as though divining my thoughts, Rogojin raised

his head from his arm and began to part his lips as though he were

going to laugh—but he continued to stare at me as persistently as

before.

“I felt so furious with him at this moment that I longed to rush at

him; but as I had sworn that he should speak first, I continued to lie

still—and the more willingly, as I was still by no means satisfied as

to whether it really was Rogojin or not.

“I cannot remember how long this lasted; I cannot recollect, either,

whether consciousness forsook me at intervals, or not. But at last

Rogojin rose, staring at me as intently as ever, but not smiling any

longer,—and walking very softly, almost on tip-toes, to the door, he

opened it, went out, and shut it behind him.

“I did not rise from my bed, and I don’t know how long I lay with my

eyes open, thinking. I don’t know what I thought about, nor how I fell

asleep or became insensible; but I awoke next morning after nine

o’clock when they knocked at my door. My general orders are that if I

don’t open the door and call, by nine o’clock, Matreona is to come and

bring my tea. When I now opened the door to her, the thought suddenly

struck me—how could he have come in, since the door was locked? I made

inquiries and found that Rogojin himself could not possibly have come

in, because all our doors were locked for the night.

“Well, this strange circumstance—which I have described with so much

detail—was the ultimate cause which led me to taking my final

determination. So that no logic, or logical deductions, had anything to

do with my resolve;—it was simply a matter of disgust.

“It was impossible for me to go on living when life was full of such

detestable, strange, tormenting forms. This ghost had humiliated

me;—nor could I bear to be subordinate to that dark, horrible force

which was embodied in the form of the loathsome insect. It was only

towards evening, when I had quite made up my mind on this point, that I

began to feel easier.”

VII.

“I had a small pocket pistol. I had procured it while still a boy, at

that droll age when the stories of duels and highwaymen begin to

delight one, and when one imagines oneself nobly standing fire at some

future day, in a duel.

“There were a couple of old bullets in the bag which contained the

pistol, and powder enough in an old flask for two or three charges.

“The pistol was a wretched thing, very crooked and wouldn’t carry

farther than fifteen paces at the most. However, it would send your

skull flying well enough if you pressed the muzzle of it against your

temple.

“I determined to die at Pavlofsk at sunrise, in the park—so as to make

no commotion in the house.

“This ‘explanation’ will make the matter clear enough to the police.

Students of psychology, and anyone else who likes, may make what they

please of it. I should not like this paper, however, to be made public.

I request the prince to keep a copy himself, and to give a copy to

Aglaya Ivanovna Epanchin. This is my last will and testament. As for my

skeleton, I bequeath it to the Medical Academy for the benefit of

science.

“I recognize no jurisdiction over myself, and I know that I am now

beyond the power of laws and judges.

“A little while ago a very amusing idea struck me. What if I were now

to commit some terrible crime—murder ten fellow-creatures, for

instance, or anything else that is thought most shocking and dreadful

in this world—what a dilemma my judges would be in, with a criminal who

only has a fortnight to live in any case, now that the rack and other

forms of torture are abolished! Why, I should die comfortably in their

own hospital—in a warm, clean room, with an attentive doctor—probably

much more comfortably than I should at home.

“I don’t understand why people in my position do not oftener indulge in

such ideas—if only for a joke! Perhaps they do! Who knows! There are

plenty of merry souls among us!

“But though I do not recognize any jurisdiction over myself, still I

know that I shall be judged, when I am nothing but a voiceless lump of

clay; therefore I do not wish to go before I have left a word of

reply—the reply of a free man—not one forced to justify himself—oh no!

I have no need to ask forgiveness of anyone. I wish to say a word

merely because I happen to desire it of my own free will.

“Here, in the first place, comes a strange thought!

“Who, in the name of what Law, would think of disputing my full

personal right over the fortnight of life left to me? What jurisdiction

can be brought to bear upon the case? Who would wish me, not only to be

sentenced, but to endure the sentence to the end? Surely there exists

no man who would wish such a thing—why should anyone desire it? For the

sake of morality? Well, I can understand that if I were to make an

attempt upon my own life while in the enjoyment of full health and

vigour—my life which might have been ‘useful,’ etc., etc.—morality

might reproach me, according to the old routine, for disposing of my

life without permission—or whatever its tenet may be. But now, \_now\_,

when my sentence is out and my days numbered! How can morality have

need of my last breaths, and why should I die listening to the

consolations offered by the prince, who, without doubt, would not omit

to demonstrate that death is actually a benefactor to me? (Christians

like him always end up with that—it is their pet theory.) And what do

they want with their ridiculous ‘Pavlofsk trees’? To sweeten my last

hours? Cannot they understand that the more I forget myself, the more I

let myself become attached to these last illusions of life and love, by

means of which they try to hide from me Meyer’s wall, and all that is

so plainly written on it—the more unhappy they make me? What is the use

of all your nature to me—all your parks and trees, your sunsets and

sunrises, your blue skies and your self-satisfied faces—when all this

wealth of beauty and happiness begins with the fact that it accounts

me—only me—one too many! What is the good of all this beauty and glory

to me, when every second, every moment, I cannot but be aware that this

little fly which buzzes around my head in the sun’s rays—even this

little fly is a sharer and participator in all the glory of the

universe, and knows its place and is happy in it;—while I—only I, am an

outcast, and have been blind to the fact hitherto, thanks to my

simplicity! Oh! I know well how the prince and others would like me,

instead of indulging in all these wicked words of my own, to sing, to

the glory and triumph of morality, that well-known verse of Gilbert’s:

“‘O, puissent voir longtemps votre beauté sacrée

Tant d’amis, sourds à mes adieux!

Qu’ils meurent pleins de jours, que leur mort soit pleurée,

Qu’un ami leur ferme les yeux!’

“But believe me, believe me, my simple-hearted friends, that in this

highly moral verse, in this academical blessing to the world in general

in the French language, is hidden the intensest gall and bitterness;

but so well concealed is the venom, that I dare say the poet actually

persuaded himself that his words were full of the tears of pardon and

peace, instead of the bitterness of disappointment and malice, and so

died in the delusion.

“Do you know there is a limit of ignominy, beyond which man’s

consciousness of shame cannot go, and after which begins satisfaction

in shame? Well, of course humility is a great force in that sense, I

admit that—though not in the sense in which religion accounts humility

to be strength!

“Religion!—I admit eternal life—and perhaps I always did admit it.

“Admitted that consciousness is called into existence by the will of a

Higher Power; admitted that this consciousness looks out upon the world

and says ‘I am;’ and admitted that the Higher Power wills that the

consciousness so called into existence, be suddenly extinguished (for

so—for some unexplained reason—it is and must be)—still there comes the

eternal question—why must I be humble through all this? Is it not

enough that I am devoured, without my being expected to bless the power

that devours me? Surely—surely I need not suppose that

Somebody—there—will be offended because I do not wish to live out the

fortnight allowed me? I don’t believe it.

“It is much simpler, and far more likely, to believe that my death is

needed—the death of an insignificant atom—in order to fulfil the

general harmony of the universe—in order to make even some plus or

minus in the sum of existence. Just as every day the death of numbers

of beings is necessary because without their annihilation the rest

cannot live on—(although we must admit that the idea is not a

particularly grand one in itself!)

“However—admit the fact! Admit that without such perpetual devouring of

one another the world cannot continue to exist, or could never have

been organized—I am ever ready to confess that I cannot understand why

this is so—but I’ll tell you what I \_do\_ know, for certain. If I have

once been given to understand and realize that I \_am\_—what does it

matter to me that the world is organized on a system full of errors and

that otherwise it cannot be organized at all? Who will or can judge me

after this? Say what you like—the thing is impossible and unjust!

“And meanwhile I have never been able, in spite of my great desire to

do so, to persuade myself that there is no future existence, and no

Providence.

“The fact of the matter is that all this \_does\_ exist, but that we know

absolutely nothing about the future life and its laws!

“But it is so difficult, and even impossible to understand, that surely

I am not to be blamed because I could not fathom the incomprehensible?

“Of course I know they say that one must be obedient, and of course,

too, the prince is one of those who say so: that one must be obedient

without questions, out of pure goodness of heart, and that for my

worthy conduct in this matter I shall meet with reward in another

world. We degrade God when we attribute our own ideas to Him, out of

annoyance that we cannot fathom His ways.

“Again, I repeat, I cannot be blamed because I am unable to understand

that which it is not given to mankind to fathom. Why am I to be judged

because I could not comprehend the Will and Laws of Providence? No, we

had better drop religion.

“And enough of this. By the time I have got so far in the reading of my

document the sun will be up and the huge force of his rays will be

acting upon the living world. So be it. I shall die gazing straight at

the great Fountain of life and power; I do not want this life!

“If I had had the power to prevent my own birth I should certainly

never have consented to accept existence under such ridiculous

conditions. However, I have the power to end my existence, although I

do but give back days that are already numbered. It is an insignificant

gift, and my revolt is equally insignificant.

“Final explanation: I die, not in the least because I am unable to

support these next three weeks. Oh no, I should find strength enough,

and if I wished it I could obtain consolation from the thought of the

injury that is done me. But I am not a French poet, and I do not desire

such consolation. And finally, nature has so limited my capacity for

work or activity of any kind, in allotting me but three weeks of time,

that suicide is about the only thing left that I can begin and end in

the time of my own free will.

“Perhaps then I am anxious to take advantage of my last chance of doing

something for myself. A protest is sometimes no small thing.”

The explanation was finished; Hippolyte paused at last.

There is, in extreme cases, a final stage of cynical candour when a

nervous man, excited, and beside himself with emotion, will be afraid

of nothing and ready for any sort of scandal, nay, glad of it. The

extraordinary, almost unnatural, tension of the nerves which upheld

Hippolyte up to this point, had now arrived at this final stage. This

poor feeble boy of eighteen—exhausted by disease—looked for all the

world as weak and frail as a leaflet torn from its parent tree and

trembling in the breeze; but no sooner had his eye swept over his

audience, for the first time during the whole of the last hour, than

the most contemptuous, the most haughty expression of repugnance

lighted up his face. He defied them all, as it were. But his hearers

were indignant, too; they rose to their feet with annoyance. Fatigue,

the wine consumed, the strain of listening so long, all added to the

disagreeable impression which the reading had made upon them.

Suddenly Hippolyte jumped up as though he had been shot.

“The sun is rising,” he cried, seeing the gilded tops of the trees, and

pointing to them as to a miracle. “See, it is rising now!”

“Well, what then? Did you suppose it wasn’t going to rise?” asked

Ferdishenko.

“It’s going to be atrociously hot again all day,” said Gania, with an

air of annoyance, taking his hat. “A month of this... Are you coming

home, Ptitsin?” Hippolyte listened to this in amazement, almost

amounting to stupefaction. Suddenly he became deadly pale and

shuddered.

“You manage your composure too awkwardly. I see you wish to insult me,”

he cried to Gania. “You—you are a cur!” He looked at Gania with an

expression of malice.

“What on earth is the matter with the boy? What phenomenal

feeble-mindedness!” exclaimed Ferdishenko.

“Oh, he’s simply a fool,” said Gania.

Hippolyte braced himself up a little.

“I understand, gentlemen,” he began, trembling as before, and stumbling

over every word, “that I have deserved your resentment, and—and am

sorry that I should have troubled you with this raving nonsense”

(pointing to his article), “or rather, I am sorry that I have not

troubled you enough.” He smiled feebly. “Have I troubled you, Evgenie

Pavlovitch?” He suddenly turned on Evgenie with this question. “Tell me

now, have I troubled you or not?”

“Well, it was a little drawn out, perhaps; but—”

“Come, speak out! Don’t lie, for once in your life—speak out!”

continued Hippolyte, quivering with agitation.

“Oh, my good sir, I assure you it’s entirely the same to me. Please

leave me in peace,” said Evgenie, angrily, turning his back on him.

“Good-night, prince,” said Ptitsin, approaching his host.

“What are you thinking of? Don’t go, he’ll blow his brains out in a

minute!” cried Vera Lebedeff, rushing up to Hippolyte and catching hold

of his hands in a torment of alarm. “What are you thinking of? He said

he would blow his brains out at sunrise.”

“Oh, he won’t shoot himself!” cried several voices, sarcastically.

“Gentlemen, you’d better look out,” cried Colia, also seizing Hippolyte

by the hand. “Just look at him! Prince, what are you thinking of?” Vera

and Colia, and Keller, and Burdovsky were all crowding round Hippolyte

now and holding him down.

“He has the right—the right—” murmured Burdovsky. “Excuse me, prince,

but what are your arrangements?” asked Lebedeff, tipsy and exasperated,

going up to Muishkin.

“What do you mean by ‘arrangements’?”

“No, no, excuse me! I’m master of this house, though I do not wish to

lack respect towards you. You are master of the house too, in a way;

but I can’t allow this sort of thing—”

“He won’t shoot himself; the boy is only playing the fool,” said

General Ivolgin, suddenly and unexpectedly, with indignation.

“I know he won’t, I know he won’t, general; but I—I’m master here!”

“Listen, Mr. Terentieff,” said Ptitsin, who had bidden the prince

good-night, and was now holding out his hand to Hippolyte; “I think you

remark in that manuscript of yours, that you bequeath your skeleton to

the Academy. Are you referring to your own skeleton—I mean, your very

bones?”

“Yes, my bones, I—”

“Quite so, I see; because, you know, little mistakes have occurred now

and then. There was a case—”

“Why do you tease him?” cried the prince, suddenly.

“You’ve moved him to tears,” added Ferdishenko. But Hippolyte was by no

means weeping. He was about to move from his place, when his four

guards rushed at him and seized him once more. There was a laugh at

this.

“He led up to this on purpose. He took the trouble of writing all that

so that people should come and grab him by the arm,” observed Rogojin.

“Good-night, prince. What a time we’ve sat here, my very bones ache!”

“If you really intended to shoot yourself, Terentieff,” said Evgenie

Pavlovitch, laughing, “if I were you, after all these compliments, I

should just not shoot myself in order to vex them all.”

“They are very anxious to see me blow my brains out,” said Hippolyte,

bitterly.

“Yes, they’ll be awfully annoyed if they don’t see it.”

“Then you think they won’t see it?”

“I am not trying to egg you on. On the contrary, I think it very likely

that you may shoot yourself; but the principal thing is to keep cool,”

said Evgenie with a drawl, and with great condescension.

“I only now perceive what a terrible mistake I made in reading this

article to them,” said Hippolyte, suddenly, addressing Evgenie, and

looking at him with an expression of trust and confidence, as though he

were applying to a friend for counsel.

“Yes, it’s a droll situation; I really don’t know what advice to give

you,” replied Evgenie, laughing. Hippolyte gazed steadfastly at him,

but said nothing. To look at him one might have supposed that he was

unconscious at intervals.

“Excuse me,” said Lebedeff, “but did you observe the young gentleman’s

style? ‘I’ll go and blow my brains out in the park,’ says he, ‘so as

not to disturb anyone.’ He thinks he won’t disturb anybody if he goes

three yards away, into the park, and blows his brains out there.”

“Gentlemen—” began the prince.

“No, no, excuse me, most revered prince,” Lebedeff interrupted,

excitedly. “Since you must have observed yourself that this is no joke,

and since at least half your guests must also have concluded that after

all that has been said this youth \_must\_ blow his brains out for

honour’s sake—I—as master of this house, and before these witnesses,

now call upon you to take steps.”

“Yes, but what am I to do, Lebedeff? What steps am I to take? I am

ready.”

“I’ll tell you. In the first place he must immediately deliver up the

pistol which he boasted of, with all its appurtenances. If he does this

I shall consent to his being allowed to spend the night in this

house—considering his feeble state of health, and of course

conditionally upon his being under proper supervision. But tomorrow he

must go elsewhere. Excuse me, prince! Should he refuse to deliver up

his weapon, then I shall instantly seize one of his arms and General

Ivolgin the other, and we shall hold him until the police arrive and

take the matter into their own hands. Mr. Ferdishenko will kindly fetch

them.”

At this there was a dreadful noise; Lebedeff danced about in his

excitement; Ferdishenko prepared to go for the police; Gania

frantically insisted that it was all nonsense, “for nobody was going to

shoot themselves.” Evgenie Pavlovitch said nothing.

“Prince,” whispered Hippolyte, suddenly, his eyes all ablaze, “you

don’t suppose that I did not foresee all this hatred?” He looked at the

prince as though he expected him to reply, for a moment. “Enough!” he

added at length, and addressing the whole company, he cried: “It’s all

my fault, gentlemen! Lebedeff, here’s the key,” (he took out a small

bunch of keys); “this one, the last but one—Colia will show you—Colia,

where’s Colia?” he cried, looking straight at Colia and not seeing him.

“Yes, he’ll show you; he packed the bag with me this morning. Take him

up, Colia; my bag is upstairs in the prince’s study, under the table.

Here’s the key, and in the little case you’ll find my pistol and the

powder, and all. Colia packed it himself, Mr. Lebedeff; he’ll show you;

but it’s on condition that tomorrow morning, when I leave for

Petersburg, you will give me back my pistol, do you hear? I do this for

the prince’s sake, not yours.”

“Capital, that’s much better!” cried Lebedeff, and seizing the key he

made off in haste.

Colia stopped a moment as though he wished to say something; but

Lebedeff dragged him away.

Hippolyte looked around at the laughing guests. The prince observed

that his teeth were chattering as though in a violent attack of ague.

“What brutes they all are!” he whispered to the prince. Whenever he

addressed him he lowered his voice.

“Let them alone, you’re too weak now—”

“Yes, directly; I’ll go away directly. I’ll—”

Suddenly he embraced Muishkin.

“Perhaps you think I am mad, eh?” he asked him, laughing very

strangely.

“No, but you—”

“Directly, directly! Stand still a moment, I wish to look in your eyes;

don’t speak—stand so—let me look at you! I am bidding farewell to

mankind.”

He stood so for ten seconds, gazing at the prince, motionless, deadly

pale, his temples wet with perspiration; he held the prince’s hand in a

strange grip, as though afraid to let him go.

“Hippolyte, Hippolyte, what is the matter with you?” cried Muishkin.

“Directly! There, that’s enough. I’ll lie down directly. I must drink

to the sun’s health. I wish to—I insist upon it! Let go!”

He seized a glass from the table, broke away from the prince, and in a

moment had reached the terrace steps.

The prince made after him, but it so happened that at this moment

Evgenie Pavlovitch stretched out his hand to say good-night. The next

instant there was a general outcry, and then followed a few moments of

indescribable excitement.

Reaching the steps, Hippolyte had paused, holding the glass in his left

hand while he put his right hand into his coat pocket.

Keller insisted afterwards that he had held his right hand in his

pocket all the while, when he was speaking to the prince, and that he

had held the latter’s shoulder with his left hand only. This

circumstance, Keller affirmed, had led him to feel some suspicion from

the first. However this may be, Keller ran after Hippolyte, but he was

too late.

He caught sight of something flashing in Hippolyte’s right hand, and

saw that it was a pistol. He rushed at him, but at that very instant

Hippolyte raised the pistol to his temple and pulled the trigger. There

followed a sharp metallic click, but no report.

When Keller seized the would-be suicide, the latter fell forward into

his arms, probably actually believing that he was shot. Keller had hold

of the pistol now. Hippolyte was immediately placed in a chair, while

the whole company thronged around excitedly, talking and asking each

other questions. Every one of them had heard the snap of the trigger,

and yet they saw a live and apparently unharmed man before them.

Hippolyte himself sat quite unconscious of what was going on, and gazed

around with a senseless expression.

Lebedeff and Colia came rushing up at this moment.

“What is it?” someone asked, breathlessly—“A misfire?”

“Perhaps it wasn’t loaded,” said several voices.

“It’s loaded all right,” said Keller, examining the pistol, “but—”

“What! did it miss fire?”

“There was no cap in it,” Keller announced.

It would be difficult to describe the pitiable scene that now followed.

The first sensation of alarm soon gave place to amusement; some burst

out laughing loud and heartily, and seemed to find a malicious

satisfaction in the joke. Poor Hippolyte sobbed hysterically; he wrung

his hands; he approached everyone in turn—even Ferdishenko—and took

them by both hands, and swore solemnly that he had forgotten—absolutely

forgotten—“accidentally, and not on purpose,”—to put a cap in—that he

“had ten of them, at least, in his pocket.” He pulled them out and

showed them to everyone; he protested that he had not liked to put one

in beforehand for fear of an accidental explosion in his pocket. That

he had thought he would have lots of time to put it in afterwards—when

required—and, that, in the heat of the moment, he had forgotten all

about it. He threw himself upon the prince, then on Evgenie Pavlovitch.

He entreated Keller to give him back the pistol, and he’d soon show

them all that “his honour—his honour,”—but he was “dishonoured, now,

for ever!”

He fell senseless at last—and was carried into the prince’s study.

Lebedeff, now quite sobered down, sent for a doctor; and he and his

daughter, with Burdovsky and General Ivolgin, remained by the sick

man’s couch.

When he was carried away unconscious, Keller stood in the middle of the

room, and made the following declaration to the company in general, in

a loud tone of voice, with emphasis upon each word.

“Gentlemen, if any one of you casts any doubt again, before me, upon

Hippolyte’s good faith, or hints that the cap was forgotten

intentionally, or suggests that this unhappy boy was acting a part

before us, I beg to announce that the person so speaking shall account

to me for his words.”

No one replied.

The company departed very quickly, in a mass. Ptitsin, Gania, and

Rogojin went away together.

The prince was much astonished that Evgenie Pavlovitch changed his

mind, and took his departure without the conversation he had requested.

“Why, you wished to have a talk with me when the others left?” he said.

“Quite so,” said Evgenie, sitting down suddenly beside him, “but I have

changed my mind for the time being. I confess, I am too disturbed, and

so, I think, are you; and the matter as to which I wished to consult

you is too serious to tackle with one’s mind even a little disturbed;

too serious both for myself and for you. You see, prince, for once in

my life I wish to perform an absolutely honest action, that is, an

action with no ulterior motive; and I think I am hardly in a condition

to talk of it just at this moment, and—and—well, we’ll discuss it

another time. Perhaps the matter may gain in clearness if we wait for

two or three days—just the two or three days which I must spend in

Petersburg.”

Here he rose again from his chair, so that it seemed strange that he

should have thought it worth while to sit down at all.

The prince thought, too, that he looked vexed and annoyed, and not

nearly so friendly towards himself as he had been earlier in the night.

“I suppose you will go to the sufferer’s bedside now?” he added.

“Yes, I am afraid...” began the prince.

“Oh, you needn’t fear! He’ll live another six weeks all right. Very

likely he will recover altogether; but I strongly advise you to pack

him off tomorrow.”

“I think I may have offended him by saying nothing just now. I am

afraid he may suspect that I doubted his good faith,—about shooting

himself, you know. What do you think, Evgenie Pavlovitch?”

“Not a bit of it! You are much too good to him; you shouldn’t care a

hang about what he thinks. I have heard of such things before, but

never came across, till tonight, a man who would actually shoot himself

in order to gain a vulgar notoriety, or blow out his brains for spite,

if he finds that people don’t care to pat him on the back for his

sanguinary intentions. But what astonishes me more than anything is the

fellow’s candid confession of weakness. You’d better get rid of him

tomorrow, in any case.”

“Do you think he will make another attempt?”

“Oh no, not he, not now! But you have to be very careful with this sort

of gentleman. Crime is too often the last resource of these petty

nonentities. This young fellow is quite capable of cutting the throats

of ten people, simply for a lark, as he told us in his ‘explanation.’ I

assure you those confounded words of his will not let me sleep.”

“I think you disturb yourself too much.”

“What an extraordinary person you are, prince! Do you mean to say that

you doubt the fact that he is capable of murdering ten men?”

“I daren’t say, one way or the other; all this is very strange—but—”

“Well, as you like, just as you like,” said Evgenie Pavlovitch,

irritably. “Only you are such a plucky fellow, take care you don’t get

included among the ten victims!”

“Oh, he is much more likely not to kill anyone at all,” said the

prince, gazing thoughtfully at Evgenie. The latter laughed

disagreeably.

“Well, \_au revoir!\_ Did you observe that he ‘willed’ a copy of his

confession to Aglaya Ivanovna?”

“Yes, I did; I am thinking of it.”

“In connection with ‘the ten,’ eh?” laughed Evgenie, as he left the

room.

An hour later, towards four o’clock, the prince went into the park. He

had endeavoured to fall asleep, but could not, owing to the painful

beating of his heart.

He had left things quiet and peaceful; the invalid was fast asleep, and

the doctor, who had been called in, had stated that there was no

special danger. Lebedeff, Colia, and Burdovsky were lying down in the

sick-room, ready to take it in turns to watch. There was nothing to

fear, therefore, at home.

But the prince’s mental perturbation increased every moment. He

wandered about the park, looking absently around him, and paused in

astonishment when he suddenly found himself in the empty space with the

rows of chairs round it, near the Vauxhall. The look of the place

struck him as dreadful now: so he turned round and went by the path

which he had followed with the Epanchins on the way to the band, until

he reached the green bench which Aglaya had pointed out for their

rendezvous. He sat down on it and suddenly burst into a loud fit of

laughter, immediately followed by a feeling of irritation. His

disturbance of mind continued; he felt that he must go away somewhere,

anywhere.

Above his head some little bird sang out, of a sudden; he began to peer

about for it among the leaves. Suddenly the bird darted out of the tree

and away, and instantly he thought of the “fly buzzing about in the

sun’s rays” that Hippolyte had talked of; how that it knew its place

and was a participator in the universal life, while he alone was an

“outcast.” This picture had impressed him at the time, and he meditated

upon it now. An old, forgotten memory awoke in his brain, and suddenly

burst into clearness and light. It was a recollection of Switzerland,

during the first year of his cure, the very first months. At that time

he had been pretty nearly an idiot still; he could not speak properly,

and had difficulty in understanding when others spoke to him. He

climbed the mountain-side, one sunny morning, and wandered long and

aimlessly with a certain thought in his brain, which would not become

clear. Above him was the blazing sky, below, the lake; all around was

the horizon, clear and infinite. He looked out upon this, long and

anxiously. He remembered how he had stretched out his arms towards the

beautiful, boundless blue of the horizon, and wept, and wept. What had

so tormented him was the idea that he was a stranger to all this, that

he was outside this glorious festival.

What was this universe? What was this grand, eternal pageant to which

he had yearned from his childhood up, and in which he could never take

part? Every morning the same magnificent sun; every morning the same

rainbow in the waterfall; every evening the same glow on the

snow-mountains.

Every little fly that buzzed in the sun’s rays was a singer in the

universal chorus, “knew its place, and was happy in it.” Every blade of

grass grew and was happy. Everything knew its path and loved it, went

forth with a song and returned with a song; only he knew nothing,

understood nothing, neither men nor words, nor any of nature’s voices;

he was a stranger and an outcast.

Oh, he could not then speak these words, or express all he felt! He had

been tormented dumbly; but now it appeared to him that he must have

said these very words—even then—and that Hippolyte must have taken his

picture of the little fly from his tears and words of that time.

He was sure of it, and his heart beat excitedly at the thought, he knew

not why.

He fell asleep on the bench; but his mental disquiet continued through

his slumbers.

Just before he dozed off, the idea of Hippolyte murdering ten men

flitted through his brain, and he smiled at the absurdity of such a

thought.

Around him all was quiet; only the flutter and whisper of the leaves

broke the silence, but broke it only to cause it to appear yet more

deep and still.

He dreamed many dreams as he sat there, and all were full of disquiet,

so that he shuddered every moment.

At length a woman seemed to approach him. He knew her, oh! he knew her

only too well. He could always name her and recognize her anywhere;

but, strange, she seemed to have quite a different face from hers, as

he had known it, and he felt a tormenting desire to be able to say she

was not the same woman. In the face before him there was such dreadful

remorse and horror that he thought she must be a criminal, that she

must have just committed some awful crime.

Tears were trembling on her white cheek. She beckoned him, but placed

her finger on her lip as though to warn him that he must follow her

very quietly. His heart froze within him. He wouldn’t, he \_couldn’t\_

confess her to be a criminal, and yet he felt that something dreadful

would happen the next moment, something which would blast his whole

life.

She seemed to wish to show him something, not far off, in the park.

He rose from his seat in order to follow her, when a bright, clear peal

of laughter rang out by his side. He felt somebody’s hand suddenly in

his own, seized it, pressed it hard, and awoke. Before him stood

Aglaya, laughing aloud.

VIII.

She laughed, but she was rather angry too.

“He’s asleep! You were asleep,” she said, with contemptuous surprise.

“Is it really you?” muttered the prince, not quite himself as yet, and

recognizing her with a start of amazement. “Oh yes, of course,” he

added, “this is our rendezvous. I fell asleep here.”

“So I saw.”

“Did no one awake me besides yourself? Was there no one else here? I

thought there was another woman.”

“There was another woman here?”

At last he was wide awake.

“It was a dream, of course,” he said, musingly. “Strange that I should

have a dream like that at such a moment. Sit down—”

He took her hand and seated her on the bench; then sat down beside her

and reflected.

Aglaya did not begin the conversation, but contented herself with

watching her companion intently.

He looked back at her, but at times it was clear that he did not see

her and was not thinking of her.

Aglaya began to flush up.

“Oh yes!” cried the prince, starting. “Hippolyte’s suicide—”

“What? At your house?” she asked, but without much surprise. “He was

alive yesterday evening, wasn’t he? How could you sleep here after

that?” she cried, growing suddenly animated.

“Oh, but he didn’t kill himself; the pistol didn’t go off.” Aglaya

insisted on hearing the whole story. She hurried the prince along, but

interrupted him with all sorts of questions, nearly all of which were

irrelevant. Among other things, she seemed greatly interested in every

word that Evgenie Pavlovitch had said, and made the prince repeat that

part of the story over and over again.

“Well, that’ll do; we must be quick,” she concluded, after hearing all.

“We have only an hour here, till eight; I must be home by then without

fail, so that they may not find out that I came and sat here with you;

but I’ve come on business. I have a great deal to say to you. But you

have bowled me over considerably with your news. As to Hippolyte, I

think his pistol was bound not to go off; it was more consistent with

the whole affair. Are you sure he really wished to blow his brains out,

and that there was no humbug about the matter?”

“No humbug at all.”

“Very likely. So he wrote that you were to bring me a copy of his

confession, did he? Why didn’t you bring it?”

“Why, he didn’t die! I’ll ask him for it, if you like.”

“Bring it by all means; you needn’t ask him. He will be delighted, you

may be sure; for, in all probability, he shot at himself simply in

order that I might read his confession. Don’t laugh at what I say,

please, Lef Nicolaievitch, because it may very well be the case.”

“I’m not laughing. I am convinced, myself, that that may have been

partly the reason.”

“You are convinced? You don’t really mean to say you think that

honestly?” asked Aglaya, extremely surprised.

She put her questions very quickly and talked fast, every now and then

forgetting what she had begun to say, and not finishing her sentence.

She seemed to be impatient to warn the prince about something or other.

She was in a state of unusual excitement, and though she put on a brave

and even defiant air, she seemed to be rather alarmed. She was dressed

very simply, but this suited her well. She continually trembled and

blushed, and she sat on the very edge of the seat.

The fact that the prince confirmed her idea, about Hippolyte shooting

himself that she might read his confession, surprised her greatly.

“Of course,” added the prince, “he wished us all to applaud his

conduct—besides yourself.”

“How do you mean—applaud?”

“Well—how am I to explain? He was very anxious that we should all come

around him, and say we were so sorry for him, and that we loved him

very much, and all that; and that we hoped he wouldn’t kill himself,

but remain alive. Very likely he thought more of you than the rest of

us, because he mentioned you at such a moment, though perhaps he did

not know himself that he had you in his mind’s eye.”

“I don’t understand you. How could he have me in view, and not be aware

of it himself? And yet, I don’t know—perhaps I do. Do you know I have

intended to poison myself at least thirty times—ever since I was

thirteen or so—and to write to my parents before I did it? I used to

think how nice it would be to lie in my coffin, and have them all

weeping over me and saying it was all their fault for being so cruel,

and all that—what are you smiling at?” she added, knitting her brow.

“What do \_you\_ think of when you go mooning about alone? I suppose you

imagine yourself a field-marshal, and think you have conquered

Napoleon?”

“Well, I really have thought something of the sort now and then,

especially when just dozing off,” laughed the prince. “Only it is the

Austrians whom I conquer—not Napoleon.”

“I don’t wish to joke with you, Lef Nicolaievitch. I shall see

Hippolyte myself. Tell him so. As for you, I think you are behaving

very badly, because it is not right to judge a man’s soul as you are

judging Hippolyte’s. You have no gentleness, but only justice—so you

are unjust.”

The prince reflected.

“I think you are unfair towards me,” he said. “There is nothing wrong

in the thoughts I ascribe to Hippolyte; they are only natural. But of

course I don’t know for certain what he thought. Perhaps he thought

nothing, but simply longed to see human faces once more, and to hear

human praise and feel human affection. Who knows? Only it all came out

wrong, somehow. Some people have luck, and everything comes out right

with them; others have none, and never a thing turns out fortunately.”

“I suppose you have felt that in your own case,” said Aglaya.

“Yes, I have,” replied the prince, quite unsuspicious of any irony in

the remark.

“H’m—well, at all events, I shouldn’t have fallen asleep here, in your

place. It wasn’t nice of you, that. I suppose you fall asleep wherever

you sit down?”

“But I didn’t sleep a wink all night. I walked and walked about, and

went to where the music was—”

“What music?”

“Where they played last night. Then I found this bench and sat down,

and thought and thought—and at last I fell fast asleep.”

“Oh, is that it? That makes a difference, perhaps. What did you go to

the bandstand for?”

“I don’t know; I—”

“Very well—afterwards. You are always interrupting me. What woman was

it you were dreaming about?”

“It was—about—you saw her—”

“Quite so; I understand. I understand quite well. You are very—Well,

how did she appear to you? What did she look like? No, I don’t want to

know anything about her,” said Aglaya, angrily; “don’t interrupt me—”

She paused a moment as though getting breath, or trying to master her

feeling of annoyance.

“Look here; this is what I called you here for. I wish to make you a—to

ask you to be my friend. What do you stare at me like that for?” she

added, almost angrily.

The prince certainly had darted a rather piercing look at her, and now

observed that she had begun to blush violently. At such moments, the

more Aglaya blushed, the angrier she grew with herself; and this was

clearly expressed in her eyes, which flashed like fire. As a rule, she

vented her wrath on her unfortunate companion, be it who it might. She

was very conscious of her own shyness, and was not nearly so talkative

as her sisters for this reason—in fact, at times she was much too

quiet. When, therefore, she was bound to talk, especially at such

delicate moments as this, she invariably did so with an air of haughty

defiance. She always knew beforehand when she was going to blush, long

before the blush came.

“Perhaps you do not wish to accept my proposition?” she asked, gazing

haughtily at the prince.

“Oh yes, I do; but it is so unnecessary. I mean, I did not think you

need make such a proposition,” said the prince, looking confused.

“What did you suppose, then? Why did you think I invited you out here?

I suppose you think me a ‘little fool,’ as they all call me at home?”

“I didn’t know they called you a fool. I certainly don’t think you

one.”

“You don’t think me one! Oh, dear me!—that’s very clever of you; you

put it so neatly, too.”

“In my opinion, you are far from a fool sometimes—in fact, you are very

intelligent. You said a very clever thing just now about my being

unjust because I had \_only\_ justice. I shall remember that, and think

about it.”

Aglaya blushed with pleasure. All these changes in her expression came

about so naturally and so rapidly—they delighted the prince; he watched

her, and laughed.

“Listen,” she began again; “I have long waited to tell you all this,

ever since the time when you sent me that letter—even before that. Half

of what I have to say you heard yesterday. I consider you the most

honest and upright of men—more honest and upright than any other man;

and if anybody says that your mind is—is sometimes affected, you

know—it is unfair. I always say so and uphold it, because even if your

surface mind be a little affected (of course you will not feel angry

with me for talking so—I am speaking from a higher point of view) yet

your real mind is far better than all theirs put together. Such a mind

as they have never even \_dreamed\_ of; because really, there are \_two\_

minds—the kind that matters, and the kind that doesn’t matter. Isn’t it

so?”

“May be! may be so!” said the prince, faintly; his heart was beating

painfully.

“I knew you would not misunderstand me,” she said, triumphantly.

“Prince S. and Evgenie Pavlovitch and Alexandra don’t understand

anything about these two kinds of mind, but, just fancy, mamma does!”

“You are very like Lizabetha Prokofievna.”

“What! surely not?” said Aglaya.

“Yes, you are, indeed.”

“Thank you; I am glad to be like mamma,” she said, thoughtfully. “You

respect her very much, don’t you?” she added, quite unconscious of the

naiveness of the question.

“\_Very\_ much; and I am so glad that you have realized the fact.”

“I am very glad, too, because she is often laughed at by people. But

listen to the chief point. I have long thought over the matter, and at

last I have chosen you. I don’t wish people to laugh at me; I don’t

wish people to think me a ‘little fool.’ I don’t want to be chaffed. I

felt all this of a sudden, and I refused Evgenie Pavlovitch flatly,

because I am not going to be forever thrown at people’s heads to be

married. I want—I want—well, I’ll tell you, I wish to run away from

home, and I have chosen you to help me.”

“Run away from home?” cried the prince.

“Yes—yes—yes! Run away from home!” she repeated, in a transport of

rage. “I won’t, I won’t be made to blush every minute by them all! I

don’t want to blush before Prince S. or Evgenie Pavlovitch, or anyone,

and therefore I have chosen you. I shall tell you everything,

\_everything\_, even the most important things of all, whenever I like,

and you are to hide nothing from me on your side. I want to speak to at

least one person, as I would to myself. They have suddenly begun to say

that I am waiting for you, and in love with you. They began this before

you arrived here, and so I didn’t show them the letter, and now they

all say it, every one of them. I want to be brave, and be afraid of

nobody. I don’t want to go to their balls and things—I want to do good.

I have long desired to run away, for I have been kept shut up for

twenty years, and they are always trying to marry me off. I wanted to

run away when I was fourteen years old—I was a little fool then, I

know—but now I have worked it all out, and I have waited for you to

tell me about foreign countries. I have never seen a single Gothic

cathedral. I must go to Rome; I must see all the museums; I must study

in Paris. All this last year I have been preparing and reading

forbidden books. Alexandra and Adelaida are allowed to read anything

they like, but I mayn’t. I don’t want to quarrel with my sisters, but I

told my parents long ago that I wish to change my social position. I

have decided to take up teaching, and I count on you because you said

you loved children. Can we go in for education together—if not at once,

then afterwards? We could do good together. I won’t be a general’s

daughter any more! Tell me, are you a very learned man?”

“Oh no; not at all.”

“Oh-h-h! I’m sorry for that. I thought you were. I wonder why I always

thought so—but at all events you’ll help me, won’t you? Because I’ve

chosen you, you know.”

“Aglaya Ivanovna, it’s absurd.”

“But I will, I \_will\_ run away!” she cried—and her eyes flashed again

with anger—“and if you don’t agree I shall go and marry Gavrila

Ardalionovitch! I won’t be considered a horrible girl, and accused of

goodness knows what.”

“Are you out of your mind?” cried the prince, almost starting from his

seat. “What do they accuse you of? Who accuses you?”

“At home, everybody, mother, my sisters, Prince S., even that

detestable Colia! If they don’t say it, they think it. I told them all

so to their faces. I told mother and father and everybody. Mamma was

ill all the day after it, and next day father and Alexandra told me

that I didn’t understand what nonsense I was talking. I informed them

that they little knew me—I was not a small child—I understood every

word in the language—that I had read a couple of Paul de Kok’s novels

two years since on purpose, so as to know all about everything. No

sooner did mamma hear me say this than she nearly fainted!”

A strange thought passed through the prince’s brain; he gazed intently

at Aglaya and smiled.

He could not believe that this was the same haughty young girl who had

once so proudly shown him Gania’s letter. He could not understand how

that proud and austere beauty could show herself to be such an utter

child—a child who probably did not even now understand some words.

“Have you always lived at home, Aglaya Ivanovna?” he asked. “I mean,

have you never been to school, or college, or anything?”

“No—never—nowhere! I’ve been at home all my life, corked up in a

bottle; and they expect me to be married straight out of it. What are

you laughing at again? I observe that you, too, have taken to laughing

at me, and range yourself on their side against me,” she added,

frowning angrily. “Don’t irritate me—I’m bad enough without that—I

don’t know what I am doing sometimes. I am persuaded that you came here

today in the full belief that I am in love with you, and that I

arranged this meeting because of that,” she cried, with annoyance.

“I admit I was afraid that that was the case, yesterday,” blundered the

prince (he was rather confused), “but today I am quite convinced that—”

“How?” cried Aglaya—and her lower lip trembled violently. “You were

\_afraid\_ that I—you dared to think that I—good gracious! you suspected,

perhaps, that I sent for you to come here in order to catch you in a

trap, so that they should find us here together, and make you marry

me—”

“Aglaya Ivanovna, aren’t you ashamed of saying such a thing? How could

such a horrible idea enter your sweet, innocent heart? I am certain you

don’t believe a word of what you say, and probably you don’t even know

what you are talking about.”

Aglaya sat with her eyes on the ground; she seemed to have alarmed even

herself by what she had said.

“No, I’m not; I’m not a bit ashamed!” she murmured. “And how do you

know my heart is innocent? And how dared you send me a love-letter that

time?”

“\_Love-letter?\_ My letter a love-letter? That letter was the most

respectful of letters; it went straight from my heart, at what was

perhaps the most painful moment of my life! I thought of you at the

time as a kind of light. I—”

“Well, very well, very well!” she said, but quite in a different tone.

She was remorseful now, and bent forward to touch his shoulder, though

still trying not to look him in the face, as if the more persuasively

to beg him not to be angry with her. “Very well,” she continued,

looking thoroughly ashamed of herself, “I feel that I said a very

foolish thing. I only did it just to try you. Take it as unsaid, and if

I offended you, forgive me. Don’t look straight at me like that,

please; turn your head away. You called it a ‘horrible idea’; I only

said it to shock you. Very often I am myself afraid of saying what I

intend to say, and out it comes all the same. You have just told me

that you wrote that letter at the most painful moment of your life. I

know what moment that was!” she added softly, looking at the ground

again.

“Oh, if you could know all!”

“I \_do\_ know all!” she cried, with another burst of indignation. “You

were living in the same house as that horrible woman with whom you ran

away.” She did not blush as she said this; on the contrary, she grew

pale, and started from her seat, apparently oblivious of what she did,

and immediately sat down again. Her lip continued to tremble for a long

time.

There was silence for a moment. The prince was taken aback by the

suddenness of this last reply, and did not know to what he should

attribute it.

“I don’t love you a bit!” she said suddenly, just as though the words

had exploded from her mouth.

The prince did not answer, and there was silence again. “I love Gavrila

Ardalionovitch,” she said, quickly; but hardly audibly, and with her

head bent lower than ever.

“That is \_not\_ true,” said the prince, in an equally low voice.

“What! I tell stories, do I? It is true! I gave him my promise a couple

of days ago on this very seat.”

The prince was startled, and reflected for a moment.

“It is not true,” he repeated, decidedly; “you have just invented it!”

“You are wonderfully polite. You know he is greatly improved. He loves

me better than his life. He let his hand burn before my very eyes in

order to prove to me that he loved me better than his life!”

“He burned his hand!”

“Yes, believe it or not! It’s all the same to me!”

The prince sat silent once more. Aglaya did not seem to be joking; she

was too angry for that.

“What! he brought a candle with him to this place? That is, if the

episode happened here; otherwise I can’t.”

“Yes, a candle! What’s there improbable about that?”

“A whole one, and in a candlestick?”

“Yes—no—half a candle—an end, you know—no, it was a whole candle; it’s

all the same. Be quiet, can’t you! He brought a box of matches too, if

you like, and then lighted the candle and held his finger in it for

half an hour and more!—There! Can’t that be?”

“I saw him yesterday, and his fingers were all right!”

Aglaya suddenly burst out laughing, as simply as a child.

“Do you know why I have just told you these lies?” She appealed to the

prince, of a sudden, with the most childlike candour, and with the

laugh still trembling on her lips. “Because when one tells a lie, if

one insists on something unusual and eccentric—something too ‘out of

the way’ for anything, you know—the more impossible the thing is, the

more plausible does the lie sound. I’ve noticed this. But I managed it

badly; I didn’t know how to work it.” She suddenly frowned again at

this point as though at some sudden unpleasant recollection.

“If”—she began, looking seriously and even sadly at him—“if when I read

you all that about the ‘poor knight,’ I wished to-to praise you for one

thing—I also wished to show you that I knew all—and did not approve of

your conduct.”

“You are very unfair to me, and to that unfortunate woman of whom you

spoke just now in such dreadful terms, Aglaya.”

“Because I know all, all—and that is why I speak so. I know very well

how you—half a year since—offered her your hand before everybody. Don’t

interrupt me. You see, I am merely stating facts without any comment

upon them. After that she ran away with Rogojin. Then you lived with

her at some village or town, and she ran away from you.” (Aglaya

blushed dreadfully.) “Then she returned to Rogojin again, who loves her

like a madman. Then you—like a wise man as you are—came back here after

her as soon as ever you heard that she had returned to Petersburg.

Yesterday evening you sprang forward to protect her, and just now you

dreamed about her. You see, I know all. You did come back here for her,

for her—now didn’t you?”

“Yes—for her!” said the prince softly and sadly, and bending his head

down, quite unconscious of the fact that Aglaya was gazing at him with

eyes which burned like live coals. “I came to find out something—I

don’t believe in her future happiness as Rogojin’s wife, although—in a

word, I did not know how to help her or what to do for her—but I came,

on the chance.”

He glanced at Aglaya, who was listening with a look of hatred on her

face.

“If you came without knowing why, I suppose you love her very much

indeed!” she said at last.

“No,” said the prince, “no, I do not love her. Oh! if you only knew

with what horror I recall the time I spent with her!”

A shudder seemed to sweep over his whole body at the recollection.

“Tell me about it,” said Aglaya.

“There is nothing which you might not hear. Why I should wish to tell

you, and only you, this experience of mine, I really cannot say;

perhaps it really is because I love you very much. This unhappy woman

is persuaded that she is the most hopeless, fallen creature in the

world. Oh, do not condemn her! Do not cast stones at her! She has

suffered too much already in the consciousness of her own undeserved

shame.

“And she is not guilty—oh God!—Every moment she bemoans and bewails

herself, and cries out that she does not admit any guilt, that she is

the victim of circumstances—the victim of a wicked libertine.

“But whatever she may say, remember that she does not believe it

herself,—remember that she will believe nothing but that she is a

guilty creature.

“When I tried to rid her soul of this gloomy fallacy, she suffered so

terribly that my heart will never be quite at peace so long as I can

remember that dreadful time!—Do you know why she left me? Simply to

prove to me what is not true—that she is base. But the worst of it is,

she did not realize herself that that was all she wanted to prove by

her departure! She went away in response to some inner prompting to do

something disgraceful, in order that she might say to

herself—‘There—you’ve done a new act of shame—you degraded creature!’

“Oh, Aglaya—perhaps you cannot understand all this. Try to realize that

in the perpetual admission of guilt she probably finds some dreadful

unnatural satisfaction—as though she were revenging herself upon

someone.

“Now and then I was able to persuade her almost to see light around her

again; but she would soon fall, once more, into her old tormenting

delusions, and would go so far as to reproach me for placing myself on

a pedestal above her (I never had an idea of such a thing!), and

informed me, in reply to my proposal of marriage, that she ‘did not

want condescending sympathy or help from anybody.’ You saw her last

night. You don’t suppose she can be happy among such people as

those—you cannot suppose that such society is fit for her? You have no

idea how well-educated she is, and what an intellect she has! She

astonished me sometimes.”

“And you preached her sermons there, did you?”

“Oh no,” continued the prince thoughtfully, not noticing Aglaya’s

mocking tone, “I was almost always silent there. I often wished to

speak, but I really did not know what to say. In some cases it is best

to say nothing, I think. I loved her, yes, I loved her very much

indeed; but afterwards—afterwards she guessed all.”

“What did she guess?”

“That I only \_pitied\_ her—and—and loved her no longer!”

“How do you know that? How do you know that she is not really in love

with that—that rich cad—the man she eloped with?”

“Oh no! I know she only laughs at him; she has made a fool of him all

along.”

“Has she never laughed at you?”

“No—in anger, perhaps. Oh yes! she reproached me dreadfully in anger;

and suffered herself, too! But afterwards—oh! don’t remind me—don’t

remind me of that!”

He hid his face in his hands.

“Are you aware that she writes to me almost every day?”

“So that is true, is it?” cried the prince, greatly agitated. “I had

heard a report of it, but would not believe it.”

“Whom did you hear it from?” asked Aglaya, alarmed. “Rogojin said

something about it yesterday, but nothing definite.”

“Yesterday! Morning or evening? Before the music or after?”

“After—it was about twelve o’clock.”

“Ah! Well, if it was Rogojin—but do you know what she writes to me

about?”

“I should not be surprised by anything. She is mad!”

“There are the letters.” (Aglaya took three letters out of her pocket

and threw them down before the prince.) “For a whole week she has been

entreating and worrying and persuading me to marry you. She—well, she

is clever, though she may be mad—much cleverer than I am, as you say.

Well, she writes that she is in love with me herself, and tries to see

me every day, if only from a distance. She writes that you love me, and

that she has long known it and seen it, and that you and she talked

about me—there. She wishes to see you happy, and she says that she is

certain only I can ensure you the happiness you deserve. She writes

such strange, wild letters—I haven’t shown them to anyone. Now, do you

know what all this means? Can you guess anything?”

“It is madness—it is merely another proof of her insanity!” said the

prince, and his lips trembled.

“You are crying, aren’t you?”

“No, Aglaya. No, I’m not crying.” The prince looked at her.

“Well, what am I to do? What do you advise me? I cannot go on receiving

these letters, you know.”

“Oh, let her alone, I entreat you!” cried the prince. “What can you do

in this dark, gloomy mystery? Let her alone, and I’ll use all my power

to prevent her writing you any more letters.”

“If so, you are a heartless man!” cried Aglaya. “As if you can’t see

that it is not myself she loves, but you, you, and only you! Surely you

have not remarked everything else in her, and only not \_this?\_ Do you

know what these letters mean? They mean jealousy, sir—nothing but pure

jealousy! She—do you think she will ever really marry this Rogojin, as

she says here she will? She would take her own life the day after you

and I were married.”

The prince shuddered; his heart seemed to freeze within him. He gazed

at Aglaya in wonderment; it was difficult for him to realize that this

child was also a woman.

“God knows, Aglaya, that to restore her peace of mind and make her

happy I would willingly give up my life. But I cannot love her, and she

knows that.”

“Oh, make a sacrifice of yourself! That sort of thing becomes you well,

you know. Why not do it? And don’t call me ‘Aglaya’; you have done it

several times lately. You are bound, it is your \_duty\_ to ‘raise’ her;

you must go off somewhere again to soothe and pacify her. Why, you love

her, you know!”

“I cannot sacrifice myself so, though I admit I did wish to do so once.

Who knows, perhaps I still wish to! But I know for \_certain\_, that if

she married me it would be her ruin; I know this and therefore I leave

her alone. I ought to go to see her today; now I shall probably not go.

She is proud, she would never forgive me the nature of the love I bear

her, and we should both be ruined. This may be unnatural, I don’t know;

but everything seems unnatural. You say she loves me, as if this were

\_love!\_ As if she could love \_me\_, after what I have been through! No,

no, it is not love.”

“How pale you have grown!” cried Aglaya in alarm.

“Oh, it’s nothing. I haven’t slept, that’s all, and I’m rather tired.

I—we certainly did talk about you, Aglaya.”

“Oh, indeed, it is true then! \_You could actually talk about me with

her\_; and—and how could you have been fond of me when you had only seen

me once?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps it was that I seemed to come upon light in the

midst of my gloom. I told you the truth when I said I did not know why

I thought of you before all others. Of course it was all a sort of

dream, a dream amidst the horrors of reality. Afterwards I began to

work. I did not intend to come back here for two or three years—”

“Then you came for her sake?” Aglaya’s voice trembled.

“Yes, I came for her sake.”

There was a moment or two of gloomy silence. Aglaya rose from her seat.

“If you say,” she began in shaky tones, “if you say that this woman of

yours is mad—at all events I have nothing to do with her insane

fancies. Kindly take these three letters, Lef Nicolaievitch, and throw

them back to her, from me. And if she dares,” cried Aglaya suddenly,

much louder than before, “if she dares so much as write me one word

again, tell her I shall tell my father, and that she shall be taken to

a lunatic asylum.”

The prince jumped up in alarm at Aglaya’s sudden wrath, and a mist

seemed to come before his eyes.

“You cannot really feel like that! You don’t mean what you say. It is

not true,” he murmured.

“It \_is\_ true, it \_is\_ true,” cried Aglaya, almost beside herself with

rage.

“What’s true? What’s all this? What’s true?” said an alarmed voice just

beside them.

Before them stood Lizabetha Prokofievna.

“Why, it’s true that I am going to marry Gavrila Ardalionovitch, that I

love him and intend to elope with him tomorrow,” cried Aglaya, turning

upon her mother. “Do you hear? Is your curiosity satisfied? Are you

pleased with what you have heard?”

Aglaya rushed away homewards with these words.

“H’m! well, \_you\_ are not going away just yet, my friend, at all

events,” said Lizabetha, stopping the prince. “Kindly step home with

me, and let me have a little explanation of the mystery. Nice goings

on, these! I haven’t slept a wink all night as it is.”

The prince followed her.

IX.

Arrived at her house, Lizabetha Prokofievna paused in the first room.

She could go no farther, and subsided on to a couch quite exhausted;

too feeble to remember so much as to ask the prince to take a seat.

This was a large reception-room, full of flowers, and with a glass door

leading into the garden.

Alexandra and Adelaida came in almost immediately, and looked

inquiringly at the prince and their mother.

The girls generally rose at about nine in the morning in the country;

Aglaya, of late, had been in the habit of getting up rather earlier and

having a walk in the garden, but not at seven o’clock; about eight or a

little later was her usual time.

Lizabetha Prokofievna, who really had not slept all night, rose at

about eight on purpose to meet Aglaya in the garden and walk with her;

but she could not find her either in the garden or in her own room.

This agitated the old lady considerably; and she awoke her other

daughters. Next, she learned from the maid that Aglaya had gone into

the park before seven o’clock. The sisters made a joke of Aglaya’s last

freak, and told their mother that if she went into the park to look for

her, Aglaya would probably be very angry with her, and that she was

pretty sure to be sitting reading on the green bench that she had

talked of two or three days since, and about which she had nearly

quarrelled with Prince S., who did not see anything particularly lovely

in it.

Arrived at the rendezvous of the prince and her daughter, and hearing

the strange words of the latter, Lizabetha Prokofievna had been

dreadfully alarmed, for many reasons. However, now that she had dragged

the prince home with her, she began to feel a little frightened at what

she had undertaken. Why should not Aglaya meet the prince in the park

and have a talk with him, even if such a meeting should be by

appointment?

“Don’t suppose, prince,” she began, bracing herself up for the effort,

“don’t suppose that I have brought you here to ask questions. After

last night, I assure you, I am not so exceedingly anxious to see you at

all; I could have postponed the pleasure for a long while.” She paused.

“But at the same time you would be very glad to know how I happened to

meet Aglaya Ivanovna this morning?” The prince finished her speech for

her with the utmost composure.

“Well, what then? Supposing I should like to know?” cried Lizabetha

Prokofievna, blushing. “I’m sure I am not afraid of plain speaking. I’m

not offending anyone, and I never wish to, and—”

“Pardon me, it is no offence to wish to know this; you are her mother.

We met at the green bench this morning, punctually at seven

o’clock,—according to an agreement made by Aglaya Ivanovna with myself

yesterday. She said that she wished to see me and speak to me about

something important. We met and conversed for an hour about matters

concerning Aglaya Ivanovna herself, and that’s all.”

“Of course it is all, my friend. I don’t doubt you for a moment,” said

Lizabetha Prokofievna with dignity.

“Well done, prince, capital!” cried Aglaya, who entered the room at

this moment. “Thank you for assuming that I would not demean myself

with lies. Come, is that enough, mamma, or do you intend to put any

more questions?”

“You know I have never needed to blush before you, up to this day,

though perhaps you would have been glad enough to make me,” said

Lizabetha Prokofievna,—with majesty. “Good-bye, prince; forgive me for

bothering you. I trust you will rest assured of my unalterable esteem

for you.”

The prince made his bows and retired at once. Alexandra and Adelaida

smiled and whispered to each other, while Lizabetha Prokofievna glared

severely at them. “We are only laughing at the prince’s beautiful bows,

mamma,” said Adelaida. “Sometimes he bows just like a meal-sack, but

to-day he was like—like Evgenie Pavlovitch!”

“It is the \_heart\_ which is the best teacher of refinement and dignity,

not the dancing-master,” said her mother, sententiously, and departed

upstairs to her own room, not so much as glancing at Aglaya.

When the prince reached home, about nine o’clock, he found Vera

Lebedeff and the maid on the verandah. They were both busy trying to

tidy up the place after last night’s disorderly party.

“Thank goodness, we’ve just managed to finish it before you came in!”

said Vera, joyfully.

“Good-morning! My head whirls so; I didn’t sleep all night. I should

like to have a nap now.”

“Here, on the verandah? Very well, I’ll tell them all not to come and

wake you. Papa has gone out somewhere.”

The servant left the room. Vera was about to follow her, but returned

and approached the prince with a preoccupied air.

“Prince!” she said, “have pity on that poor boy; don’t turn him out

today.”

“Not for the world; he shall do just as he likes.”

“He won’t do any harm now; and—and don’t be too severe with him.”

“Oh dear no! Why—”

“And—and you won’t \_laugh\_ at him? That’s the chief thing.”

“Oh no! Never.”

“How foolish I am to speak of such things to a man like you,” said

Vera, blushing. “Though you \_do\_ look tired,” she added, half turning

away, “your eyes are so splendid at this moment—so full of happiness.”

“Really?” asked the prince, gleefully, and he laughed in delight.

But Vera, simple-minded little girl that she was (just like a boy, in

fact), here became dreadfully confused, of a sudden, and ran hastily

out of the room, laughing and blushing.

“What a dear little thing she is,” thought the prince, and immediately

forgot all about her.

He walked to the far end of the verandah, where the sofa stood, with a

table in front of it. Here he sat down and covered his face with his

hands, and so remained for ten minutes. Suddenly he put his hand in his

coat-pocket and hurriedly produced three letters.

But the door opened again, and out came Colia.

The prince actually felt glad that he had been interrupted,—and might

return the letters to his pocket. He was glad of the respite.

“Well,” said Colia, plunging \_in medias res\_, as he always did, “here’s

a go! What do you think of Hippolyte now? Don’t respect him any longer,

eh?”

“Why not? But look here, Colia, I’m tired; besides, the subject is too

melancholy to begin upon again. How is he, though?”

“Asleep—he’ll sleep for a couple of hours yet. I quite understand—you

haven’t slept—you walked about the park, I know.

Agitation—excitement—all that sort of thing—quite natural, too!”

“How do you know I walked in the park and didn’t sleep at home?”

“Vera just told me. She tried to persuade me not to come, but I

couldn’t help myself, just for one minute. I have been having my turn

at the bedside for the last two hours; Kostia Lebedeff is there now.

Burdovsky has gone. Now, lie down, prince, make yourself comfortable,

and sleep well! I’m awfully impressed, you know.”

“Naturally, all this—”

“No, no, I mean with the ‘explanation,’ especially that part of it

where he talks about Providence and a future life. There is a gigantic

thought there.”

The prince gazed affectionately at Colia, who, of course, had come in

solely for the purpose of talking about this “gigantic thought.”

“But it is not any one particular thought, only; it is the general

circumstances of the case. If Voltaire had written this now, or

Rousseau, I should have just read it and thought it remarkable, but

should not have been so \_impressed\_ by it. But a man who knows for

certain that he has but ten minutes to live and can talk like

that—why—it’s—it’s \_pride\_, that is! It is really a most extraordinary,

exalted assertion of personal dignity, it’s—it’s \_defiant!\_ What a

\_gigantic\_ strength of will, eh? And to accuse a fellow like that of

not putting in the cap on purpose; it’s base and mean! You know he

deceived us last night, the cunning rascal. I never packed his bag for

him, and I never saw his pistol. He packed it himself. But he put me

off my guard like that, you see. Vera says you are going to let him

stay on; I swear there’s no danger, especially as we are always with

him.”

“Who was by him at night?”

“I, and Burdovsky, and Kostia Lebedeff. Keller stayed a little while,

and then went over to Lebedeff’s to sleep. Ferdishenko slept at

Lebedeff’s, too; but he went away at seven o’clock. My father is always

at Lebedeff’s; but he has gone out just now. I dare say Lebedeff will

be coming in here directly; he has been looking for you; I don’t know

what he wants. Shall we let him in or not, if you are asleep? I’m going

to have a nap, too. By-the-by, such a curious thing happened. Burdovsky

woke me at seven, and I met my father just outside the room, so drunk,

he didn’t even know me. He stood before me like a log, and when he

recovered himself, asked hurriedly how Hippolyte was. ‘Yes,’ he said,

when I told him, ‘that’s all very well, but I \_really\_ came to warn you

that you must be very careful what you say before Ferdishenko.’ Do you

follow me, prince?”

“Yes. Is it really so? However, it’s all the same to us, of course.”

“Of course it is; we are not a secret society; and that being the case,

it is all the more curious that the general should have been on his way

to wake me up in order to tell me this.”

“Ferdishenko has gone, you say?”

“Yes, he went at seven o’clock. He came into the room on his way out; I

was watching just then. He said he was going to spend ‘the rest of the

night’ at Wilkin’s; there’s a tipsy fellow, a friend of his, of that

name. Well, I’m off. Oh, here’s Lebedeff himself! The prince wants to

go to sleep, Lukian Timofeyovitch, so you may just go away again.”

“One moment, my dear prince, just one. I must absolutely speak to you

about something which is most grave,” said Lebedeff, mysteriously and

solemnly, entering the room with a bow and looking extremely important.

He had but just returned, and carried his hat in his hand. He looked

preoccupied and most unusually dignified.

The prince begged him to take a chair.

“I hear you have called twice; I suppose you are still worried about

yesterday’s affair.”

“What, about that boy, you mean? Oh dear no, yesterday my ideas were a

little—well—mixed. Today, I assure you, I shall not oppose in the

slightest degree any suggestions it may please you to make.”

“What’s up with you this morning, Lebedeff? You look so important and

dignified, and you choose your words so carefully,” said the prince,

smiling.

“Nicolai Ardalionovitch!” said Lebedeff, in a most amiable tone of

voice, addressing the boy. “As I have a communication to make to the

prince which concerns only myself—”

“Of course, of course, not my affair. All right,” said Colia, and away

he went.

“I love that boy for his perception,” said Lebedeff, looking after him.

“My dear prince,” he continued, “I have had a terrible misfortune,

either last night or early this morning. I cannot tell the exact time.”

“What is it?”

“I have lost four hundred roubles out of my side pocket! They’re gone!”

said Lebedeff, with a sour smile.

“You’ve lost four hundred roubles? Oh! I’m sorry for that.”

“Yes, it is serious for a poor man who lives by his toil.”

“Of course, of course! How was it?”

“Oh, the wine is to blame, of course. I confess to you, prince, as I

would to Providence itself. Yesterday I received four hundred roubles

from a debtor at about five in the afternoon, and came down here by

train. I had my purse in my pocket. When I changed, I put the money

into the pocket of my plain clothes, intending to keep it by me, as I

expected to have an applicant for it in the evening.”

“It’s true then, Lebedeff, that you advertise to lend money on gold or

silver articles?”

“Yes, through an agent. My own name doesn’t appear. I have a large

family, you see, and at a small percentage—”

“Quite so, quite so. I only asked for information—excuse the question.

Go on.”

“Well, meanwhile that sick boy was brought here, and those guests came

in, and we had tea, and—well, we made merry—to my ruin! Hearing of your

birthday afterwards, and excited with the circumstances of the evening,

I ran upstairs and changed my plain clothes once more for my uniform

[Civil Service clerks in Russia wear uniform.]—you must have noticed I

had my uniform on all the evening? Well, I forgot the money in the

pocket of my old coat—you know when God will ruin a man he first of all

bereaves him of his senses—and it was only this morning at half-past

seven that I woke up and grabbed at my coat pocket, first thing. The

pocket was empty—the purse gone, and not a trace to be found!”

“Dear me! This is very unpleasant!”

“Unpleasant! Indeed it is. You have found a very appropriate

expression,” said Lebedeff, politely, but with sarcasm.

“But what’s to be done? It’s a serious matter,” said the prince,

thoughtfully. “Don’t you think you may have dropped it out of your

pocket whilst intoxicated?”

“Certainly. Anything is possible when one is intoxicated, as you neatly

express it, prince. But consider—if I, intoxicated or not, dropped an

object out of my pocket on to the ground, that object ought to remain

on the ground. Where is the object, then?”

“Didn’t you put it away in some drawer, perhaps?”

“I’ve looked everywhere, and turned out everything.”

“I confess this disturbs me a good deal. Someone must have picked it

up, then.”

“Or taken it out of my pocket—two alternatives.”

“It is very distressing, because \_who\_—? That’s the question!”

“Most undoubtedly, excellent prince, you have hit it—that is the very

question. How wonderfully you express the exact situation in a few

words!”

“Come, come, Lebedeff, no sarcasm! It’s a serious—”

“Sarcasm!” cried Lebedeff, wringing his hands. “All right, all right,

I’m not angry. I’m only put out about this. Whom do you suspect?”

“That is a very difficult and complicated question. I cannot suspect

the servant, for she was in the kitchen the whole evening, nor do I

suspect any of my children.”

“I should think not. Go on.”

“Then it must be one of the guests.”

“Is such a thing possible?”

“Absolutely and utterly impossible—and yet, so it must be. But one

thing I am sure of, if it be a theft, it was committed, not in the

evening when we were all together, but either at night or early in the

morning; therefore, by one of those who slept here. Burdovsky and Colia

I except, of course. They did not even come into my room.”

“Yes, or even if they had! But who did sleep with you?”

“Four of us, including myself, in two rooms. The general, myself,

Keller, and Ferdishenko. One of us four it must have been. I don’t

suspect myself, though such cases have been known.”

“Oh! \_do\_ go on, Lebedeff! Don’t drag it out so.”

“Well, there are three left, then—Keller firstly. He is a drunkard to

begin with, and a liberal (in the sense of other people’s pockets),

otherwise with more of the ancient knight about him than of the modern

liberal. He was with the sick man at first, but came over afterwards

because there was no place to lie down in the room and the floor was so

hard.”

“You suspect him?”

“I \_did\_ suspect him. When I woke up at half-past seven and tore my

hair in despair for my loss and carelessness, I awoke the general, who

was sleeping the sleep of innocence near me. Taking into consideration

the sudden disappearance of Ferdishenko, which was suspicious in

itself, we decided to search Keller, who was lying there sleeping like

a top. Well, we searched his clothes thoroughly, and not a farthing did

we find; in fact, his pockets all had holes in them. We found a dirty

handkerchief, and a love-letter from some scullery-maid. The general

decided that he was innocent. We awoke him for further inquiries, and

had the greatest difficulty in making him understand what was up. He

opened his mouth and stared—he looked so stupid and so absurdly

innocent. It wasn’t Keller.”

“Oh, I’m so glad!” said the prince, joyfully. “I was so afraid.”

“Afraid! Then you had some grounds for supposing he might be the

culprit?” said Lebedeff, frowning.

“Oh no—not a bit! It was foolish of me to say I was afraid! Don’t

repeat it please, Lebedeff, don’t tell anyone I said that!”

“My dear prince! your words lie in the lowest depth of my heart—it is

their tomb!” said Lebedeff, solemnly, pressing his hat to the region of

his heart.

“Thanks; very well. Then I suppose it’s Ferdishenko; that is, I mean,

you suspect Ferdishenko?”

“Whom else?” said Lebedeff, softly, gazing intently into the prince s

face.

“Of course—quite so, whom else? But what are the proofs?”

“We have evidence. In the first place, his mysterious disappearance at

seven o’clock, or even earlier.”

“I know, Colia told me that he had said he was off to—I forget the

name, some friend of his, to finish the night.”

“H’m! then Colia has spoken to you already?”

“Not about the theft.”

“He does not know of it; I have kept it a secret. Very well,

Ferdishenko went off to Wilkin’s. That is not so curious in itself, but

here the evidence opens out further. He left his address, you see, when

he went. Now prince, consider, why did he leave his address? Why do you

suppose he went out of his way to tell Colia that he had gone to

Wilkin’s? Who cared to know that he was going to Wilkin’s? No, no!

prince, this is finesse, thieves’ finesse! This is as good as saying,

‘There, how can I be a thief when I leave my address? I’m not

concealing my movements as a thief would.’ Do you understand, prince?”

“Oh yes, but that is not enough.”

“Second proof. The scent turns out to be false, and the address given

is a sham. An hour after—that is at about eight, I went to Wilkin’s

myself, and there was no trace of Ferdishenko. The maid did tell me,

certainly, that an hour or so since someone had been hammering at the

door, and had smashed the bell; she said she would not open the door

because she didn’t want to wake her master; probably she was too lazy

to get up herself. Such phenomena are met with occasionally!”

“But is that all your evidence? It is not enough!”

“Well, prince, whom are we to suspect, then? Consider!” said Lebedeff

with almost servile amiability, smiling at the prince. There was a look

of cunning in his eyes, however.

“You should search your room and all the cupboards again,” said the

prince, after a moment or two of silent reflection.

“But I have done so, my dear prince!” said Lebedeff, more sweetly than

ever.

“H’m! why must you needs go up and change your coat like that?” asked

the prince, banging the table with his fist, in annoyance.

“Oh, don’t be so worried on my account, prince! I assure you I am not

worth it! At least, not I alone. But I see you are suffering on behalf

of the criminal too, for wretched Ferdishenko, in fact!”

“Of course you have given me a disagreeable enough thing to think

about,” said the prince, irritably, “but what are you going to do,

since you are so sure it was Ferdishenko?”

“But who else \_could\_ it be, my very dear prince?” repeated Lebedeff,

as sweet as sugar again. “If you don’t wish me to suspect Mr.

Burdovsky?”

“Of course not.”

“Nor the general? Ha, ha, ha!”

“Nonsense!” said the prince, angrily, turning round upon him.

“Quite so, nonsense! Ha, ha, ha! dear me! He did amuse me, did the

general! We went off on the hot scent to Wilkin’s together, you know;

but I must first observe that the general was even more thunderstruck

than I myself this morning, when I awoke him after discovering the

theft; so much so that his very face changed—he grew red and then pale,

and at length flew into a paroxysm of such noble wrath that I assure

you I was quite surprised! He is a most generous-hearted man! He tells

lies by the thousands, I know, but it is merely a weakness; he is a man

of the highest feelings; a simple-minded man too, and a man who carries

the conviction of innocence in his very appearance. I love that man,

sir; I may have told you so before; it is a weakness of mine. Well—he

suddenly stopped in the middle of the road, opened out his coat and

bared his breast. ‘Search me,’ he says, ‘you searched Keller; why don’t

you search me too? It is only fair!’ says he. And all the while his

legs and hands were trembling with anger, and he as white as a sheet

all over! So I said to him, ‘Nonsense, general; if anybody but yourself

had said that to me, I’d have taken my head, my own head, and put it on

a large dish and carried it round to anyone who suspected you; and I

should have said: “There, you see that head? It’s my head, and I’ll go

bail with that head for him! Yes, and walk through the fire for him,

too.” There,’ says I, ‘that’s how I’d answer for you, general!’ Then he

embraced me, in the middle of the street, and hugged me so tight

(crying over me all the while) that I coughed fit to choke! ‘You are

the one friend left to me amid all my misfortunes,’ says he. Oh, he’s a

man of sentiment, that! He went on to tell me a story of how he had

been accused, or suspected, of stealing five hundred thousand roubles

once, as a young man; and how, the very next day, he had rushed into a

burning, blazing house and saved the very count who suspected him, and

Nina Alexandrovna (who was then a young girl), from a fiery death. The

count embraced him, and that was how he came to marry Nina

Alexandrovna, he said. As for the money, it was found among the ruins

next day in an English iron box with a secret lock; it had got under

the floor somehow, and if it had not been for the fire it would never

have been found! The whole thing is, of course, an absolute

fabrication, though when he spoke of Nina Alexandrovna he wept! She’s a

grand woman, is Nina Alexandrovna, though she is very angry with me!”

“Are you acquainted with her?”

“Well, hardly at all. I wish I were, if only for the sake of justifying

myself in her eyes. Nina Alexandrovna has a grudge against me for, as

she thinks, encouraging her husband in drinking; whereas in reality I

not only do not encourage him, but I actually keep him out of harm’s

way, and out of bad company. Besides, he’s my friend, prince, so that I

shall not lose sight of him, again. Where he goes, I go. He’s quite

given up visiting the captain’s widow, though sometimes he thinks sadly

of her, especially in the morning, when he’s putting on his boots. I

don’t know why it’s at that time. But he has no money, and it’s no use

his going to see her without. Has he borrowed any money from you,

prince?”

“No, he has not.”

“Ah, he’s ashamed to! He \_meant\_ to ask you, I know, for he said so. I

suppose he thinks that as you gave him some once (you remember), you

would probably refuse if he asked you again.”

“Do you ever give him money?”

“Prince! Money! Why I would give that man not only my money, but my

very life, if he wanted it. Well, perhaps that’s exaggeration; not

life, we’ll say, but some illness, a boil or a bad cough, or anything

of that sort, I would stand with pleasure, for his sake; for I consider

him a great man fallen—money, indeed!”

“H’m, then you \_do\_ give him money?”

“N-no, I have never given him money, and he knows well that I will

never give him any; because I am anxious to keep him out of intemperate

ways. He is going to town with me now; for you must know I am off to

Petersburg after Ferdishenko, while the scent is hot; I’m certain he is

there. I shall let the general go one way, while I go the other; we

have so arranged matters in order to pop out upon Ferdishenko, you see,

from different sides. But I am going to follow that naughty old general

and catch him, I know where, at a certain widow’s house; for I think it

will be a good lesson, to put him to shame by catching him with the

widow.”

“Oh, Lebedeff, don’t, don’t make any scandal about it!” said the

prince, much agitated, and speaking in a low voice.

“Not for the world, not for the world! I merely wish to make him

ashamed of himself. Oh, prince, great though this misfortune be to

myself, I cannot help thinking of his morals! I have a great favour to

ask of you, esteemed prince; I confess that it is the chief object of

my visit. You know the Ivolgins, you have even lived in their house; so

if you would lend me your help, honoured prince, in the general’s own

interest and for his good.”

Lebedeff clasped his hands in supplication.

“What help do you want from me? You may be certain that I am most

anxious to understand you, Lebedeff.”

“I felt sure of that, or I should not have come to you. We might manage

it with the help of Nina Alexandrovna, so that he might be closely

watched in his own house. Unfortunately I am not on terms...

otherwise... but Nicolai Ardalionovitch, who adores you with all his

youthful soul, might help, too.”

“No, no! Heaven forbid that we should bring Nina Alexandrovna into this

business! Or Colia, either. But perhaps I have not yet quite understood

you, Lebedeff?”

Lebedeff made an impatient movement.

“But there is nothing to understand! Sympathy and tenderness, that is

all—that is all our poor invalid requires! You will permit me to

consider him an invalid?”

“Yes, it shows delicacy and intelligence on your part.”

“I will explain my idea by a practical example, to make it clearer. You

know the sort of man he is. At present his only failing is that he is

crazy about that captain’s widow, and he cannot go to her without

money, and I mean to catch him at her house today—for his own good; but

supposing it was not only the widow, but that he had committed a real

crime, or at least some very dishonourable action (of which he is, of

course, incapable), I repeat that even in that case, if he were treated

with what I may call generous tenderness, one could get at the whole

truth, for he is very soft-hearted! Believe me, he would betray himself

before five days were out; he would burst into tears, and make a clean

breast of the matter; especially if managed with tact, and if you and

his family watched his every step, so to speak. Oh, my dear prince,”

Lebedeff added most emphatically, “I do not positively assert that he

has... I am ready, as the saying is, to shed my last drop of blood for

him this instant; but you will admit that debauchery, drunkenness, and

the captain’s widow, all these together may lead him very far.”

“I am, of course, quite ready to add my efforts to yours in such a

case,” said the prince, rising; “but I confess, Lebedeff, that I am

terribly perplexed. Tell me, do you still think... plainly, you say

yourself that you suspect Mr. Ferdishenko?”

Lebedeff clasped his hands once more.

“Why, who else could I possibly suspect? Who else, most outspoken

prince?” he replied, with an unctuous smile.

Muishkin frowned, and rose from his seat.

“You see, Lebedeff, a mistake here would be a dreadful thing. This

Ferdishenko, I would not say a word against him, of course; but, who

knows? Perhaps it really was he? I mean he really does seem to be a

more likely man than... than any other.”

Lebedeff strained his eyes and ears to take in what the prince was

saying. The latter was frowning more and more, and walking excitedly up

and down, trying not to look at Lebedeff.

“You see,” he said, “I was given to understand that Ferdishenko was

that sort of man,—that one can’t say everything before him. One has to

take care not to say too much, you understand? I say this to prove that

he really is, so to speak, more likely to have done this than anyone

else, eh? You understand? The important thing is, not to make a

mistake.”

“And who told you this about Ferdishenko?”

“Oh, I was told. Of course I don’t altogether believe it. I am very

sorry that I should have had to say this, because I assure you I don’t

believe it myself; it is all nonsense, of course. It was stupid of me

to say anything about it.”

“You see, it is very important, it is most important to know where you

got this report from,” said Lebedeff, excitedly. He had risen from his

seat, and was trying to keep step with the prince, running after him,

up and down. “Because look here, prince, I don’t mind telling you now

that as we were going along to Wilkin’s this morning, after telling me

what you know about the fire, and saving the count and all that, the

general was pleased to drop certain hints to the same effect about

Ferdishenko, but so vaguely and clumsily that I thought better to put a

few questions to him on the matter, with the result that I found the

whole thing was an invention of his excellency’s own mind. Of course,

he only lies with the best intentions; still, he lies. But, such being

the case, where could you have heard the same report? It was the

inspiration of the moment with him, you understand, so who could have

told \_you?\_ It is an important question, you see!”

“It was Colia told me, and his father told \_him\_ at about six this

morning. They met at the threshold, when Colia was leaving the room for

something or other.” The prince told Lebedeff all that Colia had made

known to himself, in detail.

“There now, that’s what we may call \_scent!\_” said Lebedeff, rubbing

his hands and laughing silently. “I thought it must be so, you see. The

general interrupted his innocent slumbers, at six o’clock, in order to

go and wake his beloved son, and warn him of the dreadful danger of

companionship with Ferdishenko. Dear me! what a dreadfully dangerous

man Ferdishenko must be, and what touching paternal solicitude, on the

part of his excellency, ha! ha! ha!”

“Listen, Lebedeff,” began the prince, quite overwhelmed; “\_do\_ act

quietly—don’t make a scandal, Lebedeff, I ask you—I entreat you! No one

must know—\_no one\_, mind! In that case only, I will help you.”

“Be assured, most honourable, most worthy of princes—be assured that

the whole matter shall be buried within my heart!” cried Lebedeff, in a

paroxysm of exaltation. “I’d give every drop of my blood... Illustrious

prince, I am a poor wretch in soul and spirit, but ask the veriest

scoundrel whether he would prefer to deal with one like himself, or

with a noble-hearted man like you, and there is no doubt as to his

choice! He’ll answer that he prefers the noble-hearted man—and there

you have the triumph of virtue! \_Au revoir\_, honoured prince! You and I

together—softly! softly!”

X.

The prince understood at last why he shivered with dread every time he

thought of the three letters in his pocket, and why he had put off

reading them until the evening.

When he fell into a heavy sleep on the sofa on the verandah, without

having had the courage to open a single one of the three envelopes, he

again dreamed a painful dream, and once more that poor, “sinful” woman

appeared to him. Again she gazed at him with tears sparkling on her

long lashes, and beckoned him after her; and again he awoke, as before,

with the picture of her face haunting him.

He longed to get up and go to her at once—but he \_could not\_. At

length, almost in despair, he unfolded the letters, and began to read

them.

These letters, too, were like a dream. We sometimes have strange,

impossible dreams, contrary to all the laws of nature. When we awake we

remember them and wonder at their strangeness. You remember, perhaps,

that you were in full possession of your reason during this succession

of fantastic images; even that you acted with extraordinary logic and

cunning while surrounded by murderers who hid their intentions and made

great demonstrations of friendship, while waiting for an opportunity to

cut your throat. You remember how you escaped them by some ingenious

stratagem; then you doubted if they were really deceived, or whether

they were only pretending not to know your hiding-place; then you

thought of another plan and hoodwinked them once again. You remember

all this quite clearly, but how is it that your reason calmly accepted

all the manifest absurdities and impossibilities that crowded into your

dream? One of the murderers suddenly changed into a woman before your

very eyes; then the woman was transformed into a hideous, cunning

little dwarf; and you believed it, and accepted it all almost as a

matter of course—while at the same time your intelligence seemed

unusually keen, and accomplished miracles of cunning, sagacity, and

logic! Why is it that when you awake to the world of realities you

nearly always feel, sometimes very vividly, that the vanished dream has

carried with it some enigma which you have failed to solve? You smile

at the extravagance of your dream, and yet you feel that this tissue of

absurdity contained some real idea, something that belongs to your true

life,—something that exists, and has always existed, in your heart. You

search your dream for some prophecy that you were expecting. It has

left a deep impression upon you, joyful or cruel, but what it means, or

what has been predicted to you in it, you can neither understand nor

remember.

The reading of these letters produced some such effect upon the prince.

He felt, before he even opened the envelopes, that the very fact of

their existence was like a nightmare. How could she ever have made up

her mind to write to her? he asked himself. How could she write about

that at all? And how could such a wild idea have entered her head? And

yet, the strangest part of the matter was, that while he read the

letters, he himself almost believed in the possibility, and even in the

justification, of the idea he had thought so wild. Of course it was a

mad dream, a nightmare, and yet there was something cruelly real about

it. For hours he was haunted by what he had read. Several passages

returned again and again to his mind, and as he brooded over them, he

felt inclined to say to himself that he had foreseen and known all that

was written here; it even seemed to him that he had read the whole of

this some time or other, long, long ago; and all that had tormented and

grieved him up to now was to be found in these old, long since read,

letters.

“When you open this letter” (so the first began), “look first at the

signature. The signature will tell you all, so that I need explain

nothing, nor attempt to justify myself. Were I in any way on a footing

with you, you might be offended at my audacity; but who am I, and who

are you? We are at such extremes, and I am so far removed from you,

that I could not offend you if I wished to do so.”

Farther on, in another place, she wrote: “Do not consider my words as

the sickly ecstasies of a diseased mind, but you are, in my

opinion—perfection! I have seen you—I see you every day. I do not judge

you; I have not weighed you in the scales of Reason and found you

Perfection—it is simply an article of faith. But I must confess one sin

against you—I love you. One should not love perfection. One should only

look on it as perfection—yet I am in love with you. Though love

equalizes, do not fear. I have not lowered you to my level, even in my

most secret thoughts. I have written ‘Do not fear,’ as if you could

fear. I would kiss your footprints if I could; but, oh! I am not

putting myself on a level with you!—Look at the signature—quick, look

at the signature!”

“However, observe” (she wrote in another of the letters), “that

although I couple you with him, yet I have not once asked you whether

you love him. He fell in love with you, though he saw you but once. He

spoke of you as of ‘the light.’ These are his own words—I heard him use

them. But I understood without his saying it that you were all that

light is to him. I lived near him for a whole month, and I understood

then that you, too, must love him. I think of you and him as one.”

“What was the matter yesterday?” (she wrote on another sheet). “I

passed by you, and you seemed to me to \_blush\_. Perhaps it was only my

fancy. If I were to bring you to the most loathsome den, and show you

the revelation of undisguised vice—you should not blush. You can never

feel the sense of personal affront. You may hate all who are mean, or

base, or unworthy—but not for yourself—only for those whom they wrong.

No one can wrong \_you\_. Do you know, I think you ought to love me—for

you are the same in my eyes as in his—you are as light. An angel cannot

hate, perhaps cannot love, either. I often ask myself—is it possible to

love everybody? Indeed it is not; it is not in nature. Abstract love of

humanity is nearly always love of self. But you are different. You

cannot help loving all, since you can compare with none, and are above

all personal offence or anger. Oh! how bitter it would be to me to know

that you felt anger or shame on my account, for that would be your

fall—you would become comparable at once with such as me.

“Yesterday, after seeing you, I went home and thought out a picture.

“Artists always draw the Saviour as an actor in one of the Gospel

stories. I should do differently. I should represent Christ alone—the

disciples did leave Him alone occasionally. I should paint one little

child left with Him. This child has been playing about near Him, and

had probably just been telling the Saviour something in its pretty baby

prattle. Christ had listened to it, but was now musing—one hand

reposing on the child’s bright head. His eyes have a far-away

expression. Thought, great as the Universe, is in them—His face is sad.

The little one leans its elbow upon Christ’s knee, and with its cheek

resting on its hand, gazes up at Him, pondering as children sometimes

do ponder. The sun is setting. There you have my picture.

“You are innocent—and in your innocence lies all your perfection—oh,

remember that! What is my passion to you?—you are mine now; I shall be

near you all my life—I shall not live long!”

At length, in the last letter of all, he found:

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t misunderstand me! Do not think that I

humiliate myself by writing thus to you, or that I belong to that class

of people who take a satisfaction in humiliating themselves—from pride.

I have my consolation, though it would be difficult to explain it—but I

do not humiliate myself.

“Why do I wish to unite you two? For your sakes or my own? For my own

sake, naturally. All the problems of my life would thus be solved; I

have thought so for a long time. I know that once when your sister

Adelaida saw my portrait she said that such beauty could overthrow the

world. But I have renounced the world. You think it strange that I

should say so, for you saw me decked with lace and diamonds, in the

company of drunkards and wastrels. Take no notice of that; I know that

I have almost ceased to exist. God knows what it is dwelling within me

now—it is not myself. I can see it every day in two dreadful eyes which

are always looking at me, even when not present. These eyes are silent

now, they say nothing; but I know their secret. His house is gloomy,

and there is a secret in it. I am convinced that in some box he has a

razor hidden, tied round with silk, just like the one that Moscow

murderer had. This man also lived with his mother, and had a razor

hidden away, tied round with white silk, and with this razor he

intended to cut a throat.

“All the while I was in their house I felt sure that somewhere beneath

the floor there was hidden away some dreadful corpse, wrapped in

oil-cloth, perhaps buried there by his father, who knows? Just as in

the Moscow case. I could have shown you the very spot!

“He is always silent, but I know well that he loves me so much that he

must hate me. My wedding and yours are to be on the same day; so I have

arranged with him. I have no secrets from him. I would kill him from

very fright, but he will kill me first. He has just burst out laughing,

and says that I am raving. He knows I am writing to you.”

There was much more of this delirious wandering in the letters—one of

them was very long.

At last the prince came out of the dark, gloomy park, in which he had

wandered about for hours just as yesterday. The bright night seemed to

him to be lighter than ever. “It must be quite early,” he thought. (He

had forgotten his watch.) There was a sound of distant music somewhere.

“Ah,” he thought, “the Vauxhall! They won’t be there today, of course!”

At this moment he noticed that he was close to their house; he had felt

that he must gravitate to this spot eventually, and, with a beating

heart, he mounted the verandah steps.

No one met him; the verandah was empty, and nearly pitch dark. He

opened the door into the room, but it, too, was dark and empty. He

stood in the middle of the room in perplexity. Suddenly the door

opened, and in came Alexandra, candle in hand. Seeing the prince she

stopped before him in surprise, looking at him questioningly.

It was clear that she had been merely passing through the room from

door to door, and had not had the remotest notion that she would meet

anyone.

“How did you come here?” she asked, at last.

“I—I—came in—”

“Mamma is not very well, nor is Aglaya. Adelaida has gone to bed, and I

am just going. We were alone the whole evening. Father and Prince S.

have gone to town.”

“I have come to you—now—to—”

“Do you know what time it is?”

“N—no!”

“Half-past twelve. We are always in bed by one.”

“I—I thought it was half-past nine!”

“Never mind!” she laughed, “but why didn’t you come earlier? Perhaps

you were expected!”

“I thought” he stammered, making for the door.

“\_Au revoir!\_ I shall amuse them all with this story tomorrow!”

He walked along the road towards his own house. His heart was beating,

his thoughts were confused, everything around seemed to be part of a

dream.

And suddenly, just as twice already he had awaked from sleep with the

same vision, that very apparition now seemed to rise up before him. The

woman appeared to step out from the park, and stand in the path in

front of him, as though she had been waiting for him there.

He shuddered and stopped; she seized his hand and pressed it

frenziedly.

No, this was no apparition!

There she stood at last, face to face with him, for the first time

since their parting.

She said something, but he looked silently back at her. His heart ached

with anguish. Oh! never would he banish the recollection of this

meeting with her, and he never remembered it but with the same pain and

agony of mind.

She went on her knees before him—there in the open road—like a

madwoman. He retreated a step, but she caught his hand and kissed it,

and, just as in his dream, the tears were sparkling on her long,

beautiful lashes.

“Get up!” he said, in a frightened whisper, raising her. “Get up at

once!”

“Are you happy—are you happy?” she asked. “Say this one word. Are you

happy now? Today, this moment? Have you just been with her? What did

she say?”

She did not rise from her knees; she would not listen to him; she put

her questions hurriedly, as though she were pursued.

“I am going away tomorrow, as you bade me—I won’t write—so that this is

the last time I shall see you, the last time! This is really the \_last

time!\_”

“Oh, be calm—be calm! Get up!” he entreated, in despair.

She gazed thirstily at him and clutched his hands.

“Good-bye!” she said at last, and rose and left him, very quickly.

The prince noticed that Rogojin had suddenly appeared at her side, and

had taken her arm and was leading her away.

“Wait a minute, prince,” shouted the latter, as he went. “I shall be

back in five minutes.”

He reappeared in five minutes as he had said. The prince was waiting

for him.

“I’ve put her in the carriage,” he said; “it has been waiting round the

corner there since ten o’clock. She expected that you would be with

\_them\_ all the evening. I told her exactly what you wrote me. She won’t

write to the girl any more, she promises; and tomorrow she will be off,

as you wish. She desired to see you for the last time, although you

refused, so we’ve been sitting and waiting on that bench till you

should pass on your way home.”

“Did she bring you with her of her own accord?”

“Of course she did!” said Rogojin, showing his teeth; “and I saw for

myself what I knew before. You’ve read her letters, I suppose?”

“Did you read them?” asked the prince, struck by the thought.

“Of course—she showed them to me herself. You are thinking of the

razor, eh? Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, she is mad!” cried the prince, wringing his hands.

“Who knows? Perhaps she is not so mad after all,” said Rogojin, softly,

as though thinking aloud.

The prince made no reply.

“Well, good-bye,” said Rogojin. “I’m off tomorrow too, you know.

Remember me kindly! By-the-by,” he added, turning round sharply again,

“did you answer her question just now? Are you happy, or not?”

“No, no, no!” cried the prince, with unspeakable sadness.

“Ha, ha! I never supposed you would say ‘yes,’” cried Rogojin, laughing

sardonically.

And he disappeared, without looking round again.

PART IV

I.

A week had elapsed since the rendezvous of our two friends on the green

bench in the park, when, one fine morning at about half-past ten

o’clock, Varvara Ardalionovna, otherwise Mrs. Ptitsin, who had been out

to visit a friend, returned home in a state of considerable mental

depression.

There are certain people of whom it is difficult to say anything which

will at once throw them into relief—in other words, describe them

graphically in their typical characteristics. These are they who are

generally known as “commonplace people,” and this class comprises, of

course, the immense majority of mankind. Authors, as a rule, attempt to

select and portray types rarely met with in their entirety, but these

types are nevertheless more real than real life itself.

“Podkoleosin” [A character in Gogol’s comedy, The Wedding.] was perhaps

an exaggeration, but he was by no means a non-existent character; on

the contrary, how many intelligent people, after hearing of this

Podkoleosin from Gogol, immediately began to find that scores of their

friends were exactly like him! They knew, perhaps, before Gogol told

them, that their friends were like Podkoleosin, but they did not know

what name to give them. In real life, young fellows seldom jump out of

the window just before their weddings, because such a feat, not to

speak of its other aspects, must be a decidedly unpleasant mode of

escape; and yet there are plenty of bridegrooms, intelligent fellows

too, who would be ready to confess themselves Podkoleosins in the

depths of their consciousness, just before marriage. Nor does every

husband feel bound to repeat at every step, “\_Tu l’as voulu, Georges

Dandin!\_” like another typical personage; and yet how many millions and

billions of Georges Dandins there are in real life who feel inclined to

utter this soul-drawn cry after their honeymoon, if not the day after

the wedding! Therefore, without entering into any more serious

examination of the question, I will content myself with remarking that

in real life typical characters are “watered down,” so to speak; and

all these Dandins and Podkoleosins actually exist among us every day,

but in a diluted form. I will just add, however, that Georges Dandin

might have existed exactly as Molière presented him, and probably does

exist now and then, though rarely; and so I will end this scientific

examination, which is beginning to look like a newspaper criticism. But

for all this, the question remains,—what are the novelists to do with

commonplace people, and how are they to be presented to the reader in

such a form as to be in the least degree interesting? They cannot be

left out altogether, for commonplace people meet one at every turn of

life, and to leave them out would be to destroy the whole reality and

probability of the story. To fill a novel with typical characters only,

or with merely strange and uncommon people, would render the book

unreal and improbable, and would very likely destroy the interest. In

my opinion, the duty of the novelist is to seek out points of interest

and instruction even in the characters of commonplace people.

For instance, when the whole essence of an ordinary person’s nature

lies in his perpetual and unchangeable commonplaceness; and when in

spite of all his endeavours to do something out of the common, this

person ends, eventually, by remaining in his unbroken line of routine—.

I think such an individual really does become a type of his own—a type

of commonplaceness which will not for the world, if it can help it, be

contented, but strains and yearns to be something original and

independent, without the slightest possibility of being so. To this

class of commonplace people belong several characters in this

novel;—characters which—I admit—I have not drawn very vividly up to now

for my reader’s benefit.

Such were, for instance, Varvara Ardalionovna Ptitsin, her husband, and

her brother, Gania.

There is nothing so annoying as to be fairly rich, of a fairly good

family, pleasing presence, average education, to be “not stupid,”

kind-hearted, and yet to have no talent at all, no originality, not a

single idea of one’s own—to be, in fact, “just like everyone else.”

Of such people there are countless numbers in this world—far more even

than appear. They can be divided into two classes as all men can—that

is, those of limited intellect, and those who are much cleverer. The

former of these classes is the happier.

To a commonplace man of limited intellect, for instance, nothing is

simpler than to imagine himself an original character, and to revel in

that belief without the slightest misgiving.

Many of our young women have thought fit to cut their hair short, put

on blue spectacles, and call themselves Nihilists. By doing this they

have been able to persuade themselves, without further trouble, that

they have acquired new convictions of their own. Some men have but felt

some little qualm of kindness towards their fellow-men, and the fact

has been quite enough to persuade them that they stand alone in the van

of enlightenment and that no one has such humanitarian feelings as

they. Others have but to read an idea of somebody else’s, and they can

immediately assimilate it and believe that it was a child of their own

brain. The “impudence of ignorance,” if I may use the expression, is

developed to a wonderful extent in such cases;—unlikely as it appears,

it is met with at every turn.

This confidence of a stupid man in his own talents has been wonderfully

depicted by Gogol in the amazing character of Pirogoff. Pirogoff has

not the slightest doubt of his own genius,—nay, of his \_superiority\_ of

genius,—so certain is he of it that he never questions it. How many

Pirogoffs have there not been among our writers—scholars,

propagandists? I say “have been,” but indeed there are plenty of them

at this very day.

Our friend, Gania, belonged to the other class—to the “much cleverer”

persons, though he was from head to foot permeated and saturated with

the longing to be original. This class, as I have said above, is far

less happy. For the “clever commonplace” person, though he may possibly

imagine himself a man of genius and originality, none the less has

within his heart the deathless worm of suspicion and doubt; and this

doubt sometimes brings a clever man to despair. (As a rule, however,

nothing tragic happens;—his liver becomes a little damaged in the

course of time, nothing more serious. Such men do not give up their

aspirations after originality without a severe struggle,—and there have

been men who, though good fellows in themselves, and even benefactors

to humanity, have sunk to the level of base criminals for the sake of

originality).

Gania was a beginner, as it were, upon this road. A deep and

unchangeable consciousness of his own lack of talent, combined with a

vast longing to be able to persuade himself that he was original, had

rankled in his heart, even from childhood.

He seemed to have been born with overwrought nerves, and in his

passionate desire to excel, he was often led to the brink of some rash

step; and yet, having resolved upon such a step, when the moment

arrived, he invariably proved too sensible to take it. He was ready, in

the same way, to do a base action in order to obtain his wished-for

object; and yet, when the moment came to do it, he found that he was

too honest for any great baseness. (Not that he objected to acts of

petty meanness—he was always ready for \_them\_.) He looked with hate and

loathing on the poverty and downfall of his family, and treated his

mother with haughty contempt, although he knew that his whole future

depended on her character and reputation.

Aglaya had simply frightened him; yet he did not give up all thoughts

of her—though he never seriously hoped that she would condescend to

him. At the time of his “adventure” with Nastasia Philipovna he had

come to the conclusion that money was his only hope—money should do all

for him.

At the moment when he lost Aglaya, and after the scene with Nastasia,

he had felt so low in his own eyes that he actually brought the money

back to the prince. Of this returning of the money given to him by a

madwoman who had received it from a madman, he had often repented

since—though he never ceased to be proud of his action. During the

short time that Muishkin remained in Petersburg Gania had had time to

come to hate him for his sympathy, though the prince told him that it

was “not everyone who would have acted so nobly” as to return the

money. He had long pondered, too, over his relations with Aglaya, and

had persuaded himself that with such a strange, childish, innocent

character as hers, things might have ended very differently. Remorse

then seized him; he threw up his post, and buried himself in

self-torment and reproach.

He lived at Ptitsin’s, and openly showed contempt for the latter,

though he always listened to his advice, and was sensible enough to ask

for it when he wanted it. Gavrila Ardalionovitch was angry with Ptitsin

because the latter did not care to become a Rothschild. “If you are to

be a Jew,” he said, “do it properly—squeeze people right and left, show

some character; be the King of the Jews while you are about it.”

Ptitsin was quiet and not easily offended—he only laughed. But on one

occasion he explained seriously to Gania that he was no Jew, that he

did nothing dishonest, that he could not help the market price of

money, that, thanks to his accurate habits, he had already a good

footing and was respected, and that his business was flourishing.

“I shan’t ever be a Rothschild, and there is no reason why I should,”

he added, smiling; “but I shall have a house in the Liteynaya, perhaps

two, and that will be enough for me.” “Who knows but what I may have

three!” he concluded to himself; but this dream, cherished inwardly, he

never confided to a soul.

Nature loves and favours such people. Ptitsin will certainly have his

reward, not three houses, but four, precisely because from childhood up

he had realized that he would never be a Rothschild. That will be the

limit of Ptitsin’s fortune, and, come what may, he will never have more

than four houses.

Varvara Ardalionovna was not like her brother. She too, had passionate

desires, but they were persistent rather than impetuous. Her plans were

as wise as her methods of carrying them out. No doubt she also belonged

to the category of ordinary people who dream of being original, but she

soon discovered that she had not a grain of true originality, and she

did not let it trouble her too much. Perhaps a certain kind of pride

came to her help. She made her first concession to the demands of

practical life with great resolution when she consented to marry

Ptitsin. However, when she married she did not say to herself, “Never

mind a mean action if it leads to the end in view,” as her brother

would certainly have said in such a case; it is quite probable that he

may have said it when he expressed his elder-brotherly satisfaction at

her decision. Far from this; Varvara Ardalionovna did not marry until

she felt convinced that her future husband was unassuming, agreeable,

almost cultured, and that nothing on earth would tempt him to a really

dishonourable deed. As to small meannesses, such trifles did not

trouble her. Indeed, who is free from them? It is absurd to expect the

ideal! Besides, she knew that her marriage would provide a refuge for

all her family. Seeing Gania unhappy, she was anxious to help him, in

spite of their former disputes and misunderstandings. Ptitsin, in a

friendly way, would press his brother-in-law to enter the army. “You

know,” he said sometimes, jokingly, “you despise generals and

generaldom, but you will see that ‘they’ will all end by being generals

in their turn. You will see it if you live long enough!”

“But why should they suppose that I despise generals?” Gania thought

sarcastically to himself.

To serve her brother’s interests, Varvara Ardalionovna was constantly

at the Epanchins’ house, helped by the fact that in childhood she and

Gania had played with General Ivan Fedorovitch’s daughters. It would

have been inconsistent with her character if in these visits she had

been pursuing a chimera; her project was not chimerical at all; she was

building on a firm basis—on her knowledge of the character of the

Epanchin family, especially Aglaya, whom she studied closely. All

Varvara’s efforts were directed towards bringing Aglaya and Gania

together. Perhaps she achieved some result; perhaps, also, she made the

mistake of depending too much upon her brother, and expecting more from

him than he would ever be capable of giving. However this may be, her

manoeuvres were skilful enough. For weeks at a time she would never

mention Gania. Her attitude was modest but dignified, and she was

always extremely truthful and sincere. Examining the depths of her

conscience, she found nothing to reproach herself with, and this still

further strengthened her in her designs. But Varvara Ardalionovna

sometimes remarked that she felt spiteful; that there was a good deal

of vanity in her, perhaps even of wounded vanity. She noticed this at

certain times more than at others, and especially after her visits to

the Epanchins.

Today, as I have said, she returned from their house with a heavy

feeling of dejection. There was a sensation of bitterness, a sort of

mocking contempt, mingled with it.

Arrived at her own house, Varia heard a considerable commotion going on

in the upper storey, and distinguished the voices of her father and

brother. On entering the salon she found Gania pacing up and down at

frantic speed, pale with rage and almost tearing his hair. She frowned,

and subsided on to the sofa with a tired air, and without taking the

trouble to remove her hat. She very well knew that if she kept quiet

and asked her brother nothing about his reason for tearing up and down

the room, his wrath would fall upon her head. So she hastened to put

the question:

“The old story, eh?”

“Old story? No! Heaven knows what’s up now—I don’t! Father has simply

gone mad; mother’s in floods of tears. Upon my word, Varia, I must kick

him out of the house; or else go myself,” he added, probably

remembering that he could not well turn people out of a house which was

not his own.

“You must make allowances,” murmured Varia.

“Make allowances? For whom? Him—the old blackguard? No, no, Varia—that

won’t do! It won’t do, I tell you! And look at the swagger of the man!

He’s all to blame himself, and yet he puts on so much ‘side’ that you’d

think—my word!—‘It’s too much trouble to go through the gate, you must

break the fence for me!’ That’s the sort of air he puts on; but what’s

the matter with you, Varia? What a curious expression you have!”

“I’m all right,” said Varia, in a tone that sounded as though she were

all wrong.

Gania looked more intently at her.

“You’ve been \_there?\_” he asked, suddenly.

“Yes.”

“Did you find out anything?”

“Nothing unexpected. I discovered that it’s all true. My husband was

wiser than either of us. Just as he suspected from the beginning, so it

has fallen out. Where is he?”

“Out. Well—what has happened?—go on.”

“The prince is formally engaged to her—that’s settled. The elder

sisters told me about it. Aglaya has agreed. They don’t attempt to

conceal it any longer; you know how mysterious and secret they have all

been up to now. Adelaida’s wedding is put off again, so that both can

be married on one day. Isn’t that delightfully romantic? Somebody ought

to write a poem on it. Sit down and write an ode instead of tearing up

and down like that. This evening Princess Bielokonski is to arrive; she

comes just in time—they have a party tonight. He is to be presented to

old Bielokonski, though I believe he knows her already; probably the

engagement will be openly announced. They are only afraid that he may

knock something down, or trip over something when he comes into the

room. It would be just like him.”

Gania listened attentively, but to his sister’s astonishment he was by

no means so impressed by this news (which should, she thought, have

been so important to him) as she had expected.

“Well, it was clear enough all along,” he said, after a moment’s

reflection. “So that’s the end,” he added, with a disagreeable smile,

continuing to walk up and down the room, but much slower than before,

and glancing slyly into his sister’s face.

“It’s a good thing that you take it philosophically, at all events,”

said Varia. “I’m really very glad of it.”

“Yes, it’s off our hands—off \_yours\_, I should say.”

“I think I have served you faithfully. I never even asked you what

happiness you expected to find with Aglaya.”

“Did I ever expect to find happiness with Aglaya?”

“Come, come, don’t overdo your philosophy. Of course you did. Now it’s

all over, and a good thing, too; pair of fools that we have been! I

confess I have never been able to look at it seriously. I busied myself

in it for your sake, thinking that there was no knowing what might

happen with a funny girl like that to deal with. There were ninety to

one chances against it. To this moment I can’t make out why you wished

for it.”

“H’m! now, I suppose, you and your husband will never weary of egging

me on to work again. You’ll begin your lectures about perseverance and

strength of will, and all that. I know it all by heart,” said Gania,

laughing.

“He’s got some new idea in his head,” thought Varia. “Are they pleased

over there—the parents?” asked Gania, suddenly.

“N-no, I don’t think they are. You can judge for yourself. I think the

general is pleased enough; her mother is a little uneasy. She always

loathed the idea of the prince as a \_husband\_; everybody knows that.”

“Of course, naturally. The bridegroom is an impossible and ridiculous

one. I mean, has \_she\_ given her formal consent?”

“She has not said ‘no,’ up to now, and that’s all. It was sure to be so

with her. You know what she is like. You know how absurdly shy she is.

You remember how she used to hide in a cupboard as a child, so as to

avoid seeing visitors, for hours at a time. She is just the same now;

but, do you know, I think there is something serious in the matter,

even from her side; I feel it, somehow. She laughs at the prince, they

say, from morn to night in order to hide her real feelings; but you may

be sure she finds occasion to say something or other to him on the sly,

for he himself is in a state of radiant happiness. He walks in the

clouds; they say he is extremely funny just now; I heard it from

themselves. They seemed to be laughing at me in their sleeves—those

elder girls—I don’t know why.”

Gania had begun to frown, and probably Varia added this last sentence

in order to probe his thought. However, at this moment, the noise began

again upstairs.

“I’ll turn him out!” shouted Gania, glad of the opportunity of venting

his vexation. “I shall just turn him out—we can’t have this.”

“Yes, and then he’ll go about the place and disgrace us as he did

yesterday.”

“How ‘as he did yesterday’? What do you mean? What did he do

yesterday?” asked Gania, in alarm.

“Why, goodness me, don’t you know?” Varia stopped short.

“What? You don’t mean to say that he went there yesterday!” cried

Gania, flushing red with shame and anger. “Good heavens, Varia! Speak!

You have just been there. \_Was\_ he there or not, \_quick?\_” And Gania

rushed for the door. Varia followed and caught him by both hands.

“What are you doing? Where are you going to? You can’t let him go now;

if you do he’ll go and do something worse.”

“What did he do there? What did he say?”

“They couldn’t tell me themselves; they couldn’t make head or tail of

it; but he frightened them all. He came to see the general, who was not

at home; so he asked for Lizabetha Prokofievna. First of all, he begged

her for some place, or situation, for work of some kind, and then he

began to complain about \_us\_, about me and my husband, and you,

especially \_you\_; he said a lot of things.”

“Oh! couldn’t you find out?” muttered Gania, trembling hysterically.

“No—nothing more than that. Why, they couldn’t understand him

themselves; and very likely didn’t tell me all.”

Gania seized his head with both hands and tottered to the window; Varia

sat down at the other window.

“Funny girl, Aglaya,” she observed, after a pause. “When she left me

she said, ‘Give my special and personal respects to your parents; I

shall certainly find an opportunity to see your father one day,’ and so

serious over it. She’s a strange creature.”

“Wasn’t she joking? She was speaking sarcastically!”

“Not a bit of it; that’s just the strange part of it.”

“Does she know about father, do you think—or not?”

“That they do \_not\_ know about it in the house is quite certain, the

rest of them, I mean; but you have given me an idea. Aglaya perhaps

knows. She alone, though, if anyone; for the sisters were as astonished

as I was to hear her speak so seriously. If she knows, the prince must

have told her.”

“Oh! it’s not a great matter to guess who told her. A thief! A thief in

our family, and the head of the family, too!”

“Oh! nonsense!” cried Varia, angrily. “That was nothing but a

drunkard’s tale. Nonsense! Why, who invented the whole thing—Lebedeff

and the prince—a pretty pair! Both were probably drunk.”

“Father is a drunkard and a thief; I am a beggar, and the husband of my

sister is a usurer,” continued Gania, bitterly. “There was a pretty

list of advantages with which to enchant the heart of Aglaya.”

“That same husband of your sister, the usurer—”

“Feeds me? Go on. Don’t stand on ceremony, pray.”

“Don’t lose your temper. You are just like a schoolboy. You think that

all this sort of thing would harm you in Aglaya’s eyes, do you? You

little know her character. She is capable of refusing the most

brilliant party, and running away and starving in a garret with some

wretched student; that’s the sort of girl she is. You never could or

did understand how interesting you would have seen in her eyes if you

had come firmly and proudly through our misfortunes. The prince has

simply caught her with hook and line; firstly, because he never thought

of fishing for her, and secondly, because he is an idiot in the eyes of

most people. It’s quite enough for her that by accepting him she puts

her family out and annoys them all round—that’s what she likes. You

don’t understand these things.”

“We shall see whether I understand or no!” said Gania, enigmatically.

“But I shouldn’t like her to know all about father, all the same. I

thought the prince would manage to hold his tongue about this, at

least. He prevented Lebedeff spreading the news—he wouldn’t even tell

me all when I asked him—”

“Then you must see that he is not responsible. What does it matter to

you now, in any case? What are you hoping for still? If you \_have\_ a

hope left, it is that your suffering air may soften her heart towards

you.”

“Oh, she would funk a scandal like anyone else. You are all tarred with

one brush!”

“What! \_Aglaya\_ would have funked? You are a chicken-hearted fellow,

Gania!” said Varia, looking at her brother with contempt. “Not one of

us is worth much. Aglaya may be a wild sort of a girl, but she is far

nobler than any of us, a thousand times nobler!”

“Well—come! there’s nothing to get cross about,” said Gania.

“All I’m afraid of is—mother. I’m afraid this scandal about father may

come to her ears; perhaps it has already. I am dreadfully afraid.”

“It undoubtedly has already!” observed Gania.

Varia had risen from her place and had started to go upstairs to her

mother; but at this observation of Gania’s she turned and gazed at him

attentively.

“Who could have told her?”

“Hippolyte, probably. He would think it the most delightful amusement

in the world to tell her of it the instant he moved over here; I

haven’t a doubt of it.”

“But how could he know anything of it? Tell me that. Lebedeff and the

prince determined to tell no one—even Colia knows nothing.”

“What, Hippolyte? He found it out himself, of course. Why, you have no

idea what a cunning little animal he is; dirty little gossip! He has

the most extraordinary nose for smelling out other people’s secrets, or

anything approaching to scandal. Believe it or not, but I’m pretty sure

he has got round Aglaya. If he hasn’t, he soon will. Rogojin is

intimate with him, too. How the prince doesn’t notice it, I can’t

understand. The little wretch considers me his enemy now and does his

best to catch me tripping. What on earth does it matter to him, when

he’s dying? However, you’ll see; I shall catch \_him\_ tripping yet, and

not he me.”

“Why did you get him over here, if you hate him so? And is it really

worth your while to try to score off him?”

“Why, it was yourself who advised me to bring him over!”

“I thought he might be useful. You know he is in love with Aglaya

himself, now, and has written to her; he has even written to Lizabetha

Prokofievna!”

“Oh! he’s not dangerous there!” cried Gania, laughing angrily.

“However, I believe there is something of that sort in the air; he is

very likely to be in love, for he is a mere boy. But he won’t write

anonymous letters to the old lady; that would be too audacious a thing

for him to attempt; but I dare swear the very first thing he did was to

show me up to Aglaya as a base deceiver and intriguer. I confess I was

fool enough to attempt something through him at first. I thought he

would throw himself into my service out of revengeful feelings towards

the prince, the sly little beast! But I know him better now. As for the

theft, he may have heard of it from the widow in Petersburg, for if the

old man committed himself to such an act, he can have done it for no

other object but to give the money to her. Hippolyte said to me,

without any prelude, that the general had promised the widow four

hundred roubles. Of course I understood, and the little wretch looked

at me with a nasty sort of satisfaction. I know him; you may depend

upon it he went and told mother too, for the pleasure of wounding her.

And why doesn’t he die, I should like to know? He undertook to die

within three weeks, and here he is getting fatter. His cough is better,

too. It was only yesterday that he said that was the second day he

hadn’t coughed blood.”

“Well, turn him out!”

“I don’t \_hate\_, I despise him,” said Gania, grandly. “Well, I do hate

him, if you like!” he added, with a sudden access of rage, “and I’ll

tell him so to his face, even when he’s dying! If you had but read his

confession—good Lord! what refinement of impudence! Oh, but I’d have

liked to whip him then and there, like a schoolboy, just to see how

surprised he would have been! Now he hates everybody because he—Oh, I

say, what on earth are they doing there! Listen to that noise! I really

can’t stand this any longer. Ptitsin!” he cried, as the latter entered

the room, “what in the name of goodness are we coming to? Listen to

that—”

But the noise came rapidly nearer, the door burst open, and old General

Ivolgin, raging, furious, purple-faced, and trembling with anger,

rushed in. He was followed by Nina Alexandrovna, Colia, and behind the

rest, Hippolyte.

II.

Hippolyte had now been five days at the Ptitsins’. His flitting from

the prince’s to these new quarters had been brought about quite

naturally and without many words. He did not quarrel with the prince—in

fact, they seemed to part as friends. Gania, who had been hostile

enough on that eventful evening, had himself come to see him a couple

of days later, probably in obedience to some sudden impulse. For some

reason or other, Rogojin too had begun to visit the sick boy. The

prince thought it might be better for him to move away from his (the

prince’s) house. Hippolyte informed him, as he took his leave, that

Ptitsin “had been kind enough to offer him a corner,” and did not say a

word about Gania, though Gania had procured his invitation, and himself

came to fetch him away. Gania noticed this at the time, and put it to

Hippolyte’s debit on account.

Gania was right when he told his sister that Hippolyte was getting

better; that he was better was clear at the first glance. He entered

the room now last of all, deliberately, and with a disagreeable smile

on his lips.

Nina Alexandrovna came in, looking frightened. She had changed much

since we last saw her, half a year ago, and had grown thin and pale.

Colia looked worried and perplexed. He could not understand the

vagaries of the general, and knew nothing of the last achievement of

that worthy, which had caused so much commotion in the house. But he

could see that his father had of late changed very much, and that he

had begun to behave in so extraordinary a fashion both at home and

abroad that he was not like the same man. What perplexed and disturbed

him as much as anything was that his father had entirely given up

drinking during the last few days. Colia knew that he had quarrelled

with both Lebedeff and the prince, and had just bought a small bottle

of vodka and brought it home for his father.

“Really, mother,” he had assured Nina Alexandrovna upstairs, “really

you had better let him drink. He has not had a drop for three days; he

must be suffering agonies—” The general now entered the room, threw the

door wide open, and stood on the threshold trembling with indignation.

“Look here, my dear sir,” he began, addressing Ptitsin in a very loud

tone of voice; “if you have really made up your mind to sacrifice an

old man—your father too or at all events father of your wife—an old man

who has served his emperor—to a wretched little atheist like this, all

I can say is, sir, my foot shall cease to tread your floors. Make your

choice, sir; make your choice quickly, if you please! Me or this—screw!

Yes, screw, sir; I said it accidentally, but let the word stand—this

screw, for he screws and drills himself into my soul—”

“Hadn’t you better say corkscrew?” said Hippolyte.

“No, sir, \_not\_ corkscrew. I am a general, not a bottle, sir. Make your

choice, sir—me or him.”

Here Colia handed him a chair, and he subsided into it, breathless with

rage.

“Hadn’t you better—better—take a nap?” murmured the stupefied Ptitsin.

“A nap?” shrieked the general. “I am not drunk, sir; you insult me! I

see,” he continued, rising, “I see that all are against me here.

Enough—I go; but know, sirs—know that—”

He was not allowed to finish his sentence. Somebody pushed him back

into his chair, and begged him to be calm. Nina Alexandrovna trembled,

and cried quietly. Gania retired to the window in disgust.

“But what have I done? What is his grievance?” asked Hippolyte,

grinning.

“What have you done, indeed?” put in Nina Alexandrovna. “You ought to

be ashamed of yourself, teasing an old man like that—and in your

position, too.”

“And pray what \_is\_ my position, madame? I have the greatest respect

for you, personally; but—”

“He’s a little screw,” cried the general; “he drills holes in my heart

and soul. He wishes me to be a pervert to atheism. Know, you young

greenhorn, that I was covered with honours before ever you were born;

and you are nothing better than a wretched little worm, torn in two

with coughing, and dying slowly of your own malice and unbelief. What

did Gavrila bring you over here for? They’re all against me, even to my

own son—all against me.”

“Oh, come—nonsense!” cried Gania; “if you did not go shaming us all

over the town, things might be better for all parties.”

“What—shame you? I?—what do you mean, you young calf? I shame you? I

can only do you honour, sir; I cannot shame you.”

He jumped up from his chair in a fit of uncontrollable rage. Gania was

very angry too.

“Honour, indeed!” said the latter, with contempt.

“What do you say, sir?” growled the general, taking a step towards him.

“I say that I have but to open my mouth, and you—”

Gania began, but did not finish. The two—father and son—stood before

one another, both unspeakably agitated, especially Gania.

“Gania, Gania, reflect!” cried his mother, hurriedly.

“It’s all nonsense on both sides,” snapped out Varia. “Let them alone,

mother.”

“It’s only for mother’s sake that I spare him,” said Gania, tragically.

“Speak!” said the general, beside himself with rage and excitement;

“speak—under the penalty of a father’s curse!”

“Oh, father’s curse be hanged—you don’t frighten me that way!” said

Gania. “Whose fault is it that you have been as mad as a March hare all

this week? It is just a week—you see, I count the days. Take care now;

don’t provoke me too much, or I’ll tell all. Why did you go to the

Epanchins’ yesterday—tell me that? And you call yourself an old man,

too, with grey hair, and father of a family! H’m—nice sort of a

father.”

“Be quiet, Gania,” cried Colia. “Shut up, you fool!”

“Yes, but how have I offended him?” repeated Hippolyte, still in the

same jeering voice. “Why does he call me a screw? You all heard it. He

came to me himself and began telling me about some Captain Eropegoff. I

don’t wish for your company, general. I always avoided you—you know

that. What have I to do with Captain Eropegoff? All I did was to

express my opinion that probably Captain Eropegoff never existed at

all!”

“Of course he never existed!” Gania interrupted.

But the general only stood stupefied and gazed around in a dazed way.

Gania’s speech had impressed him, with its terrible candour. For the

first moment or two he could find no words to answer him, and it was

only when Hippolyte burst out laughing, and said:

“There, you see! Even your own son supports my statement that there

never was such a person as Captain Eropegoff!” that the old fellow

muttered confusedly:

“Kapiton Eropegoff—not Captain Eropegoff!—Kapiton—major

retired—Eropegoff—Kapiton.”

“Kapiton didn’t exist either!” persisted Gania, maliciously.

“What? Didn’t exist?” cried the poor general, and a deep blush suffused

his face.

“That’ll do, Gania!” cried Varia and Ptitsin.

“Shut up, Gania!” said Colia.

But this intercession seemed to rekindle the general.

“What did you mean, sir, that he didn’t exist? Explain yourself,” he

repeated, angrily.

“Because he \_didn’t\_ exist—never could and never did—there! You’d

better drop the subject, I warn you!”

“And this is my son—my own son—whom I—oh, gracious Heaven!

Eropegoff—Eroshka Eropegoff didn’t exist!”

“Ha, ha! it’s Eroshka now,” laughed Hippolyte.

“No, sir, Kapitoshka—not Eroshka. I mean, Kapiton Alexeyevitch—retired

major—married Maria Petrovna Lu—Lu—he was my friend and

companion—Lutugoff—from our earliest beginnings. I closed his eyes for

him—he was killed. Kapiton Eropegoff never existed! tfu!”

The general shouted in his fury; but it was to be concluded that his

wrath was not kindled by the expressed doubt as to Kapiton’s existence.

This was his scapegoat; but his excitement was caused by something

quite different. As a rule he would have merely shouted down the doubt

as to Kapiton, told a long yarn about his friend, and eventually

retired upstairs to his room. But today, in the strange uncertainty of

human nature, it seemed to require but so small an offence as this to

make his cup to overflow. The old man grew purple in the face, he

raised his hands. “Enough of this!” he yelled. “My curse—away, out of

the house I go! Colia, bring my bag away!” He left the room hastily and

in a paroxysm of rage.

His wife, Colia, and Ptitsin ran out after him.

“What have you done now?” said Varia to Gania. “He’ll probably be

making off \_there\_ again! What a disgrace it all is!”

“Well, he shouldn’t steal,” cried Gania, panting with fury. And just at

this moment his eye met Hippolyte’s.

“As for you, sir,” he cried, “you should at least remember that you are

in a strange house and—receiving hospitality; you should not take the

opportunity of tormenting an old man, sir, who is too evidently out of

his mind.”

Hippolyte looked furious, but he restrained himself.

“I don’t quite agree with you that your father is out of his mind,” he

observed, quietly. “On the contrary, I cannot help thinking he has been

less demented of late. Don’t you think so? He has grown so cunning and

careful, and weighs his words so deliberately; he spoke to me about

that Kapiton fellow with an object, you know! Just fancy—he wanted me

to—”

“Oh, devil take what he wanted you to do! Don’t try to be too cunning

with me, young man!” shouted Gania. “If you are aware of the real

reason for my father’s present condition (and you have kept such an

excellent spying watch during these last few days that you are sure to

be aware of it)—you had no right whatever to torment the—unfortunate

man, and to worry my mother by your exaggerations of the affair;

because the whole business is nonsense—simply a drunken freak, and

nothing more, quite unproved by any evidence, and I don’t believe that

much of it!” (he snapped his fingers). “But you must needs spy and

watch over us all, because you are a—a—”

“Screw!” laughed Hippolyte.

“Because you are a humbug, sir; and thought fit to worry people for

half an hour, and tried to frighten them into believing that you would

shoot yourself with your little empty pistol, pirouetting about and

playing at suicide! I gave you hospitality, you have fattened on it,

your cough has left you, and you repay all this—”

“Excuse me—two words! I am Varvara Ardalionovna’s guest, not yours;

\_you\_ have extended no hospitality to me. On the contrary, if I am not

mistaken, I believe you are yourself indebted to Mr. Ptitsin’s

hospitality. Four days ago I begged my mother to come down here and

find lodgings, because I certainly do feel better here, though I am not

fat, nor have I ceased to cough. I am today informed that my room is

ready for me; therefore, having thanked your sister and mother for

their kindness to me, I intend to leave the house this evening. I beg

your pardon—I interrupted you—I think you were about to add something?”

“Oh—if that is the state of affairs—” began Gania.

“Excuse me—I will take a seat,” interrupted Hippolyte once more,

sitting down deliberately; “for I am not strong yet. Now then, I am

ready to hear you. Especially as this is the last chance we shall have

of a talk, and very likely the last meeting we shall ever have at all.”

Gania felt a little guilty.

“I assure you I did not mean to reckon up debits and credits,” he

began, “and if you—”

“I don’t understand your condescension,” said Hippolyte. “As for me, I

promised myself, on the first day of my arrival in this house, that I

would have the satisfaction of settling accounts with you in a very

thorough manner before I said good-bye to you. I intend to perform this

operation now, if you like; after you, though, of course.”

“May I ask you to be so good as to leave this room?”

“You’d better speak out. You’ll be sorry afterwards if you don’t.”

“Hippolyte, stop, please! It’s so dreadfully undignified,” said Varia.

“Well, only for the sake of a lady,” said Hippolyte, laughing. “I am

ready to put off the reckoning, but only put it off, Varvara

Ardalionovna, because an explanation between your brother and myself

has become an absolute necessity, and I could not think of leaving the

house without clearing up all misunderstandings first.”

“In a word, you are a wretched little scandal-monger,” cried Gania,

“and you cannot go away without a scandal!”

“You see,” said Hippolyte, coolly, “you can’t restrain yourself. You’ll

be dreadfully sorry afterwards if you don’t speak out now. Come, you

shall have the first say. I’ll wait.”

Gania was silent and merely looked contemptuously at him.

“You won’t? Very well. I shall be as short as possible, for my part.

Two or three times to-day I have had the word ‘hospitality’ pushed down

my throat; this is not fair. In inviting me here you yourself entrapped

me for your own use; you thought I wished to revenge myself upon the

prince. You heard that Aglaya Ivanovna had been kind to me and read my

confession. Making sure that I should give myself up to your interests,

you hoped that you might get some assistance out of me. I will not go

into details. I don’t ask either admission or confirmation of this from

yourself; I am quite content to leave you to your conscience, and to

feel that we understand one another capitally.”

“What a history you are weaving out of the most ordinary

circumstances!” cried Varia.

“I told you the fellow was nothing but a scandal-monger,” said Gania.

“Excuse me, Varia Ardalionovna, I will proceed. I can, of course,

neither love nor respect the prince, though he is a good-hearted

fellow, if a little queer. But there is no need whatever for me to hate

him. I quite understood your brother when he first offered me aid

against the prince, though I did not show it; I knew well that your

brother was making a ridiculous mistake in me. I am ready to spare him,

however, even now; but solely out of respect for yourself, Varvara

Ardalionovna.

“Having now shown you that I am not quite such a fool as I look, and

that I have to be fished for with a rod and line for a good long while

before I am caught, I will proceed to explain why I specially wished to

make your brother look a fool. That my motive power is hate, I do not

attempt to conceal. I have felt that before dying (and I am dying,

however much fatter I may appear to you), I must absolutely make a fool

of, at least, one of that class of men which has dogged me all my life,

which I hate so cordially, and which is so prominently represented by

your much esteemed brother. I should not enjoy paradise nearly so much

without having done this first. I hate you, Gavrila Ardalionovitch,

solely (this may seem curious to you, but I repeat)—solely because you

are the type, and incarnation, and head, and crown of the most

impudent, the most self-satisfied, the most vulgar and detestable form

of commonplaceness. You are ordinary of the ordinary; you have no

chance of ever fathering the pettiest idea of your own. And yet you are

as jealous and conceited as you can possibly be; you consider yourself

a great genius; of this you are persuaded, although there are dark

moments of doubt and rage, when even this fact seems uncertain. There

are spots of darkness on your horizon, though they will disappear when

you become completely stupid. But a long and chequered path lies before

you, and of this I am glad. In the first place you will never gain a

certain person.”

“Come, come! This is intolerable! You had better stop, you little

mischief-making wretch!” cried Varia. Gania had grown very pale; he

trembled, but said nothing.

Hippolyte paused, and looked at him intently and with great

gratification. He then turned his gaze upon Varia, bowed, and went out,

without adding another word.

Gania might justly complain of the hardness with which fate treated

him. Varia dared not speak to him for a long while, as he strode past

her, backwards and forwards. At last he went and stood at the window,

looking out, with his back turned towards her. There was a fearful row

going on upstairs again.

“Are you off?” said Gania, suddenly, remarking that she had risen and

was about to leave the room. “Wait a moment—look at this.”

He approached the table and laid a small sheet of paper before her. It

looked like a little note.

“Good heavens!” cried Varia, raising her hands.

This was the note:

“GAVRILA ARDOLIONOVITCH,—persuaded of your kindness of heart, I have

determined to ask your advice on a matter of great importance to

myself. I should like to meet you tomorrow morning at seven o’clock by

the green bench in the park. It is not far from our house. Varvara

Ardalionovna, who must accompany you, knows the place well.

“A. E.”

“What on earth is one to make of a girl like that?” said Varia.

Gania, little as he felt inclined for swagger at this moment, could not

avoid showing his triumph, especially just after such humiliating

remarks as those of Hippolyte. A smile of self-satisfaction beamed on

his face, and Varia too was brimming over with delight.

“And this is the very day that they were to announce the engagement!

What will she do next?”

“What do you suppose she wants to talk about tomorrow?” asked Gania.

“Oh, \_that’s\_ all the same! The chief thing is that she wants to see

you after six months’ absence. Look here, Gania, this is a \_serious\_

business. Don’t swagger again and lose the game—play carefully, but

don’t funk, do you understand? As if she could possibly avoid seeing

what I have been working for all this last six months! And just

imagine, I was there this morning and not a word of this! I was there,

you know, on the sly. The old lady did not know, or she would have

kicked me out. I ran some risk for you, you see. I did so want to find

out, at all hazards.”

Here there was a frantic noise upstairs once more; several people

seemed to be rushing downstairs at once.

“Now, Gania,” cried Varia, frightened, “we can’t let him go out! We

can’t afford to have a breath of scandal about the town at this moment.

Run after him and beg his pardon—quick.”

But the father of the family was out in the road already. Colia was

carrying his bag for him; Nina Alexandrovna stood and cried on the

doorstep; she wanted to run after the general, but Ptitsin kept her

back.

“You will only excite him more,” he said. “He has nowhere else to go

to—he’ll be back here in half an hour. I’ve talked it all over with

Colia; let him play the fool a bit, it will do him good.”

“What are you up to? Where are you off to? You’ve nowhere to go to, you

know,” cried Gania, out of the window.

“Come back, father; the neighbours will hear!” cried Varia.

The general stopped, turned round, raised his hands and remarked: “My

curse be upon this house!”

“Which observation should always be made in as theatrical a tone as

possible,” muttered Gania, shutting the window with a bang.

The neighbours undoubtedly did hear. Varia rushed out of the room.

No sooner had his sister left him alone, than Gania took the note out

of his pocket, kissed it, and pirouetted around.

III.

As a general rule, old General Ivolgin’s paroxysms ended in smoke. He

had before this experienced fits of sudden fury, but not very often,

because he was really a man of peaceful and kindly disposition. He had

tried hundreds of times to overcome the dissolute habits which he had

contracted of late years. He would suddenly remember that he was “a

father,” would be reconciled with his wife, and shed genuine tears. His

feeling for Nina Alexandrovna amounted almost to adoration; she had

pardoned so much in silence, and loved him still in spite of the state

of degradation into which he had fallen. But the general’s struggles

with his own weakness never lasted very long. He was, in his way, an

impetuous man, and a quiet life of repentance in the bosom of his

family soon became insupportable to him. In the end he rebelled, and

flew into rages which he regretted, perhaps, even as he gave way to

them, but which were beyond his control. He picked quarrels with

everyone, began to hold forth eloquently, exacted unlimited respect,

and at last disappeared from the house, and sometimes did not return

for a long time. He had given up interfering in the affairs of his

family for two years now, and knew nothing about them but what he

gathered from hearsay.

But on this occasion there was something more serious than usual.

Everyone seemed to know something, but to be afraid to talk about it.

The general had turned up in the bosom of his family two or three days

before, but not, as usual, with the olive branch of peace in his hand,

not in the garb of penitence—in which he was usually clad on such

occasions—but, on the contrary, in an uncommonly bad temper. He had

arrived in a quarrelsome mood, pitching into everyone he came across,

and talking about all sorts and kinds of subjects in the most

unexpected manner, so that it was impossible to discover what it was

that was really putting him out. At moments he would be apparently

quite bright and happy; but as a rule he would sit moody and

thoughtful. He would abruptly commence to hold forth about the

Epanchins, about Lebedeff, or the prince, and equally abruptly would

stop short and refuse to speak another word, answering all further

questions with a stupid smile, unconscious that he was smiling, or that

he had been asked a question. The whole of the previous night he had

spent tossing about and groaning, and poor Nina Alexandrovna had been

busy making cold compresses and warm fomentations and so on, without

being very clear how to apply them. He had fallen asleep after a while,

but not for long, and had awaked in a state of violent hypochondria

which had ended in his quarrel with Hippolyte, and the solemn cursing

of Ptitsin’s establishment generally. It was also observed during those

two or three days that he was in a state of morbid self-esteem, and was

specially touchy on all points of honour. Colia insisted, in discussing

the matter with his mother, that all this was but the outcome of

abstinence from drink, or perhaps of pining after Lebedeff, with whom

up to this time the general had been upon terms of the greatest

friendship; but with whom, for some reason or other, he had quarrelled

a few days since, parting from him in great wrath. There had also been

a scene with the prince. Colia had asked an explanation of the latter,

but had been forced to conclude that he was not told the whole truth.

If Hippolyte and Nina Alexandrovna had, as Gania suspected, had some

special conversation about the general’s actions, it was strange that

the malicious youth, whom Gania had called a scandal-monger to his

face, had not allowed himself a similar satisfaction with Colia.

The fact is that probably Hippolyte was not quite so black as Gania

painted him; and it was hardly likely that he had informed Nina

Alexandrovna of certain events, of which we know, for the mere pleasure

of giving her pain. We must never forget that human motives are

generally far more complicated than we are apt to suppose, and that we

can very rarely accurately describe the motives of another. It is much

better for the writer, as a rule, to content himself with the bare

statement of events; and we shall take this line with regard to the

catastrophe recorded above, and shall state the remaining events

connected with the general’s trouble shortly, because we feel that we

have already given to this secondary character in our story more

attention than we originally intended.

The course of events had marched in the following order. When Lebedeff

returned, in company with the general, after their expedition to town a

few days since, for the purpose of investigation, he brought the prince

no information whatever. If the latter had not himself been occupied

with other thoughts and impressions at the time, he must have observed

that Lebedeff not only was very uncommunicative, but even appeared

anxious to avoid him.

When the prince did give the matter a little attention, he recalled the

fact that during these days he had always found Lebedeff to be in

radiantly good spirits, when they happened to meet; and further, that

the general and Lebedeff were always together. The two friends did not

seem ever to be parted for a moment.

Occasionally the prince heard loud talking and laughing upstairs, and

once he detected the sound of a jolly soldier’s song going on above,

and recognized the unmistakable bass of the general’s voice. But the

sudden outbreak of song did not last; and for an hour afterwards the

animated sound of apparently drunken conversation continued to be heard

from above. At length there was the clearest evidence of a grand mutual

embracing, and someone burst into tears. Shortly after this, however,

there was a violent but short-lived quarrel, with loud talking on both

sides.

All these days Colia had been in a state of great mental preoccupation.

Muishkin was usually out all day, and only came home late at night. On

his return he was invariably informed that Colia had been looking for

him. However, when they did meet, Colia never had anything particular

to tell him, excepting that he was highly dissatisfied with the general

and his present condition of mind and behaviour.

“They drag each other about the place,” he said, “and get drunk

together at the pub close by here, and quarrel in the street on the way

home, and embrace one another after it, and don’t seem to part for a

moment.”

When the prince pointed out that there was nothing new about that, for

that they had always behaved in this manner together, Colia did not

know what to say; in fact he could not explain what it was that

specially worried him, just now, about his father.

On the morning following the bacchanalian songs and quarrels recorded

above, as the prince stepped out of the house at about eleven o’clock,

the general suddenly appeared before him, much agitated.

“I have long sought the honour and opportunity of meeting

you—much-esteemed Lef Nicolaievitch,” he murmured, pressing the

prince’s hand very hard, almost painfully so; “long—very long.”

The prince begged him to step in and sit down.

“No—I will not sit down,—I am keeping you, I see,—another time!—I think

I may be permitted to congratulate you upon the realization of your

heart’s best wishes, is it not so?”

“What best wishes?”

The prince blushed. He thought, as so many in his position do, that

nobody had seen, heard, noticed, or understood anything.

“Oh—be easy, sir, be easy! I shall not wound your tenderest feelings.

I’ve been through it all myself, and I know well how unpleasant it is

when an outsider sticks his nose in where he is not wanted. I

experience this every morning. I came to speak to you about another

matter, though, an important matter. A very important matter, prince.”

The latter requested him to take a seat once more, and sat down

himself.

“Well—just for one second, then. The fact is, I came for advice. Of

course I live now without any very practical objects in life; but,

being full of self-respect, in which quality the ordinary Russian is so

deficient as a rule, and of activity, I am desirous, in a word, prince,

of placing myself and my wife and children in a position of—in fact, I

want advice.”

The prince commended his aspirations with warmth.

“Quite so—quite so! But this is all mere nonsense. I came here to speak

of something quite different, something very important, prince. And I

have determined to come to you as to a man in whose sincerity and

nobility of feeling I can trust like—like—are you surprised at my

words, prince?”

The prince was watching his guest, if not with much surprise, at all

events with great attention and curiosity.

The old man was very pale; every now and then his lips trembled, and

his hands seemed unable to rest quietly, but continually moved from

place to place. He had twice already jumped up from his chair and sat

down again without being in the least aware of it. He would take up a

book from the table and open it—talking all the while,—look at the

heading of a chapter, shut it and put it back again, seizing another

immediately, but holding it unopened in his hand, and waving it in the

air as he spoke.

“But enough!” he cried, suddenly. “I see I have been boring you with

my—”

“Not in the least—not in the least, I assure you. On the contrary, I am

listening most attentively, and am anxious to guess—”

“Prince, I wish to place myself in a respectable position—I wish to

esteem myself—and to—”

“My dear sir, a man of such noble aspirations is worthy of all esteem

by virtue of those aspirations alone.”

The prince brought out his “copy-book sentence” in the firm belief that

it would produce a good effect. He felt instinctively that some such

well-sounding humbug, brought out at the proper moment, would soothe

the old man’s feelings, and would be specially acceptable to such a man

in such a position. At all hazards, his guest must be despatched with

heart relieved and spirit comforted; that was the problem before the

prince at this moment.

The phrase flattered the general, touched him, and pleased him

mightily. He immediately changed his tone, and started off on a long

and solemn explanation. But listen as he would, the prince could make

neither head nor tail of it.

The general spoke hotly and quickly for ten minutes; he spoke as though

his words could not keep pace with his crowding thoughts. Tears stood

in his eyes, and yet his speech was nothing but a collection of

disconnected sentences, without beginning and without end—a string of

unexpected words and unexpected sentiments—colliding with one another,

and jumping over one another, as they burst from his lips.

“Enough!” he concluded at last, “you understand me, and that is the

great thing. A heart like yours cannot help understanding the

sufferings of another. Prince, you are the ideal of generosity; what

are other men beside yourself? But you are young—accept my blessing! My

principal object is to beg you to fix an hour for a most important

conversation—that is my great hope, prince. My heart needs but a little

friendship and sympathy, and yet I cannot always find means to satisfy

it.”

“But why not now? I am ready to listen, and—”

“No, no—prince, not now! Now is a dream! And it is too, too important!

It is to be the hour of Fate to me—\_my own\_ hour. Our interview is not

to be broken in upon by every chance comer, every impertinent guest—and

there are plenty of such stupid, impertinent fellows”—(he bent over and

whispered mysteriously, with a funny, frightened look on his face)—“who

are unworthy to tie your shoe, prince. I don’t say \_mine\_, mind—you

will understand me, prince. Only \_you\_ understand me, prince—no one

else. \_He\_ doesn’t understand me, he is absolutely—\_absolutely\_ unable

to sympathize. The first qualification for understanding another is

Heart.”

The prince was rather alarmed at all this, and was obliged to end by

appointing the same hour of the following day for the interview

desired. The general left him much comforted and far less agitated than

when he had arrived.

At seven in the evening, the prince sent to request Lebedeff to pay him

a visit. Lebedeff came at once, and “esteemed it an honour,” as he

observed, the instant he entered the room. He acted as though there had

never been the slightest suspicion of the fact that he had

systematically avoided the prince for the last three days.

He sat down on the edge of his chair, smiling and making faces, and

rubbing his hands, and looking as though he were in delighted

expectation of hearing some important communication, which had been

long guessed by all.

The prince was instantly covered with confusion; for it appeared to be

plain that everyone expected something of him—that everyone looked at

him as though anxious to congratulate him, and greeted him with hints,

and smiles, and knowing looks.

Keller, for instance, had run into the house three times of late, “just

for a moment,” and each time with the air of desiring to offer his

congratulations. Colia, too, in spite of his melancholy, had once or

twice begun sentences in much the same strain of suggestion or

insinuation.

The prince, however, immediately began, with some show of annoyance, to

question Lebedeff categorically, as to the general’s present condition,

and his opinion thereon. He described the morning’s interview in a few

words.

“Everyone has his worries, prince, especially in these strange and

troublous times of ours,” Lebedeff replied, drily, and with the air of

a man disappointed of his reasonable expectations.

“Dear me, what a philosopher you are!” laughed the prince.

“Philosophy is necessary, sir—very necessary—in our day. It is too much

neglected. As for me, much esteemed prince, I am sensible of having

experienced the honour of your confidence in a certain matter up to a

certain point, but never beyond that point. I do not for a moment

complain—”

“Lebedeff, you seem to be angry for some reason!” said the prince.

“Not the least bit in the world, esteemed and revered prince! Not the

least bit in the world!” cried Lebedeff, solemnly, with his hand upon

his heart. “On the contrary, I am too painfully aware that neither by

my position in the world, nor by my gifts of intellect and heart, nor

by my riches, nor by any former conduct of mine, have I in any way

deserved your confidence, which is far above my highest aspirations and

hopes. Oh no, prince; I may serve you, but only as your humble slave! I

am not angry, oh no! Not angry; pained perhaps, but nothing more.

“My dear Lebedeff, I—”

“Oh, nothing more, nothing more! I was saying to myself but now... ‘I

am quite unworthy of friendly relations with him,’ say I; ‘but perhaps

as landlord of this house I may, at some future date, in his good time,

receive information as to certain imminent and much to be desired

changes—’”

So saying Lebedeff fixed the prince with his sharp little eyes, still

in hope that he would get his curiosity satisfied.

The prince looked back at him in amazement.

“I don’t understand what you are driving at!” he cried, almost angrily,

“and, and—what an intriguer you are, Lebedeff!” he added, bursting into

a fit of genuine laughter.

Lebedeff followed suit at once, and it was clear from his radiant face

that he considered his prospects of satisfaction immensely improved.

“And do you know,” the prince continued, “I am amazed at your naive

ways, Lebedeff! Don’t be angry with me—not only yours, everybody else’s

also! You are waiting to hear something from me at this very moment

with such simplicity that I declare I feel quite ashamed of myself for

having nothing whatever to tell you. I swear to you solemnly, that

there is nothing to tell. There! Can you take that in?” The prince

laughed again.

Lebedeff assumed an air of dignity. It was true enough that he was

sometimes naive to a degree in his curiosity; but he was also an

excessively cunning gentleman, and the prince was almost converting him

into an enemy by his repeated rebuffs. The prince did not snub

Lebedeff’s curiosity, however, because he felt any contempt for him;

but simply because the subject was too delicate to talk about. Only a

few days before he had looked upon his own dreams almost as crimes. But

Lebedeff considered the refusal as caused by personal dislike to

himself, and was hurt accordingly. Indeed, there was at this moment a

piece of news, most interesting to the prince, which Lebedeff knew and

even had wished to tell him, but which he now kept obstinately to

himself.

“And what can I do for you, esteemed prince? Since I am told you sent

for me just now,” he said, after a few moments’ silence.

“Oh, it was about the general,” began the prince, waking abruptly from

the fit of musing which he too had indulged in “and—and about the theft

you told me of.”

“That is—er—about—what theft?”

“Oh come! just as if you didn’t understand, Lukian Timofeyovitch! What

are you up to? I can’t make you out! The money, the money, sir! The

four hundred roubles that you lost that day. You came and told me about

it one morning, and then went off to Petersburg. There, \_now\_ do you

understand?”

“Oh—h—h! You mean the four hundred roubles!” said Lebedeff, dragging

the words out, just as though it had only just dawned upon him what the

prince was talking about. “Thanks very much, prince, for your kind

interest—you do me too much honour. I found the money, long ago!”

“You found it? Thank God for that!”

“Your exclamation proves the generous sympathy of your nature, prince;

for four hundred roubles—to a struggling family man like myself—is no

small matter!”

“I didn’t mean that; at least, of course, I’m glad for your sake, too,”

added the prince, correcting himself, “but—how did you find it?”

“Very simply indeed! I found it under the chair upon which my coat had

hung; so that it is clear the purse simply fell out of the pocket and

on to the floor!”

“Under the chair? Impossible! Why, you told me yourself that you had

searched every corner of the room? How could you not have looked in the

most likely place of all?”

“Of course I looked there,—of course I did! Very much so! I looked and

scrambled about, and felt for it, and wouldn’t believe it was not

there, and looked again and again. It is always so in such cases. One

longs and expects to find a lost article; one sees it is not there, and

the place is as bare as one’s palm; and yet one returns and looks again

and again, fifteen or twenty times, likely enough!”

“Oh, quite so, of course. But how was it in your case?—I don’t quite

understand,” said the bewildered prince. “You say it wasn’t there at

first, and that you searched the place thoroughly, and yet it turned up

on that very spot!”

“Yes, sir—on that very spot.” The prince gazed strangely at Lebedeff.

“And the general?” he asked, abruptly.

“The—the general? How do you mean, the general?” said Lebedeff,

dubiously, as though he had not taken in the drift of the prince’s

remark.

“Oh, good heavens! I mean, what did the general say when the purse

turned up under the chair? You and he had searched for it together

there, hadn’t you?”

“Quite so—together! But the second time I thought better to say nothing

about finding it. I found it alone.”

“But—why in the world—and the money? Was it all there?”

“I opened the purse and counted it myself; right to a single rouble.”

“I think you might have come and told me,” said the prince,

thoughtfully.

“Oh—I didn’t like to disturb you, prince, in the midst of your private

and doubtless most interesting personal reflections. Besides, I wanted

to appear, myself, to have found nothing. I took the purse, and opened

it, and counted the money, and shut it and put it down again under the

chair.”

“What in the world for?”

“Oh, just out of curiosity,” said Lebedeff, rubbing his hands and

sniggering.

“What, it’s still there then, is it? Ever since the day before

yesterday?”

“Oh no! You see, I was half in hopes the general might find it. Because

if I found it, why should not he too observe an object lying before his

very eyes? I moved the chair several times so as to expose the purse to

view, but the general never saw it. He is very absent just now,

evidently. He talks and laughs and tells stories, and suddenly flies

into a rage with me, goodness knows why.”

“Well, but—have you taken the purse away now?”

“No, it disappeared from under the chair in the night.”

“Where is it now, then?”

“Here,” laughed Lebedeff, at last, rising to his full height and

looking pleasantly at the prince, “here, in the lining of my coat.

Look, you can feel it for yourself, if you like!”

Sure enough there was something sticking out of the front of the

coat—something large. It certainly felt as though it might well be the

purse fallen through a hole in the pocket into the lining.

“I took it out and had a look at it; it’s all right. I’ve let it slip

back into the lining now, as you see, and so I have been walking about

ever since yesterday morning; it knocks against my legs when I walk

along.”

“H’m! and you take no notice of it?”

“Quite so, I take no notice of it. Ha, ha! and think of this, prince,

my pockets are always strong and whole, and yet, here in one night, is

a huge hole. I know the phenomenon is unworthy of your notice; but such

is the case. I examined the hole, and I declare it actually looks as

though it had been made with a pen-knife, a most improbable

contingency.”

“And—and—the general?”

“Ah, very angry all day, sir; all yesterday and all today. He shows

decided bacchanalian predilections at one time, and at another is

tearful and sensitive, but at any moment he is liable to paroxysms of

such rage that I assure you, prince, I am quite alarmed. I am not a

military man, you know. Yesterday we were sitting together in the

tavern, and the lining of my coat was—quite accidentally, of

course—sticking out right in front. The general squinted at it, and

flew into a rage. He never looks me quite in the face now, unless he is

very drunk or maudlin; but yesterday he looked at me in such a way that

a shiver went all down my back. I intend to find the purse tomorrow;

but till then I am going to have another night of it with him.”

“What’s the good of tormenting him like this?” cried the prince.

“I don’t torment him, prince, I don’t indeed!” cried Lebedeff, hotly.

“I love him, my dear sir, I esteem him; and believe it or not, I love

him all the better for this business, yes—and value him more.”

Lebedeff said this so seriously that the prince quite lost his temper

with him.

“Nonsense! love him and torment him so! Why, by the very fact that he

put the purse prominently before you, first under the chair and then in

your lining, he shows that he does not wish to deceive you, but is

anxious to beg your forgiveness in this artless way. Do you hear? He is

asking your pardon. He confides in the delicacy of your feelings, and

in your friendship for him. And you can allow yourself to humiliate so

thoroughly honest a man!”

“Thoroughly honest, quite so, prince, thoroughly honest!” said

Lebedeff, with flashing eyes. “And only you, prince, could have found

so very appropriate an expression. I honour you for it, prince. Very

well, that’s settled; I shall find the purse now and not tomorrow.

Here, I find it and take it out before your eyes! And the money is all

right. Take it, prince, and keep it till tomorrow, will you? Tomorrow

or next day I’ll take it back again. I think, prince, that the night

after its disappearance it was buried under a bush in the garden. So I

believe—what do you think of that?”

“Well, take care you don’t tell him to his face that you have found the

purse. Simply let him see that it is no longer in the lining of your

coat, and form his own conclusions.”

“Do you think so? Had I not just better tell him I have found it, and

pretend I never guessed where it was?”

“No, I don’t think so,” said the prince, thoughtfully; “it’s too late

for that—that would be dangerous now. No, no! Better say nothing about

it. Be nice with him, you know, but don’t show him—oh, \_you\_ know well

enough—”

“I know, prince, of course I know, but I’m afraid I shall not carry it

out; for to do so one needs a heart like your own. He is so very

irritable just now, and so proud. At one moment he will embrace me, and

the next he flies out at me and sneers at me, and then I stick the

lining forward on purpose. Well, \_au revoir\_, prince, I see I am

keeping you, and boring you, too, interfering with your most

interesting private reflections.”

“Now, do be careful! Secrecy, as before!”

“Oh, silence isn’t the word! Softly, softly!”

But in spite of this conclusion to the episode, the prince remained as

puzzled as ever, if not more so. He awaited next morning’s interview

with the general most impatiently.

IV.

The time appointed was twelve o’clock, and the prince, returning home

unexpectedly late, found the general waiting for him. At the first

glance, he saw that the latter was displeased, perhaps because he had

been kept waiting. The prince apologized, and quickly took a seat. He

seemed strangely timid before the general this morning, for some

reason, and felt as though his visitor were some piece of china which

he was afraid of breaking.

On scrutinizing him, the prince soon saw that the general was quite a

different man from what he had been the day before; he looked like one

who had come to some momentous resolve. His calmness, however, was more

apparent than real. He was courteous, but there was a suggestion of

injured innocence in his manner.

“I’ve brought your book back,” he began, indicating a book lying on the

table. “Much obliged to you for lending it to me.”

“Ah, yes. Well, did you read it, general? It’s curious, isn’t it?” said

the prince, delighted to be able to open up conversation upon an

outside subject.

“Curious enough, yes, but crude, and of course dreadful nonsense;

probably the man lies in every other sentence.”

The general spoke with considerable confidence, and dragged his words

out with a conceited drawl.

“Oh, but it’s only the simple tale of an old soldier who saw the French

enter Moscow. Some of his remarks were wonderfully interesting. Remarks

of an eye-witness are always valuable, whoever he be, don’t you think

so?”

“Had I been the publisher I should not have printed it. As to the

evidence of eye-witnesses, in these days people prefer impudent lies to

the stories of men of worth and long service. I know of some notes of

the year 1812, which—I have determined, prince, to leave this house,

Mr. Lebedeff’s house.”

The general looked significantly at his host.

“Of course you have your own lodging at Pavlofsk at—at your daughter’s

house,” began the prince, quite at a loss what to say. He suddenly

recollected that the general had come for advice on a most important

matter, affecting his destiny.

“At my wife’s; in other words, at my own place, my daughter’s house.”

“I beg your pardon, I—”

“I leave Lebedeff’s house, my dear prince, because I have quarrelled

with this person. I broke with him last night, and am very sorry that I

did not do so before. I expect respect, prince, even from those to whom

I give my heart, so to speak. Prince, I have often given away my heart,

and am nearly always deceived. This person was quite unworthy of the

gift.”

“There is much that might be improved in him,” said the prince,

moderately, “but he has some qualities which—though amid them one

cannot but discern a cunning nature—reveal what is often a diverting

intellect.”

The prince’s tone was so natural and respectful that the general could

not possibly suspect him of any insincerity.

“Oh, that he possesses good traits, I was the first to show, when I

very nearly made him a present of my friendship. I am not dependent

upon his hospitality, and upon his house; I have my own family. I do

not attempt to justify my own weakness. I have drunk with this man, and

perhaps I deplore the fact now, but I did not take him up for the sake

of drink alone (excuse the crudeness of the expression, prince); I did

not make friends with him for that alone. I was attracted by his good

qualities; but when the fellow declares that he was a child in 1812,

and had his left leg cut off, and buried in the Vagarkoff cemetery, in

Moscow, such a cock-and-bull story amounts to disrespect, my dear sir,

to—to impudent exaggeration.”

“Oh, he was very likely joking; he said it for fun.”

“I quite understand you. You mean that an innocent lie for the sake of

a good joke is harmless, and does not offend the human heart. Some

people lie, if you like to put it so, out of pure friendship, in order

to amuse their fellows; but when a man makes use of extravagance in

order to show his disrespect and to make clear how the intimacy bores

him, it is time for a man of honour to break off the said intimacy, and

to teach the offender his place.”

The general flushed with indignation as he spoke.

“Oh, but Lebedeff cannot have been in Moscow in 1812. He is much too

young; it is all nonsense.”

“Very well, but even if we admit that he \_was\_ alive in 1812, can one

believe that a French chasseur pointed a cannon at him for a lark, and

shot his left leg off? He says he picked his own leg up and took it

away and buried it in the cemetery. He swore he had a stone put up over

it with the inscription: ‘Here lies the leg of Collegiate Secretary

Lebedeff,’ and on the other side, ‘Rest, beloved ashes, till the morn

of joy,’ and that he has a service read over it every year (which is

simply sacrilege), and goes to Moscow once a year on purpose. He

invites me to Moscow in order to prove his assertion, and show me his

leg’s tomb, and the very cannon that shot him; he says it’s the

eleventh from the gate of the Kremlin, an old-fashioned falconet taken

from the French afterwards.”

“And, meanwhile both his legs are still on his body,” said the prince,

laughing. “I assure you, it is only an innocent joke, and you need not

be angry about it.”

“Excuse me—wait a minute—he says that the leg we see is a wooden one,

made by Tchernosvitoff.”

“They do say one can dance with those!”

“Quite so, quite so; and he swears that his wife never found out that

one of his legs was wooden all the while they were married. When I

showed him the ridiculousness of all this, he said, ‘Well, if you were

one of Napoleon’s pages in 1812, you might let me bury my leg in the

Moscow cemetery.’”

“Why, did you say—” began the prince, and paused in confusion.

The general gazed at his host disdainfully.

“Oh, go on,” he said, “finish your sentence, by all means. Say how odd

it appears to you that a man fallen to such a depth of humiliation as

I, can ever have been the actual eye-witness of great events. Go on,

\_I\_ don’t mind! Has \_he\_ found time to tell you scandal about me?”

“No, I’ve heard nothing of this from Lebedeff, if you mean Lebedeff.”

“H’m; I thought differently. You see, we were talking over this period

of history. I was criticizing a current report of something which then

happened, and having been myself an eye-witness of the occurrence—you

are smiling, prince—you are looking at my face as if—”

“Oh no! not at all—I—”

“I am rather young-looking, I know; but I am actually older than I

appear to be. I was ten or eleven in the year 1812. I don’t know my age

exactly, but it has always been a weakness of mine to make it out less

than it really is.”

“I assure you, general, I do not in the least doubt your statement. One

of our living autobiographers states that when he was a small baby in

Moscow in 1812 the French soldiers fed him with bread.”

“Well, there you see!” said the general, condescendingly. “There is

nothing whatever unusual about my tale. Truth very often appears to be

impossible. I was a page—it sounds strange, I dare say. Had I been

fifteen years old I should probably have been terribly frightened when

the French arrived, as my mother was (who had been too slow about

clearing out of Moscow); but as I was only just ten I was not in the

least alarmed, and rushed through the crowd to the very door of the

palace when Napoleon alighted from his horse.”

“Undoubtedly, at ten years old you would not have felt the sense of

fear, as you say,” blurted out the prince, horribly uncomfortable in

the sensation that he was just about to blush.

“Of course; and it all happened so easily and naturally. And yet, were

a novelist to describe the episode, he would put in all kinds of

impossible and incredible details.”

“Oh,” cried the prince, “I have often thought that! Why, I know of a

murder, for the sake of a watch. It’s in all the papers now. But if

some writer had invented it, all the critics would have jumped down his

throat and said the thing was too improbable for anything. And yet you

read it in the paper, and you can’t help thinking that out of these

strange disclosures is to be gained the full knowledge of Russian life

and character. You said that well, general; it is so true,” concluded

the prince, warmly, delighted to have found a refuge from the fiery

blushes which had covered his face.

“Yes, it’s quite true, isn’t it?” cried the general, his eyes sparkling

with gratification. “A small boy, a child, would naturally realize no

danger; he would shove his way through the crowds to see the shine and

glitter of the uniforms, and especially the great man of whom everyone

was speaking, for at that time all the world had been talking of no one

but this man for some years past. The world was full of his name; I—so

to speak—drew it in with my mother’s milk. Napoleon, passing a couple

of paces from me, caught sight of me accidentally. I was very well

dressed, and being all alone, in that crowd, as you will easily

imagine...”

“Oh, of course! Naturally the sight impressed him, and proved to him

that not \_all\_ the aristocracy had left Moscow; that at least some

nobles and their children had remained behind.”

“Just so! just so! He wanted to win over the aristocracy! When his

eagle eye fell on me, mine probably flashed back in response. ‘\_Voilà

un garçon bien éveillé! Qui est ton père?\_’ I immediately replied,

almost panting with excitement, ‘A general, who died on the

battle-fields of his country!’ ‘\_Le fils d’un boyard et d’un brave,

pardessus le marché. J’aime les boyards. M’aimes-tu, petit?\_’

“To this keen question I replied as keenly, ‘The Russian heart can

recognize a great man even in the bitter enemy of his country.’ At

least, I don’t remember the exact words, you know, but the idea was as

I say. Napoleon was struck; he thought a minute and then said to his

suite: ‘I like that boy’s pride; if all Russians think like this child,

then—’ he didn’t finish, but went on and entered the palace. I

instantly mixed with his suite, and followed him. I was already in high

favour. I remember when he came into the first hall, the emperor

stopped before a portrait of the Empress Katherine, and after a

thoughtful glance remarked, ‘That was a great woman,’ and passed on.

“Well, in a couple of days I was known all over the palace and the

Kremlin as ‘le petit boyard.’ I only went home to sleep. They were

nearly out of their minds about me at home. A couple of days after

this, Napoleon’s page, De Bazancour, died; he had not been able to

stand the trials of the campaign. Napoleon remembered me; I was taken

away without explanation; the dead page’s uniform was tried on me, and

when I was taken before the emperor, dressed in it, he nodded his head

to me, and I was told that I was appointed to the vacant post of page.

“Well, I was glad enough, for I had long felt the greatest sympathy for

this man; and then the pretty uniform and all that—only a child, you

know—and so on. It was a dark green dress coat with gold buttons—red

facings, white trousers, and a white silk waistcoat—silk stockings,

shoes with buckles, and top-boots if I were riding out with his majesty

or with the suite.

“Though the position of all of us at that time was not particularly

brilliant, and the poverty was dreadful all round, yet the etiquette at

court was strictly preserved, and the more strictly in proportion to

the growth of the forebodings of disaster.”

“Quite so, quite so, of course!” murmured the poor prince, who didn’t

know where to look. “Your memoirs would be most interesting.”

The general was, of course, repeating what he had told Lebedeff the

night before, and thus brought it out glibly enough, but here he looked

suspiciously at the prince out of the corners of his eyes.

“My memoirs!” he began, with redoubled pride and dignity. “Write my

memoirs? The idea has not tempted me. And yet, if you please, my

memoirs have long been written, but they shall not see the light until

dust returns to dust. Then, I doubt not, they will be translated into

all languages, not of course on account of their actual literary merit,

but because of the great events of which I was the actual witness,

though but a child at the time. As a child, I was able to penetrate

into the secrecy of the great man’s private room. At nights I have

heard the groans and wailings of this ‘giant in distress.’ He could

feel no shame in weeping before such a mere child as I was, though I

understood even then that the reason for his suffering was the silence

of the Emperor Alexander.”

“Yes, of course; he had written letters to the latter with proposals of

peace, had he not?” put in the prince.

“We did not know the details of his proposals, but he wrote letter

after letter, all day and every day. He was dreadfully agitated.

Sometimes at night I would throw myself upon his breast with tears (Oh,

how I loved that man!). ‘Ask forgiveness, Oh, ask forgiveness of the

Emperor Alexander!’ I would cry. I should have said, of course, ‘Make

peace with Alexander,’ but as a child I expressed my idea in the naive

way recorded. ‘Oh, my child,’ he would say (he loved to talk to me and

seemed to forget my tender years), ‘Oh, my child, I am ready to kiss

Alexander’s feet, but I hate and abominate the King of Prussia and the

Austrian Emperor, and—and—but you know nothing of politics, my child.’

He would pull up, remembering whom he was speaking to, but his eyes

would sparkle for a long while after this. Well now, if I were to

describe all this, and I have seen greater events than these, all these

critical gentlemen of the press and political parties—Oh, no thanks!

I’m their very humble servant, but no thanks!”

“Quite so—parties—you are very right,” said the prince. “I was reading

a book about Napoleon and the Waterloo campaign only the other day, by

Charasse, in which the author does not attempt to conceal his joy at

Napoleon’s discomfiture at every page. Well now, I don’t like that; it

smells of ‘party,’ you know. You are quite right. And were you much

occupied with your service under Napoleon?”

The general was in ecstasies, for the prince’s remarks, made, as they

evidently were, in all seriousness and simplicity, quite dissipated the

last relics of his suspicion.

“I know Charasse’s book! Oh! I was so angry with his work! I wrote to

him and said—I forget what, at this moment. You ask whether I was very

busy under the Emperor? Oh no! I was called ‘page,’ but hardly took my

duty seriously. Besides, Napoleon very soon lost hope of conciliating

the Russians, and he would have forgotten all about me had he not loved

me—for personal reasons—I don’t mind saying so now. My heart was

greatly drawn to him, too. My duties were light. I merely had to be at

the palace occasionally to escort the Emperor out riding, and that was

about all. I rode very fairly well. He used to have a ride before

dinner, and his suite on those occasions were generally Davoust,

myself, and Roustan.”

“Constant?” said the prince, suddenly, and quite involuntarily.

“No; Constant was away then, taking a letter to the Empress Josephine.

Instead of him there were always a couple of orderlies—and that was

all, excepting, of course, the generals and marshals whom Napoleon

always took with him for the inspection of various localities, and for

the sake of consultation generally. I remember there was

one—Davoust—nearly always with him—a big man with spectacles. They used

to argue and quarrel sometimes. Once they were in the Emperor’s study

together—just those two and myself—I was unobserved—and they argued,

and the Emperor seemed to be agreeing to something under protest.

Suddenly his eye fell on me and an idea seemed to flash across him.

“‘Child,’ he said, abruptly. ‘If I were to recognize the Russian

orthodox religion and emancipate the serfs, do you think Russia would

come over to me?’”

“‘Never!’ I cried, indignantly.”

“The Emperor was much struck.”

“‘In the flashing eyes of this patriotic child I read and accept the

fiat of the Russian people. Enough, Davoust, it is mere phantasy on our

part. Come, let’s hear your other project.’”

“Yes, but that was a great idea,” said the prince, clearly interested.

“You ascribe it to Davoust, do you?”

“Well, at all events, they were consulting together at the time. Of

course it was the idea of an eagle, and must have originated with

Napoleon; but the other project was good too—it was the ‘Conseil du

lion!’ as Napoleon called it. This project consisted in a proposal to

occupy the Kremlin with the whole army; to arm and fortify it

scientifically, to kill as many horses as could be got, and salt their

flesh, and spend the winter there; and in spring to fight their way

out. Napoleon liked the idea—it attracted him. We rode round the

Kremlin walls every day, and Napoleon used to give orders where they

were to be patched, where built up, where pulled down and so on. All

was decided at last. They were alone together—those two and myself.

“Napoleon was walking up and down with folded arms. I could not take my

eyes off his face—my heart beat loudly and painfully.

“‘I’m off,’ said Davoust. ‘Where to?’ asked Napoleon.

“‘To salt horse-flesh,’ said Davoust. Napoleon shuddered—his fate was

being decided.

“‘Child,’ he addressed me suddenly, ‘what do you think of our plan?’ Of

course he only applied to me as a sort of toss-up, you know. I turned

to Davoust and addressed my reply to him. I said, as though inspired:

“‘Escape, general! Go home!—’

“The project was abandoned; Davoust shrugged his shoulders and went

out, whispering to himself—‘\_Bah, il devient superstitieux!\_’ Next

morning the order to retreat was given.”

“All this is most interesting,” said the prince, very softly, “if it

really was so—that is, I mean—” he hastened to correct himself.

“Oh, my dear prince,” cried the general, who was now so intoxicated

with his own narrative that he probably could not have pulled up at the

most patent indiscretion. “You say, ‘if it really was so!’ There was

more—\_much\_ more, I assure you! These are merely a few little political

acts. I tell you I was the eye-witness of the nightly sorrow and

groanings of the great man, and of \_that\_ no one can speak but myself.

Towards the end he wept no more, though he continued to emit an

occasional groan; but his face grew more overcast day by day, as though

Eternity were wrapping its gloomy mantle about him. Occasionally we

passed whole hours of silence together at night, Roustan snoring in the

next room—that fellow slept like a pig. ‘But he’s loyal to me and my

dynasty,’ said Napoleon of him.

“Sometimes it was very painful to me, and once he caught me with tears

in my eyes. He looked at me kindly. ‘You are sorry for me,’ he said,

‘you, my child, and perhaps one other child—my son, the King of

Rome—may grieve for me. All the rest hate me; and my brothers are the

first to betray me in misfortune.’ I sobbed and threw myself into his

arms. He could not resist me—he burst into tears, and our tears mingled

as we folded each other in a close embrace.

“‘Write, oh, write a letter to the Empress Josephine!’ I cried,

sobbing. Napoleon started, reflected, and said, ‘You remind me of a

third heart which loves me. Thank you, my friend;’ and then and there

he sat down and wrote that letter to Josephine, with which Constant was

sent off next day.”

“You did a good action,” said the prince, “for in the midst of his

angry feelings you insinuated a kind thought into his heart.”

“Just so, prince, just so. How well you bring out that fact! Because

your own heart is good!” cried the ecstatic old gentleman, and,

strangely enough, real tears glistened in his eyes. “Yes, prince, it

was a wonderful spectacle. And, do you know, I all but went off to

Paris, and should assuredly have shared his solitary exile with him;

but, alas, our destinies were otherwise ordered! We parted, he to his

island, where I am sure he thought of the weeping child who had

embraced him so affectionately at parting in Moscow; and I was sent off

to the cadet corps, where I found nothing but roughness and harsh

discipline. Alas, my happy days were done!”

“‘I do not wish to deprive your mother of you, and, therefore, I will

not ask you to go with me,’ he said, the morning of his departure, ‘but

I should like to do something for you.’ He was mounting his horse as he

spoke. ‘Write something in my sister’s album for me,’ I said rather

timidly, for he was in a state of great dejection at the moment. He

turned, called for a pen, took the album. ‘How old is your sister?’ he

asked, holding the pen in his hand. ‘Three years old,’ I said. ‘Ah,

\_petite fille alors!\_’ and he wrote in the album:

“‘Ne mentez jamais! NAPOLÉON (votre ami sincère).’

“Such advice, and at such a moment, you must allow, prince, was—”

“Yes, quite so; very remarkable.”

“This page of the album, framed in gold, hung on the wall of my

sister’s drawing-room all her life, in the most conspicuous place, till

the day of her death; where it is now, I really don’t know. Heavens!

it’s two o’clock! \_How\_ I have kept you, prince! It is really most

unpardonable of me.”

The general rose.

“Oh, not in the least,” said the prince. “On the contrary, I have been

so much interested, I’m really very much obliged to you.”

“Prince,” said the general, pressing his hand, and looking at him with

flashing eyes, and an expression as though he were under the influence

of a sudden thought which had come upon him with stunning force.

“Prince, you are so kind, so simple-minded, that sometimes I really

feel sorry for you! I gaze at you with a feeling of real affection. Oh,

Heaven bless you! May your life blossom and fructify in love. Mine is

over. Forgive me, forgive me!”

He left the room quickly, covering his face with his hands.

The prince could not doubt the sincerity of his agitation. He

understood, too, that the old man had left the room intoxicated with

his own success. The general belonged to that class of liars, who, in

spite of their transports of lying, invariably suspect that they are

not believed. On this occasion, when he recovered from his exaltation,

he would probably suspect Muishkin of pitying him, and feel insulted.

“Have I been acting rightly in allowing him to develop such vast

resources of imagination?” the prince asked himself. But his answer was

a fit of violent laughter which lasted ten whole minutes. He tried to

reproach himself for the laughing fit, but eventually concluded that he

needn’t do so, since in spite of it he was truly sorry for the old man.

The same evening he received a strange letter, short but decided. The

general informed him that they must part for ever; that he was

grateful, but that even from him he could not accept “signs of sympathy

which were humiliating to the dignity of a man already miserable

enough.”

When the prince heard that the old man had gone to Nina Alexandrovna,

though, he felt almost easy on his account.

We have seen, however, that the general paid a visit to Lizabetha

Prokofievna and caused trouble there, the final upshot being that he

frightened Mrs. Epanchin, and angered her by bitter hints as to his son

Gania.

He had been turned out in disgrace, eventually, and this was the cause

of his bad night and quarrelsome day, which ended in his sudden

departure into the street in a condition approaching insanity, as

recorded before.

Colia did not understand the position. He tried severity with his

father, as they stood in the street after the latter had cursed the

household, hoping to bring him round that way.

“Well, where are we to go to now, father?” he asked. “You don’t want to

go to the prince’s; you have quarrelled with Lebedeff; you have no

money; I never have any; and here we are in the middle of the road, in

a nice sort of mess.”

“Better to be of a mess than in a mess! I remember making a joke

something like that at the mess in eighteen hundred and forty—forty—I

forget. ‘Where is my youth, where is my golden youth?’ Who was it said

that, Colia?”

“It was Gogol, in Dead Souls, father,” cried Colia, glancing at him in

some alarm.

“‘Dead Souls,’ yes, of course, dead. When I die, Colia, you must

engrave on my tomb:

“‘Here lies a Dead Soul,

Shame pursues me.’

“Who said that, Colia?”

“I don’t know, father.”

“There was no Eropegoff? Eroshka Eropegoff?” he cried, suddenly,

stopping in the road in a frenzy. “No Eropegoff! And my own son to say

it! Eropegoff was in the place of a brother to me for eleven months. I

fought a duel for him. He was married afterwards, and then killed on

the field of battle. The bullet struck the cross on my breast and

glanced off straight into his temple. ‘I’ll never forget you,’ he

cried, and expired. I served my country well and honestly, Colia, but

shame, shame has pursued me! You and Nina will come to my grave, Colia;

poor Nina, I always used to call her Nina in the old days, and how she

loved.... Nina, Nina, oh, Nina. What have I ever done to deserve your

forgiveness and long-suffering? Oh, Colia, your mother has an angelic

spirit, an angelic spirit, Colia!”

“I know that, father. Look here, dear old father, come back home! Let’s

go back to mother. Look, she ran after us when we came out. What have

you stopped her for, just as though you didn’t take in what I said? Why

are you crying, father?”

Poor Colia cried himself, and kissed the old man’s hands

“You kiss my hands, \_mine?\_”

“Yes, yes, yours, yours! What is there to surprise anyone in that?

Come, come, you mustn’t go on like this, crying in the middle of the

road; and you a general too, a military man! Come, let’s go back.”

“God bless you, dear boy, for being respectful to a disgraced man. Yes,

to a poor disgraced old fellow, your father. You shall have such a son

yourself; le roi de Rome. Oh, curses on this house!”

“Come, come, what does all this mean?” cried Colia beside himself at

last. “What is it? What has happened to you? Why don’t you wish to come

back home? Why have you gone out of your mind, like this?”

“I’ll explain it, I’ll explain all to you. Don’t shout! You shall hear.

Le roi de Rome. Oh, I am sad, I am melancholy!

“‘Nurse, where is your tomb?’

“Who said that, Colia?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know who said it. Come home at once; come on!

I’ll punch Gania’s head myself, if you like—only come. Oh, where \_are\_

you off to again?” The general was dragging him away towards the door

of a house nearby. He sat down on the step, still holding Colia by the

hand.

“Bend down—bend down your ear. I’ll tell you all—disgrace—bend down,

I’ll tell you in your ear.”

“What are you dreaming of?” said poor, frightened Colia, stooping down

towards the old man, all the same.

“Le roi de Rome,” whispered the general, trembling all over.

“What? What \_do\_ you mean? What roi de Rome?”

“I—I,” the general continued to whisper, clinging more and more tightly

to the boy’s shoulder. “I—wish—to tell you—all—Maria—Maria

Petrovna—Su—Su—Su.......”

Colia broke loose, seized his father by the shoulders, and stared into

his eyes with frenzied gaze. The old man had grown livid—his lips were

shaking, convulsions were passing over his features. Suddenly he leant

over and began to sink slowly into Colia’s arms.

“He’s got a stroke!” cried Colia, loudly, realizing what was the matter

at last.

V.

In point of fact, Varia had rather exaggerated the certainty of her

news as to the prince’s betrothal to Aglaya. Very likely, with the

perspicacity of her sex, she gave out as an accomplished fact what she

felt was pretty sure to become a fact in a few days. Perhaps she could

not resist the satisfaction of pouring one last drop of bitterness into

her brother Gania’s cup, in spite of her love for him. At all events,

she had been unable to obtain any definite news from the Epanchin

girls—the most she could get out of them being hints and surmises, and

so on. Perhaps Aglaya’s sisters had merely been pumping Varia for news

while pretending to impart information; or perhaps, again, they had

been unable to resist the feminine gratification of teasing a

friend—for, after all this time, they could scarcely have helped

divining the aim of her frequent visits.

On the other hand, the prince, although he had told Lebedeff,—as we

know, that nothing had happened, and that he had nothing to impart,—the

prince may have been in error. Something strange seemed to have

happened, without anything definite having actually happened. Varia had

guessed that with her true feminine instinct.

How or why it came about that everyone at the Epanchins’ became imbued

with one conviction—that something very important had happened to

Aglaya, and that her fate was in process of settlement—it would be very

difficult to explain. But no sooner had this idea taken root, than all

at once declared that they had seen and observed it long ago; that they

had remarked it at the time of the “poor knight” joke, and even before,

though they had been unwilling to believe in such nonsense.

So said the sisters. Of course, Lizabetha Prokofievna had foreseen it

long before the rest; her “heart had been sore” for a long while, she

declared, and it was now so sore that she appeared to be quite

overwhelmed, and the very thought of the prince became distasteful to

her.

There was a question to be decided—most important, but most difficult;

so much so, that Mrs. Epanchin did not even see how to put it into

words. Would the prince do or not? Was all this good or bad? If good

(which might be the case, of course), \_why\_ good? If bad (which was

hardly doubtful), \_wherein\_, especially, bad? Even the general, the

paterfamilias, though astonished at first, suddenly declared that,

“upon his honour, he really believed he had fancied something of the

kind, after all. At first, it seemed a new idea, and then, somehow, it

looked as familiar as possible.” His wife frowned him down there. This

was in the morning; but in the evening, alone with his wife, he had

given tongue again.

“Well, really, you know”—(silence)—“of course, you know all this is

very strange, if true, which I cannot deny; but”—(silence).—“But, on

the other hand, if one looks things in the face, you know—upon my

honour, the prince is a rare good fellow—and—and—and—well, his name,

you know—your family name—all this looks well, and perpetuates the name

and title and all that—which at this moment is not standing so high as

it might—from one point of view—don’t you know? The world, the world is

the world, of course—and people will talk—and—and—the prince has

property, you know—if it is not very large—and then he—he—” (Continued

silence, and collapse of the general.)

Hearing these words from her husband, Lizabetha Prokofievna was driven

beside herself.

According to her opinion, the whole thing had been one huge,

fantastical, absurd, unpardonable mistake. “First of all, this prince

is an idiot, and, secondly, he is a fool—knows nothing of the world,

and has no place in it. Whom can he be shown to? Where can you take him

to? What will old Bielokonski say? We never thought of such a husband

as \_that\_ for our Aglaya!”

Of course, the last argument was the chief one. The maternal heart

trembled with indignation to think of such an absurdity, although in

that heart there rose another voice, which said: “And \_why\_ is not the

prince such a husband as you would have desired for Aglaya?” It was

this voice which annoyed Lizabetha Prokofievna more than anything else.

For some reason or other, the sisters liked the idea of the prince.

They did not even consider it very strange; in a word, they might be

expected at any moment to range themselves strongly on his side. But

both of them decided to say nothing either way. It had always been

noticed in the family that the stronger Mrs. Epanchin’s opposition was

to any project, the nearer she was, in reality, to giving in.

Alexandra, however, found it difficult to keep absolute silence on the

subject. Long since holding, as she did, the post of “confidential

adviser to mamma,” she was now perpetually called in council, and asked

her opinion, and especially her assistance, in order to recollect “how

on earth all this happened?” Why did no one see it? Why did no one say

anything about it? What did all that wretched “poor knight” joke mean?

Why was she, Lizabetha Prokofievna, driven to think, and foresee, and

worry for everybody, while they all sucked their thumbs, and counted

the crows in the garden, and did nothing? At first, Alexandra had been

very careful, and had merely replied that perhaps her father’s remark

was not so far out: that, in the eyes of the world, probably the choice

of the prince as a husband for one of the Epanchin girls would be

considered a very wise one. Warming up, however, she added that the

prince was by no means a fool, and never had been; and that as to

“place in the world,” no one knew what the position of a respectable

person in Russia would imply in a few years—whether it would depend on

successes in the government service, on the old system, or what.

To all this her mother replied that Alexandra was a freethinker, and

that all this was due to that “cursed woman’s rights question.”

Half an hour after this conversation, she went off to town, and thence

to the Kammenny Ostrof, [“Stone Island,” a suburb and park of St.

Petersburg] to see Princess Bielokonski, who had just arrived from

Moscow on a short visit. The princess was Aglaya’s godmother.

“Old Bielokonski” listened to all the fevered and despairing

lamentations of Lizabetha Prokofievna without the least emotion; the

tears of this sorrowful mother did not evoke answering sighs—in fact,

she laughed at her. She was a dreadful old despot, this princess; she

could not allow equality in anything, not even in friendship of the

oldest standing, and she insisted on treating Mrs. Epanchin as her

\_protégée\_, as she had been thirty-five years ago. She could never put

up with the independence and energy of Lizabetha’s character. She

observed that, as usual, the whole family had gone much too far ahead,

and had converted a fly into an elephant; that, so far as she had heard

their story, she was persuaded that nothing of any seriousness had

occurred; that it would surely be better to wait until something \_did\_

happen; that the prince, in her opinion, was a very decent young

fellow, though perhaps a little eccentric, through illness, and not

quite as weighty in the world as one could wish. The worst feature was,

she said, Nastasia Philipovna.

Lizabetha Prokofievna well understood that the old lady was angry at

the failure of Evgenie Pavlovitch—her own recommendation. She returned

home to Pavlofsk in a worse humour than when she left, and of course

everybody in the house suffered. She pitched into everyone, because,

she declared, they had ‘gone mad.’ Why were things always mismanaged in

her house? Why had everybody been in such a frantic hurry in this

matter? So far as she could see, nothing whatever had happened. Surely

they had better wait and see what was to happen, instead of making

mountains out of molehills.

And so the conclusion of the matter was that it would be far better to

take it quietly, and wait coolly to see what would turn up. But, alas!

peace did not reign for more than ten minutes. The first blow dealt to

its power was in certain news communicated to Lizabetha Prokofievna as

to events which had happened during her trip to see the princess. (This

trip had taken place the day after that on which the prince had turned

up at the Epanchins at nearly one o’clock at night, thinking it was

nine.)

The sisters replied candidly and fully enough to their mother’s

impatient questions on her return. They said, in the first place, that

nothing particular had happened since her departure; that the prince

had been, and that Aglaya had kept him waiting a long while before she

appeared—half an hour, at least; that she had then come in, and

immediately asked the prince to have a game of chess; that the prince

did not know the game, and Aglaya had beaten him easily; that she had

been in a wonderfully merry mood, and had laughed at the prince, and

chaffed him so unmercifully that one was quite sorry to see his

wretched expression.

She had then asked him to play cards—the game called “little fools.” At

this game the tables were turned completely, for the prince had shown

himself a master at it. Aglaya had cheated and changed cards, and

stolen others, in the most bare-faced way, but, in spite of everything

the prince had beaten her hopelessly five times running, and she had

been left “little fool” each time.

Aglaya then lost her temper, and began to say such awful things to the

prince that he laughed no more, but grew dreadfully pale, especially

when she said that she should not remain in the house with him, and

that he ought to be ashamed of coming to their house at all, especially

at night, “\_after all that had happened\_.”

So saying, she had left the room, banging the door after her, and the

prince went off, looking as though he were on his way to a funeral, in

spite of all their attempts at consolation.

Suddenly, a quarter of an hour after the prince’s departure, Aglaya had

rushed out of her room in such a hurry that she had not even wiped her

eyes, which were full of tears. She came back because Colia had brought

a hedgehog. Everybody came in to see the hedgehog. In answer to their

questions Colia explained that the hedgehog was not his, and that he

had left another boy, Kostia Lebedeff, waiting for him outside. Kostia

was too shy to come in, because he was carrying a hatchet; they had

bought the hedgehog and the hatchet from a peasant whom they had met on

the road. He had offered to sell them the hedgehog, and they had paid

fifty copecks for it; and the hatchet had so taken their fancy that

they had made up their minds to buy it of their own accord. On hearing

this, Aglaya urged Colia to sell her the hedgehog; she even called him

“dear Colia,” in trying to coax him. He refused for a long time, but at

last he could hold out no more, and went to fetch Kostia Lebedeff. The

latter appeared, carrying his hatchet, and covered with confusion. Then

it came out that the hedgehog was not theirs, but the property of a

schoolmate, one Petroff, who had given them some money to buy

Schlosser’s History for him, from another schoolfellow who at that

moment was driven to raising money by the sale of his books. Colia and

Kostia were about to make this purchase for their friend when chance

brought the hedgehog to their notice, and they had succumbed to the

temptation of buying it. They were now taking Petroff the hedgehog and

hatchet which they had bought with his money, instead of Schlosser’s

History. But Aglaya so entreated them that at last they consented to

sell her the hedgehog. As soon as she had got possession of it, she put

it in a wicker basket with Colia’s help, and covered it with a napkin.

Then she said to Colia: “Go and take this hedgehog to the prince from

me, and ask him to accept it as a token of my profound respect.” Colia

joyfully promised to do the errand, but he demanded explanations. “What

does the hedgehog mean? What is the meaning of such a present?” Aglaya

replied that it was none of his business. “I am sure that there is some

allegory about it,” Colia persisted. Aglaya grew angry, and called him

“a silly boy.” “If I did not respect all women in your person,” replied

Colia, “and if my own principles would permit it, I would soon prove to

you, that I know how to answer such an insult!” But, in the end, Colia

went off with the hedgehog in great delight, followed by Kostia

Lebedeff. Aglaya’s annoyance was soon over, and seeing that Colia was

swinging the hedgehog’s basket violently to and fro, she called out to

him from the verandah, as if they had never quarrelled: “Colia, dear,

please take care not to drop him!” Colia appeared to have no grudge

against her, either, for he stopped, and answered most cordially: “No,

I will not drop him! Don’t be afraid, Aglaya Ivanovna!” After which he

went on his way. Aglaya burst out laughing and ran up to her room,

highly delighted. Her good spirits lasted the whole day.

All this filled poor Lizabetha’s mind with chaotic confusion. What on

earth did it all mean? The most disturbing feature was the hedgehog.

What was the symbolic signification of a hedgehog? What did they

understand by it? What underlay it? Was it a cryptic message?

Poor General Epanchin “put his foot in it” by answering the above

questions in his own way. He said there was no cryptic message at all.

As for the hedgehog, it was just a hedgehog, which meant

nothing—unless, indeed, it was a pledge of friendship,—the sign of

forgetting of offences and so on. At all events, it was a joke, and, of

course, a most pardonable and innocent one.

We may as well remark that the general had guessed perfectly

accurately.

The prince, returning home from the interview with Aglaya, had sat

gloomy and depressed for half an hour. He was almost in despair when

Colia arrived with the hedgehog.

Then the sky cleared in a moment. The prince seemed to arise from the

dead; he asked Colia all about it, made him repeat the story over and

over again, and laughed and shook hands with the boys in his delight.

It seemed clear to the prince that Aglaya forgave him, and that he

might go there again this very evening; and in his eyes that was not

only the main thing, but everything in the world.

“What children we are still, Colia!” he cried at last,

enthusiastically,—“and how delightful it is that we can be children

still!”

“Simply—my dear prince,—simply she is in love with you,—that’s the

whole of the secret!” replied Colia, with authority.

The prince blushed, but this time he said nothing. Colia burst out

laughing and clapped his hands. A minute later the prince laughed too,

and from this moment until the evening he looked at his watch every

other minute to see how much time he had to wait before evening came.

But the situation was becoming rapidly critical.

Mrs. Epanchin could bear her suspense no longer, and in spite of the

opposition of husband and daughters, she sent for Aglaya, determined to

get a straightforward answer out of her, once for all.

“Otherwise,” she observed hysterically, “I shall die before evening.”

It was only now that everyone realized to what a ridiculous dead-lock

the whole matter had been brought. Excepting feigned surprise,

indignation, laughter, and jeering—both at the prince and at everyone

who asked her questions,—nothing could be got out of Aglaya.

Lizabetha Prokofievna went to bed and only rose again in time for tea,

when the prince might be expected.

She awaited him in trembling agitation; and when he at last arrived she

nearly went off into hysterics.

Muishkin himself came in very timidly. He seemed to feel his way, and

looked in each person’s eyes in a questioning way,—for Aglaya was

absent, which fact alarmed him at once.

This evening there were no strangers present—no one but the immediate

members of the family. Prince S. was still in town, occupied with the

affairs of Evgenie Pavlovitch’s uncle.

“I wish at least \_he\_ would come and say something!” complained poor

Lizabetha Prokofievna.

The general sat still with a most preoccupied air. The sisters were

looking very serious and did not speak a word, and Lizabetha

Prokofievna did not know how to commence the conversation.

At length she plunged into an energetic and hostile criticism of

railways, and glared at the prince defiantly.

Alas Aglaya still did not come—and the prince was quite lost. He had

the greatest difficulty in expressing his opinion that railways were

most useful institutions,—and in the middle of his speech Adelaida

laughed, which threw him into a still worse state of confusion.

At this moment in marched Aglaya, as calm and collected as could be.

She gave the prince a ceremonious bow and solemnly took up a prominent

position near the big round table. She looked at the prince

questioningly.

All present realized that the moment for the settlement of perplexities

had arrived.

“Did you get my hedgehog?” she inquired, firmly and almost angrily.

“Yes, I got it,” said the prince, blushing.

“Tell us now, at once, what you made of the present? I must have you

answer this question for mother’s sake; she needs pacifying, and so do

all the rest of the family!”

“Look here, Aglaya—” began the general.

“This—this is going beyond all limits!” said Lizabetha Prokofievna,

suddenly alarmed.

“It is not in the least beyond all limits, mamma!” said her daughter,

firmly. “I sent the prince a hedgehog this morning, and I wish to hear

his opinion of it. Go on, prince.”

“What—what sort of opinion, Aglaya Ivanovna?”

“About the hedgehog.”

“That is—I suppose you wish to know how I received the hedgehog, Aglaya

Ivanovna,—or, I should say, how I regarded your sending him to me? In

that case, I may tell you—in a word—that I—in fact—”

He paused, breathless.

“Come—you haven’t told us much!” said Aglaya, after waiting some five

seconds. “Very well, I am ready to drop the hedgehog, if you like; but

I am anxious to be able to clear up this accumulation of

misunderstandings. Allow me to ask you, prince,—I wish to hear from

you, personally—are you making me an offer, or not?”

“Gracious heavens!” exclaimed Lizabetha Prokofievna. The prince

started. The general stiffened in his chair; the sisters frowned.

“Don’t deceive me now, prince—tell the truth. All these people

persecute me with astounding questions—about you. Is there any ground

for all these questions, or not? Come!”

“I have not asked you to marry me yet, Aglaya Ivanovna,” said the

prince, becoming suddenly animated; “but you know yourself how much I

love you and trust you.”

“No—I asked you this—answer this! Do you intend to ask for my hand, or

not?”

“Yes—I do ask for it!” said the prince, more dead than alive now.

There was a general stir in the room.

“No—no—my dear girl,” began the general. “You cannot proceed like this,

Aglaya, if that’s how the matter stands. It’s impossible. Prince,

forgive it, my dear fellow, but—Lizabetha Prokofievna!”—he appealed to

his spouse for help—“you must really—”

“Not I—not I! I retire from all responsibility,” said Lizabetha

Prokofievna, with a wave of the hand.

“Allow me to speak, please, mamma,” said Aglaya. “I think I ought to

have something to say in the matter. An important moment of my destiny

is about to be decided”—(this is how Aglaya expressed herself)—“and I

wish to find out how the matter stands, for my own sake, though I am

glad you are all here. Allow me to ask you, prince, since you cherish

those intentions, how you consider that you will provide for my

happiness?”

“I—I don’t quite know how to answer your question, Aglaya Ivanovna.

What is there to say to such a question? And—and must I answer?”

“I think you are rather overwhelmed and out of breath. Have a little

rest, and try to recover yourself. Take a glass of water, or—but

they’ll give you some tea directly.”

“I love you, Aglaya Ivanovna,—I love you very much. I love only

you—and—please don’t jest about it, for I do love you very much.”

“Well, this matter is important. We are not children—we must look into

it thoroughly. Now then, kindly tell me—what does your fortune consist

of?”

“No—Aglaya—come, enough of this, you mustn’t behave like this,” said

her father, in dismay.

“It’s disgraceful,” said Lizabetha Prokofievna in a loud whisper.

“She’s mad—quite!” said Alexandra.

“Fortune—money—do you mean?” asked the prince in some surprise.

“Just so.”

“I have now—let’s see—I have a hundred and thirty-five thousand

roubles,” said the prince, blushing violently.

“Is that all, really?” said Aglaya, candidly, without the slightest

show of confusion. “However, it’s not so bad, especially if managed

with economy. Do you intend to serve?”

“I—I intended to try for a certificate as private tutor.”

“Very good. That would increase our income nicely. Have you any

intention of being a Kammer-junker?”

“A Kammer-junker? I had not thought of it, but—”

But here the two sisters could restrain themselves no longer, and both

of them burst into irrepressible laughter.

Adelaida had long since detected in Aglaya’s features the gathering

signs of an approaching storm of laughter, which she restrained with

amazing self-control.

Aglaya looked menacingly at her laughing sisters, but could not contain

herself any longer, and the next minute she too had burst into an

irrepressible, and almost hysterical, fit of mirth. At length she

jumped up, and ran out of the room.

“I knew it was all a joke!” cried Adelaida. “I felt it ever since—since

the hedgehog.”

“No, no! I cannot allow this,—this is a little too much,” cried

Lizabetha Prokofievna, exploding with rage, and she rose from her seat

and followed Aglaya out of the room as quickly as she could.

The two sisters hurriedly went after her.

The prince and the general were the only two persons left in the room.

“It’s—it’s really—now could you have imagined anything like it, Lef

Nicolaievitch?” cried the general. He was evidently so much agitated

that he hardly knew what he wished to say. “Seriously now, seriously I

mean—”

“I only see that Aglaya Ivanovna is laughing at me,” said the poor

prince, sadly.

“Wait a bit, my boy, I’ll just go—you stay here, you know. But do just

explain, if you can, Lef Nicolaievitch, how in the world has all this

come about? And what does it all mean? You must understand, my dear

fellow; I am a father, you see, and I ought to be allowed to understand

the matter—do explain, I beg you!”

“I love Aglaya Ivanovna—she knows it,—and I think she must have long

known it.”

The general shrugged his shoulders.

“Strange—it’s strange,” he said, “and you love her very much?”

“Yes, very much.”

“Well—it’s all most strange to me. That is—my dear fellow, it is such a

surprise—such a blow—that... You see, it is not your financial position

(though I should not object if you were a bit richer)—I am thinking of

my daughter’s happiness, of course, and the thing is—are you able to

give her the happiness she deserves? And then—is all this a joke on her

part, or is she in earnest? I don’t mean on your side, but on hers.”

At this moment Alexandra’s voice was heard outside the door, calling

out “Papa!”

“Wait for me here, my boy—will you? Just wait and think it all over,

and I’ll come back directly,” he said hurriedly, and made off with what

looked like the rapidity of alarm in response to Alexandra’s call.

He found the mother and daughter locked in one another’s arms, mingling

their tears.

These were the tears of joy and peace and reconciliation. Aglaya was

kissing her mother’s lips and cheeks and hands; they were hugging each

other in the most ardent way.

“There, look at her now—Ivan Fedorovitch! Here she is—all of her! This

is our \_real\_ Aglaya at last!” said Lizabetha Prokofievna.

Aglaya raised her happy, tearful face from her mother’s breast, glanced

at her father, and burst out laughing. She sprang at him and hugged him

too, and kissed him over and over again. She then rushed back to her

mother and hid her face in the maternal bosom, and there indulged in

more tears. Her mother covered her with a corner of her shawl.

“Oh, you cruel little girl! How will you treat us all next, I wonder?”

she said, but she spoke with a ring of joy in her voice, and as though

she breathed at last without the oppression which she had felt so long.

“Cruel?” sobbed Aglaya. “Yes, I \_am\_ cruel, and worthless, and

spoiled—tell father so,—oh, here he is—I forgot Father, listen!” She

laughed through her tears.

“My darling, my little idol,” cried the general, kissing and fondling

her hands (Aglaya did not draw them away); “so you love this young man,

do you?”

“No, no, no, can’t \_bear\_ him, I can’t \_bear\_ your young man!” cried

Aglaya, raising her head. “And if you dare say that \_once\_ more,

papa—I’m serious, you know, I’m,—do you hear me—I’m serious!”

She certainly did seem to be serious enough. She had flushed up all

over and her eyes were blazing.

The general felt troubled and remained silent, while Lizabetha

Prokofievna telegraphed to him from behind Aglaya to ask no questions.

“If that’s the case, darling—then, of course, you shall do exactly as

you like. He is waiting alone downstairs. Hadn’t I better hint to him

gently that he can go?” The general telegraphed to Lizabetha

Prokofievna in his turn.

“No, no, you needn’t do anything of the sort; you mustn’t hint gently

at all. I’ll go down myself directly. I wish to apologize to this young

man, because I hurt his feelings.”

“Yes, \_seriously\_,” said the general, gravely.

“Well, you’d better stay here, all of you, for a little, and I’ll go

down to him alone to begin with. I’ll just go in and then you can

follow me almost at once. That’s the best way.”

She had almost reached the door when she turned round again.

“I shall laugh—I know I shall; I shall die of laughing,” she said,

lugubriously.

However, she turned and ran down to the prince as fast as her feet

could carry her.

“Well, what does it all mean? What do you make of it?” asked the

general of his spouse, hurriedly.

“I hardly dare say,” said Lizabetha, as hurriedly, “but I think it’s as

plain as anything can be.”

“I think so too, as clear as day; she loves him.”

“Loves him? She is head over ears in love, that’s what she is,” put in

Alexandra.

“Well, God bless her, God bless her, if such is her destiny,” said

Lizabetha, crossing herself devoutly.

“H’m destiny it is,” said the general, “and there’s no getting out of

destiny.”

With these words they all moved off towards the drawing-room, where

another surprise awaited them. Aglaya had not only not laughed, as she

had feared, but had gone to the prince rather timidly, and said to him:

“Forgive a silly, horrid, spoilt girl”—(she took his hand here)—“and be

quite assured that we all of us esteem you beyond all words. And if I

dared to turn your beautiful, admirable simplicity to ridicule, forgive

me as you would a little child its mischief. Forgive me all my

absurdity of just now, which, of course, meant nothing, and could not

have the slightest consequence.” She spoke these words with great

emphasis.

Her father, mother, and sisters came into the room and were much struck

with the last words, which they just caught as they entered—“absurdity

which of course meant nothing”—and still more so with the emphasis with

which Aglaya had spoken.

They exchanged glances questioningly, but the prince did not seem to

have understood the meaning of Aglaya’s words; he was in the highest

heaven of delight.

“Why do you speak so?” he murmured. “Why do you ask my forgiveness?”

He wished to add that he was unworthy of being asked for forgiveness by

her, but paused. Perhaps he did understand Aglaya’s sentence about

“absurdity which meant nothing,” and like the strange fellow that he

was, rejoiced in the words.

Undoubtedly the fact that he might now come and see Aglaya as much as

he pleased again was quite enough to make him perfectly happy; that he

might come and speak to her, and see her, and sit by her, and walk with

her—who knows, but that all this was quite enough to satisfy him for

the whole of his life, and that he would desire no more to the end of

time?

(Lizabetha Prokofievna felt that this might be the case, and she didn’t

like it; though very probably she could not have put the idea into

words.)

It would be difficult to describe the animation and high spirits which

distinguished the prince for the rest of the evening.

He was so happy that “it made one feel happy to look at him,” as

Aglaya’s sisters expressed it afterwards. He talked, and told stories

just as he had done once before, and never since, namely on the very

first morning of his acquaintance with the Epanchins, six months ago.

Since his return to Petersburg from Moscow, he had been remarkably

silent, and had told Prince S. on one occasion, before everyone, that

he did not think himself justified in degrading any thought by his

unworthy words.

But this evening he did nearly all the talking himself, and told

stories by the dozen, while he answered all questions put to him

clearly, gladly, and with any amount of detail.

There was nothing, however, of love-making in his talk. His ideas were

all of the most serious kind; some were even mystical and profound.

He aired his own views on various matters, some of his most private

opinions and observations, many of which would have seemed rather

funny, so his hearers agreed afterwards, had they not been so well

expressed.

The general liked serious subjects of conversation; but both he and

Lizabetha Prokofievna felt that they were having a little too much of a

good thing tonight, and as the evening advanced, they both grew more or

less melancholy; but towards night, the prince fell to telling funny

stories, and was always the first to burst out laughing himself, which

he invariably did so joyously and simply that the rest laughed just as

much at him as at his stories.

As for Aglaya, she hardly said a word all the evening; but she listened

with all her ears to Lef Nicolaievitch’s talk, and scarcely took her

eyes off him.

“She looked at him, and stared and stared, and hung on every word he

said,” said Lizabetha afterwards, to her husband, “and yet, tell her

that she loves him, and she is furious!”

“What’s to be done? It’s fate,” said the general, shrugging his

shoulders, and, for a long while after, he continued to repeat: “It’s

fate, it’s fate!”

We may add that to a business man like General Epanchin the present

position of affairs was most unsatisfactory. He hated the uncertainty

in which they had been, perforce, left. However, he decided to say no

more about it, and merely to look on, and take his time and tune from

Lizabetha Prokofievna.

The happy state in which the family had spent the evening, as just

recorded, was not of very long duration. Next day Aglaya quarrelled

with the prince again, and so she continued to behave for the next few

days. For whole hours at a time she ridiculed and chaffed the wretched

man, and made him almost a laughing-stock.

It is true that they used to sit in the little summer-house together

for an hour or two at a time, very often, but it was observed that on

these occasions the prince would read the paper, or some book, aloud to

Aglaya.

“Do you know,” Aglaya said to him once, interrupting the reading, “I’ve

remarked that you are dreadfully badly educated. You never know

anything thoroughly, if one asks you; neither anyone’s name, nor dates,

nor about treaties and so on. It’s a great pity, you know!”

“I told you I had not had much of an education,” replied the prince.

“How am I to respect you, if that’s the case? Read on now. No—don’t!

Stop reading!”

And once more, that same evening, Aglaya mystified them all. Prince S.

had returned, and Aglaya was particularly amiable to him, and asked a

great deal after Evgenie Pavlovitch. (Muishkin had not come in as yet.)

Suddenly Prince S. hinted something about “a new and approaching change

in the family.” He was led to this remark by a communication

inadvertently made to him by Lizabetha Prokofievna, that Adelaida’s

marriage must be postponed a little longer, in order that the two

weddings might come off together.

It is impossible to describe Aglaya’s irritation. She flared up, and

said some indignant words about “all these silly insinuations.” She

added that “she had no intentions as yet of replacing anybody’s

mistress.”

These words painfully impressed the whole party; but especially her

parents. Lizabetha Prokofievna summoned a secret council of two, and

insisted upon the general’s demanding from the prince a full

explanation of his relations with Nastasia Philipovna. The general

argued that it was only a whim of Aglaya’s; and that, had not Prince S.

unfortunately made that remark, which had confused the child and made

her blush, she never would have said what she did; and that he was sure

Aglaya knew well that anything she might have heard of the prince and

Nastasia Philipovna was merely the fabrication of malicious tongues,

and that the woman was going to marry Rogojin. He insisted that the

prince had nothing whatever to do with Nastasia Philipovna, so far as

any liaison was concerned; and, if the truth were to be told about it,

he added, never had had.

Meanwhile nothing put the prince out, and he continued to be in the

seventh heaven of bliss. Of course he could not fail to observe some

impatience and ill-temper in Aglaya now and then; but he believed in

something else, and nothing could now shake his conviction. Besides,

Aglaya’s frowns never lasted long; they disappeared of themselves.

Perhaps he was too easy in his mind. So thought Hippolyte, at all

events, who met him in the park one day.

“Didn’t I tell you the truth now, when I said you were in love?” he

said, coming up to Muishkin of his own accord, and stopping him.

The prince gave him his hand and congratulated him upon “looking so

well.”

Hippolyte himself seemed to be hopeful about his state of health, as is

often the case with consumptives.

He had approached the prince with the intention of talking

sarcastically about his happy expression of face, but very soon forgot

his intention and began to talk about himself. He began complaining

about everything, disconnectedly and endlessly, as was his wont.

“You wouldn’t believe,” he concluded, “how irritating they all are

there. They are such wretchedly small, vain, egotistical, \_commonplace\_

people! Would you believe it, they invited me there under the express

condition that I should die quickly, and they are all as wild as

possible with me for not having died yet, and for being, on the

contrary, a good deal better! Isn’t it a comedy? I don’t mind betting

that you don’t believe me!”

The prince said nothing.

“I sometimes think of coming over to you again,” said Hippolyte,

carelessly. “So you \_don’t\_ think them capable of inviting a man on the

condition that he is to look sharp and die?”

“I certainly thought they invited you with quite other views.”

“Ho, ho! you are not nearly so simple as they try to make you out! This

is not the time for it, or I would tell you a thing or two about that

beauty, Gania, and his hopes. You are being undermined, pitilessly

undermined, and—and it is really melancholy to see you so calm about

it. But alas! it’s your nature—you can’t help it!”

“My word! what a thing to be melancholy about! Why, do you think I

should be any happier if I were to feel disturbed about the excavations

you tell me of?”

“It is better to be unhappy and know the worst, than to be happy in a

fool’s paradise! I suppose you don’t believe that you have a rival in

that quarter?”

“Your insinuations as to rivalry are rather cynical, Hippolyte. I’m

sorry to say I have no right to answer you! As for Gania, I put it to

you, \_can\_ any man have a happy mind after passing through what he has

had to suffer? I think that is the best way to look at it. He will

change yet, he has lots of time before him, and life is rich;

besides—besides...” the prince hesitated. “As to being undermined, I

don’t know what in the world you are driving at, Hippolyte. I think we

had better drop the subject!”

“Very well, we’ll drop it for a while. You can’t look at anything but

in your exalted, generous way. You must put out your finger and touch a

thing before you’ll believe it, eh? Ha! ha! ha! I suppose you despise

me dreadfully, prince, eh? What do you think?”

“Why? Because you have suffered more than we have?”

“No; because I am unworthy of my sufferings, if you like!”

“Whoever \_can\_ suffer is worthy to suffer, I should think. Aglaya

Ivanovna wished to see you, after she had read your confession, but—”

“She postponed the pleasure—I see—I quite understand!” said Hippolyte,

hurriedly, as though he wished to banish the subject. “I hear—they tell

me—that you read her all that nonsense aloud? Stupid bosh it

was—written in delirium. And I can’t understand how anyone can be so—I

won’t say \_cruel\_, because the word would be humiliating to myself, but

we’ll say childishly vain and revengeful, as to \_reproach\_ me with this

confession, and use it as a weapon against me. Don’t be afraid, I’m not

referring to yourself.”

“Oh, but I’m sorry you repudiate the confession, Hippolyte—it is

sincere; and, do you know, even the absurd parts of it—and these are

many” (here Hippolyte frowned savagely) “are, as it were, redeemed by

suffering—for it must have cost you something to admit what you there

say—great torture, perhaps, for all I know. Your motive must have been

a very noble one all through. Whatever may have appeared to the

contrary, I give you my word, I see this more plainly every day. I do

not judge you; I merely say this to have it off my mind, and I am only

sorry that I did not say it all \_then\_—”

Hippolyte flushed hotly. He had thought at first that the prince was

“humbugging” him; but on looking at his face he saw that he was

absolutely serious, and had no thought of any deception. Hippolyte

beamed with gratification.

“And yet I must die,” he said, and almost added: “a man like me!

“And imagine how that Gania annoys me! He has developed the idea—or

pretends to believe—that in all probability three or four others who

heard my confession will die before I do. There’s an idea for you—and

all this by way of \_consoling\_ me! Ha! ha! ha! In the first place they

haven’t died yet; and in the second, if they \_did\_ die—all of them—what

would be the satisfaction to me in that? He judges me by himself. But

he goes further, he actually pitches into me because, as he declares,

‘any decent fellow’ would die quietly, and that ‘all this’ is mere

egotism on my part. He doesn’t see what refinement of egotism it is on

his own part—and at the same time, what ox-like coarseness! Have you

ever read of the death of one Stepan Gleboff, in the eighteenth

century? I read of it yesterday by chance.”

“Who was he?”

“He was impaled on a stake in the time of Peter.”

“I know, I know! He lay there fifteen hours in the hard frost, and died

with the most extraordinary fortitude—I know—what of him?”

“Only that God gives that sort of dying to some, and not to others.

Perhaps you think, though, that I could not die like Gleboff?”

“Not at all!” said the prince, blushing. “I was only going to say that

you—not that you could not be like Gleboff—but that you would have been

more like—”

“I guess what you mean—I should be an Osterman, not a Gleboff—eh? Is

that what you meant?”

“What Osterman?” asked the prince in some surprise.

“Why, Osterman—the diplomatist. Peter’s Osterman,” muttered Hippolyte,

confused. There was a moment’s pause of mutual confusion.

“Oh, no, no!” said the prince at last, “that was not what I was going

to say—oh no! I don’t think you would ever have been like Osterman.”

Hippolyte frowned gloomily.

“I’ll tell you why I draw the conclusion,” explained the prince,

evidently desirous of clearing up the matter a little. “Because, though

I often think over the men of those times, I cannot for the life of me

imagine them to be like ourselves. It really appears to me that they

were of another race altogether than ourselves of today. At that time

people seemed to stick so to one idea; now, they are more nervous, more

sensitive, more enlightened—people of two or three ideas at once—as it

were. The man of today is a broader man, so to speak—and I declare I

believe that is what prevents him from being so self-contained and

independent a being as his brother of those earlier days. Of course my

remark was only made under this impression, and not in the least—”

“I quite understand. You are trying to comfort me for the naiveness

with which you disagreed with me—eh? Ha! ha! ha! You are a regular

child, prince! However, I cannot help seeing that you always treat me

like—like a fragile china cup. Never mind, never mind, I’m not a bit

angry! At all events we have had a very funny talk. Do you know, all

things considered, I should like to be something better than Osterman!

I wouldn’t take the trouble to rise from the dead to be an Osterman.

However, I see I must make arrangements to die soon, or I myself—.

Well—leave me now! \_Au revoir.\_ Look here—before you go, just give me

your opinion: how do you think I ought to die, now? I mean—the best,

the most virtuous way? Tell me!”

“You should pass us by and forgive us our happiness,” said the prince

in a low voice.

“Ha! ha! ha! I thought so. I thought I should hear something like that.

Well, you are—you really are—oh dear me! Eloquence, eloquence!

Good-bye!”

VI.

As to the evening party at the Epanchins’ at which Princess Bielokonski

was to be present, Varia had reported with accuracy; though she had

perhaps expressed herself too strongly.

The thing was decided in a hurry and with a certain amount of quite

unnecessary excitement, doubtless because “nothing could be done in

this house like anywhere else.”

The impatience of Lizabetha Prokofievna “to get things settled”

explained a good deal, as well as the anxiety of both parents for the

happiness of their beloved daughter. Besides, Princess Bielokonski was

going away soon, and they hoped that she would take an interest in the

prince. They were anxious that he should enter society under the

auspices of this lady, whose patronage was the best of recommendations

for any young man.

Even if there seems something strange about the match, the general and

his wife said to each other, the “world” will accept Aglaya’s fiance

without any question if he is under the patronage of the princess. In

any case, the prince would have to be “shown” sooner or later; that is,

introduced into society, of which he had, so far, not the least idea.

Moreover, it was only a question of a small gathering of a few intimate

friends. Besides Princess Bielokonski, only one other lady was

expected, the wife of a high dignitary. Evgenie Pavlovitch, who was to

escort the princess, was the only young man.

Muishkin was told of the princess’s visit three days beforehand, but

nothing was said to him about the party until the night before it was

to take place.

He could not help observing the excited and agitated condition of all

members of the family, and from certain hints dropped in conversation

he gathered that they were all anxious as to the impression he should

make upon the princess. But the Epanchins, one and all, believed that

Muishkin, in his simplicity of mind, was quite incapable of realizing

that they could be feeling any anxiety on his account, and for this

reason they all looked at him with dread and uneasiness.

In point of fact, he did attach marvellously little importance to the

approaching event. He was occupied with altogether different thoughts.

Aglaya was growing hourly more capricious and gloomy, and this

distressed him. When they told him that Evgenie Pavlovitch was

expected, he evinced great delight, and said that he had long wished to

see him—and somehow these words did not please anyone.

Aglaya left the room in a fit of irritation, and it was not until late

in the evening, past eleven, when the prince was taking his departure,

that she said a word or two to him, privately, as she accompanied him

as far as the front door.

“I should like you,” she said, “not to come here tomorrow until

evening, when the guests are all assembled. You know there are to be

guests, don’t you?”

She spoke impatiently and with severity; this was the first allusion

she had made to the party of tomorrow.

She hated the idea of it, everyone saw that; and she would probably

have liked to quarrel about it with her parents, but pride and modesty

prevented her from broaching the subject.

The prince jumped to the conclusion that Aglaya, too, was nervous about

him, and the impression he would make, and that she did not like to

admit her anxiety; and this thought alarmed him.

“Yes, I am invited,” he replied.

She was evidently in difficulties as to how best to go on. “May I speak

of something serious to you, for once in my life?” she asked, angrily.

She was irritated at she knew not what, and could not restrain her

wrath.

“Of course you may; I am very glad to listen,” replied Muishkin.

Aglaya was silent a moment and then began again with evident dislike of

her subject:

“I do not wish to quarrel with them about this; in some things they

won’t be reasonable. I always did feel a loathing for the laws which

seem to guide mamma’s conduct at times. I don’t speak of father, for he

cannot be expected to be anything but what he is. Mother is a

noble-minded woman, I know; you try to suggest anything mean to her,

and you’ll see! But she is such a slave to these miserable creatures! I

don’t mean old Bielokonski alone. She is a contemptible old thing, but

she is able to twist people round her little finger, and I admire that

in her, at all events! How mean it all is, and how foolish! We were

always middle-class, thoroughly middle-class, people. Why should we

attempt to climb into the giddy heights of the fashionable world? My

sisters are all for it. It’s Prince S. they have to thank for poisoning

their minds. Why are you so glad that Evgenie Pavlovitch is coming?”

“Listen to me, Aglaya,” said the prince, “I do believe you are nervous

lest I shall make a fool of myself tomorrow at your party?”

“Nervous about you?” Aglaya blushed. “Why should I be nervous about

you? What would it matter to me if you were to make ever such a fool of

yourself? How can you say such a thing? What do you mean by ‘making a

fool of yourself’? What a vulgar expression! I suppose you intend to

talk in that sort of way tomorrow evening? Look up a few more such

expressions in your dictionary; do, you’ll make a grand effect! I’m

sorry that you seem to be able to come into a room as gracefully as you

do; where did you learn the art? Do you think you can drink a cup of

tea decently, when you know everybody is looking at you, on purpose to

see how you do it?”

“Yes, I think I can.”

“Can you? I’m sorry for it then, for I should have had a good laugh at

you otherwise. Do break \_something\_ at least, in the drawing-room!

Upset the Chinese vase, won’t you? It’s a valuable one; \_do\_ break it.

Mamma values it, and she’ll go out of her mind—it was a present. She’ll

cry before everyone, you’ll see! Wave your hand about, you know, as you

always do, and just smash it. Sit down near it on purpose.”

“On the contrary, I shall sit as far from it as I can. Thanks for the

hint.”

“Ha, ha! Then you are afraid you \_will\_ wave your arms about! I

wouldn’t mind betting that you’ll talk about some lofty subject,

something serious and learned. How delightful, how tactful that will

be!”

“I should think it would be very foolish indeed, unless it happened to

come in appropriately.”

“Look here, once for all,” cried Aglaya, boiling over, “if I hear you

talking about capital punishment, or the economical condition of

Russia, or about Beauty redeeming the world, or anything of that sort,

I’ll—well, of course I shall laugh and seem very pleased, but I warn

you beforehand, don’t look me in the face again! I’m serious now, mind,

this time I \_am really\_ serious.” She certainly did say this very

seriously, so much so, that she looked quite different from what she

usually was, and the prince could not help noticing the fact. She did

not seem to be joking in the slightest degree.

“Well, you’ve put me into such a fright that I shall certainly make a

fool of myself, and very likely break something too. I wasn’t a bit

alarmed before, but now I’m as nervous as can be.”

“Then don’t speak at all. Sit still and don’t talk.”

“Oh, I can’t do that, you know! I shall say something foolish out of

pure ‘funk,’ and break something for the same excellent reason; I know

I shall. Perhaps I shall slip and fall on the slippery floor; I’ve done

that before now, you know. I shall dream of it all night now. Why did

you say anything about it?”

Aglaya looked blackly at him.

“Do you know what, I had better not come at all tomorrow! I’ll plead

sick-list and stay away,” said the prince, with decision.

Aglaya stamped her foot, and grew quite pale with anger.

“Oh, my goodness! Just listen to that! ‘Better not come,’ when the

party is on purpose for him! Good Lord! What a delightful thing it is

to have to do with such a—such a stupid as you are!”

“Well, I’ll come, I’ll come,” interrupted the prince, hastily, “and

I’ll give you my word of honour that I will sit the whole evening and

not say a word.”

“I believe that’s the best thing you can do. You said you’d ‘plead

sick-list’ just now; where in the world do you get hold of such

expressions? Why do you talk to me like this? Are you trying to

irritate me, or what?”

“Forgive me, it’s a schoolboy expression. I won’t do it again. I know

quite well, I see it, that you are anxious on my account (now, don’t be

angry), and it makes me very happy to see it. You wouldn’t believe how

frightened I am of misbehaving somehow, and how glad I am of your

instructions. But all this panic is simply nonsense, you know, Aglaya!

I give you my word it is; I am so pleased that you are such a child,

such a dear good child. How \_charming\_ you can be if you like, Aglaya.”

Aglaya wanted to be angry, of course, but suddenly some quite

unexpected feeling seized upon her heart, all in a moment.

“And you won’t reproach me for all these rude words of mine—some

day—afterwards?” she asked, of a sudden.

“What an idea! Of course not. And what are you blushing for again? And

there comes that frown once more! You’ve taken to looking too gloomy

sometimes, Aglaya, much more than you used to. I know why it is.”

“Be quiet, do be quiet!”

“No, no, I had much better speak out. I have long wished to say it, and

\_have\_ said it, but that’s not enough, for you didn’t believe me.

Between us two there stands a being who—”

“Be quiet, be quiet, be quiet, be quiet!” Aglaya struck in, suddenly,

seizing his hand in hers, and gazing at him almost in terror.

At this moment she was called by someone. She broke loose from him with

an air of relief and ran away.

The prince was in a fever all night. It was strange, but he had

suffered from fever for several nights in succession. On this

particular night, while in semi-delirium, he had an idea: what if on

the morrow he were to have a fit before everybody? The thought seemed

to freeze his blood within him. All night he fancied himself in some

extraordinary society of strange persons. The worst of it was that he

was talking nonsense; he knew that he ought not to speak at all, and

yet he talked the whole time; he seemed to be trying to persuade them

all to something. Evgenie and Hippolyte were among the guests, and

appeared to be great friends.

He awoke towards nine o’clock with a headache, full of confused ideas

and strange impressions. For some reason or other he felt most anxious

to see Rogojin, to see and talk to him, but what he wished to say he

could not tell. Next, he determined to go and see Hippolyte. His mind

was in a confused state, so much so that the incidents of the morning

seemed to be imperfectly realized, though acutely felt.

One of these incidents was a visit from Lebedeff. Lebedeff came rather

early—before ten—but he was tipsy already. Though the prince was not in

an observant condition, yet he could not avoid seeing that for at least

three days—ever since General Ivolgin had left the house Lebedeff had

been behaving very badly. He looked untidy and dirty at all times of

the day, and it was said that he had begun to rage about in his own

house, and that his temper was very bad. As soon as he arrived this

morning, he began to hold forth, beating his breast and apparently

blaming himself for something.

“I’ve—I’ve had a reward for my meanness—I’ve had a slap in the face,”

he concluded, tragically.

“A slap in the face? From whom? And so early in the morning?”

“Early?” said Lebedeff, sarcastically. “Time counts for nothing, even

in physical chastisement; but my slap in the face was not physical, it

was moral.”

He suddenly took a seat, very unceremoniously, and began his story. It

was very disconnected; the prince frowned, and wished he could get

away; but suddenly a few words struck him. He sat stiff with

wonder—Lebedeff said some extraordinary things.

In the first place he began about some letter; the name of Aglaya

Ivanovna came in. Then suddenly he broke off and began to accuse the

prince of something; he was apparently offended with him. At first he

declared that the prince had trusted him with his confidences as to “a

certain person” (Nastasia Philipovna), but that of late his friendship

had been thrust back into his bosom, and his innocent question as to

“approaching family changes” had been curtly put aside, which Lebedeff

declared, with tipsy tears, he could not bear; especially as he knew so

much already both from Rogojin and Nastasia Philipovna and her friend,

and from Varvara Ardalionovna, and even from Aglaya Ivanovna, through

his daughter Vera. “And who told Lizabetha Prokofievna something in

secret, by letter? Who told her all about the movements of a certain

person called Nastasia Philipovna? Who was the anonymous person, eh?

Tell me!”

“Surely not you?” cried the prince.

“Just so,” said Lebedeff, with dignity; “and only this very morning I

have sent up a letter to the noble lady, stating that I have a matter

of great importance to communicate. She received the letter; I know she

got it; and she received \_me\_, too.”

“Have you just seen Lizabetha Prokofievna?” asked the prince, scarcely

believing his ears.

“Yes, I saw her, and got the said slap in the face as mentioned. She

chucked the letter back to me unopened, and kicked me out of the house,

morally, not physically, although not far off it.”

“What letter do you mean she returned unopened?”

“What! didn’t I tell you? Ha, ha, ha! I thought I had. Why, I received

a letter, you know, to be handed over—”

“From whom? To whom?”

But it was difficult, if not impossible, to extract anything from

Lebedeff. All the prince could gather was, that the letter had been

received very early, and had a request written on the outside that it

might be sent on to the address given.

“Just as before, sir, just as before! To a certain person, and from a

certain hand. The individual’s name who wrote the letter is to be

represented by the letter A.—”

“What? Impossible! To Nastasia Philipovna? Nonsense!” cried the prince.

“It was, I assure you, and if not to her then to Rogojin, which is the

same thing. Mr. Hippolyte has had letters, too, and all from the

individual whose name begins with an A.,” smirked Lebedeff, with a

hideous grin.

As he kept jumping from subject to subject, and forgetting what he had

begun to talk about, the prince said nothing, but waited, to give him

time.

It was all very vague. Who had taken the letters, if letters there

were? Probably Vera—and how could Lebedeff have got them? In all

probability, he had managed to steal the present letter from Vera, and

had himself gone over to Lizabetha Prokofievna with some idea in his

head. So the prince concluded at last.

“You are mad!” he cried, indignantly.

“Not quite, esteemed prince,” replied Lebedeff, with some acerbity. “I

confess I thought of doing you the service of handing the letter over

to yourself, but I decided that it would pay me better to deliver it up

to the noble lady aforesaid, as I had informed her of everything

hitherto by anonymous letters; so when I sent her up a note from

myself, with the letter, you know, in order to fix a meeting for eight

o’clock this morning, I signed it ‘your secret correspondent.’ They let

me in at once—very quickly—by the back door, and the noble lady

received me.”

“Well? Go on.”

“Oh, well, when I saw her she almost punched my head, as I say; in fact

so nearly that one might almost say she did punch my head. She threw

the letter in my face; she seemed to reflect first, as if she would

have liked to keep it, but thought better of it and threw it in my face

instead. ‘If anybody can have been such a fool as to trust a man like

you to deliver the letter,’ says she, ‘take it and deliver it!’ Hey!

she was grandly indignant. A fierce, fiery lady that, sir!”

“Where’s the letter now?”

“Oh, I’ve still got it, here!”

And he handed the prince the very letter from Aglaya to Gania, which

the latter showed with so much triumph to his sister at a later hour.

“This letter cannot be allowed to remain in your hands.”

“It’s for you—for you! I’ve brought it you on purpose!” cried Lebedeff,

excitedly. “Why, I’m yours again now, heart and hand, your slave; there

was but a momentary pause in the flow of my love and esteem for you.

Mea culpa, mea culpa! as the Pope of Rome says.”

“This letter should be sent on at once,” said the prince, disturbed.

“I’ll hand it over myself.”

“Wouldn’t it be better, esteemed prince, wouldn’t it be better—to—don’t

you know—”

Lebedeff made a strange and very expressive grimace; he twisted about

in his chair, and did something, apparently symbolical, with his hands.

“What do you mean?” said the prince.

“Why, open it, for the time being, don’t you know?” he said, most

confidentially and mysteriously.

The prince jumped up so furiously that Lebedeff ran towards the door;

having gained which strategic position, however, he stopped and looked

back to see if he might hope for pardon.

“Oh, Lebedeff, Lebedeff! Can a man really sink to such depths of

meanness?” said the prince, sadly.

Lebedeff’s face brightened.

“Oh, I’m a mean wretch—a mean wretch!” he said, approaching the prince

once more, and beating his breast, with tears in his eyes.

“It’s abominable dishonesty, you know!”

“Dishonesty—it is, it is! That’s the very word!”

“What in the world induces you to act so? You are nothing but a spy.

Why did you write anonymously to worry so noble and generous a lady?

Why should not Aglaya Ivanovna write a note to whomever she pleases?

What did you mean to complain of today? What did you expect to get by

it? What made you go at all?”

“Pure amiable curiosity,—I assure you—desire to do a service. That’s

all. Now I’m entirely yours again, your slave; hang me if you like!”

“Did you go before Lizabetha Prokofievna in your present condition?”

inquired the prince.

“No—oh no, fresher—more the correct card. I only became this like after

the humiliation I suffered there.”

“Well—that’ll do; now leave me.”

This injunction had to be repeated several times before the man could

be persuaded to move. Even then he turned back at the door, came as far

as the middle of the room, and there went through his mysterious

motions designed to convey the suggestion that the prince should open

the letter. He did not dare put his suggestion into words again.

After this performance, he smiled sweetly and left the room on tiptoe.

All this had been very painful to listen to. One fact stood out certain

and clear, and that was that poor Aglaya must be in a state of great

distress and indecision and mental torment (“from jealousy,” the prince

whispered to himself). Undoubtedly in this inexperienced, but hot and

proud little head, there were all sorts of plans forming, wild and

impossible plans, maybe; and the idea of this so frightened the prince

that he could not make up his mind what to do. Something must be done,

that was clear.

He looked at the address on the letter once more. Oh, he was not in the

least degree alarmed about Aglaya writing such a letter; he could trust

her. What he did not like about it was that he could not trust Gania.

However, he made up his mind that he would himself take the note and

deliver it. Indeed, he went so far as to leave the house and walk up

the road, but changed his mind when he had nearly reached Ptitsin’s

door. However, he there luckily met Colia, and commissioned him to

deliver the letter to his brother as if direct from Aglaya. Colia asked

no questions but simply delivered it, and Gania consequently had no

suspicion that it had passed through so many hands.

Arrived home again, the prince sent for Vera Lebedeff and told her as

much as was necessary, in order to relieve her mind, for she had been

in a dreadful state of anxiety since she had missed the letter. She

heard with horror that her father had taken it. Muishkin learned from

her that she had on several occasions performed secret missions both

for Aglaya and for Rogojin, without, however, having had the slightest

idea that in so doing she might injure the prince in any way.

The latter, with one thing and another, was now so disturbed and

confused, that when, a couple of hours or so later, a message came from

Colia that the general was ill, he could hardly take the news in.

However, when he did master the fact, it acted upon him as a tonic by

completely distracting his attention. He went at once to Nina

Alexandrovna’s, whither the general had been carried, and stayed there

until the evening. He could do no good, but there are people whom to

have near one is a blessing at such times. Colia was in an almost

hysterical state; he cried continuously, but was running about all day,

all the same; fetching doctors, of whom he collected three; going to

the chemist’s, and so on.

The general was brought round to some extent, but the doctors declared

that he could not be said to be out of danger. Varia and Nina

Alexandrovna never left the sick man’s bedside; Gania was excited and

distressed, but would not go upstairs, and seemed afraid to look at the

patient. He wrung his hands when the prince spoke to him, and said that

“such a misfortune at such a moment” was terrible.

The prince thought he knew what Gania meant by “such a moment.”

Hippolyte was not in the house. Lebedeff turned up late in the

afternoon; he had been asleep ever since his interview with the prince

in the morning. He was quite sober now, and cried with real sincerity

over the sick general—mourning for him as though he were his own

brother. He blamed himself aloud, but did not explain why. He repeated

over and over again to Nina Alexandrovna that he alone was to blame—no

one else—but that he had acted out of “pure amiable curiosity,” and

that “the deceased,” as he insisted upon calling the still living

general, had been the greatest of geniuses.

He laid much stress on the genius of the sufferer, as if this idea must

be one of immense solace in the present crisis.

Nina Alexandrovna—seeing his sincerity of feeling—said at last, and

without the faintest suspicion of reproach in her voice: “Come,

come—don’t cry! God will forgive you!”

Lebedeff was so impressed by these words, and the tone in which they

were spoken, that he could not leave Nina Alexandrovna all the

evening—in fact, for several days. Till the general’s death, indeed, he

spent almost all his time at his side.

Twice during the day a messenger came to Nina Alexandrovna from the

Epanchins to inquire after the invalid.

When—late in the evening—the prince made his appearance in Lizabetha

Prokofievna’s drawing-room, he found it full of guests. Mrs. Epanchin

questioned him very fully about the general as soon as he appeared; and

when old Princess Bielokonski wished to know “who this general was, and

who was Nina Alexandrovna,” she proceeded to explain in a manner which

pleased the prince very much.

He himself, when relating the circumstances of the general’s illness to

Lizabetha Prokofievna, “spoke beautifully,” as Aglaya’s sisters

declared afterwards—“modestly, quietly, without gestures or too many

words, and with great dignity.” He had entered the room with propriety

and grace, and he was perfectly dressed; he not only did not “fall down

on the slippery floor,” as he had expressed it, but evidently made a

very favourable impression upon the assembled guests.

As for his own impression on entering the room and taking his seat, he

instantly remarked that the company was not in the least such as

Aglaya’s words had led him to fear, and as he had dreamed of—in

nightmare form—all night.

This was the first time in his life that he had seen a little corner of

what was generally known by the terrible name of “society.” He had long

thirsted, for reasons of his own, to penetrate the mysteries of the

magic circle, and, therefore, this assemblage was of the greatest

possible interest to him.

His first impression was one of fascination. Somehow or other he felt

that all these people must have been born on purpose to be together! It

seemed to him that the Epanchins were not having a party at all; that

these people must have been here always, and that he himself was one of

them—returned among them after a long absence, but one of them,

naturally and indisputably.

It never struck him that all this refined simplicity and nobility and

wit and personal dignity might possibly be no more than an exquisite

artistic polish. The majority of the guests—who were somewhat

empty-headed, after all, in spite of their aristocratic bearing—never

guessed, in their self-satisfied composure, that much of their

superiority was mere veneer, which indeed they had adopted

unconsciously and by inheritance.

The prince would never so much as suspect such a thing in the delight

of his first impression.

He saw, for instance, that one important dignitary, old enough to be

his grandfather, broke off his own conversation in order to listen to

\_him\_—a young and inexperienced man; and not only listened, but seemed

to attach value to his opinion, and was kind and amiable, and yet they

were strangers and had never seen each other before. Perhaps what most

appealed to the prince’s impressionability was the refinement of the

old man’s courtesy towards him. Perhaps the soil of his susceptible

nature was really predisposed to receive a pleasant impression.

Meanwhile all these people—though friends of the family and of each

other to a certain extent—were very far from being such intimate

friends of the family and of each other as the prince concluded. There

were some present who never would think of considering the Epanchins

their equals. There were even some who hated one another cordially. For

instance, old Princess Bielokonski had all her life despised the wife

of the “dignitary,” while the latter was very far from loving Lizabetha

Prokofievna. The dignitary himself had been General Epanchin’s

protector from his youth up; and the general considered him so majestic

a personage that he would have felt a hearty contempt for himself if he

had even for one moment allowed himself to pose as the great man’s

equal, or to think of him—in his fear and reverence—as anything less

than an Olympic God! There were others present who had not met for

years, and who had no feeling whatever for each other, unless it were

dislike; and yet they met tonight as though they had seen each other

but yesterday in some friendly and intimate assembly of kindred

spirits.

It was not a large party, however. Besides Princess Bielokonski and the

old dignitary (who was really a great man) and his wife, there was an

old military general—a count or baron with a German name, a man reputed

to possess great knowledge and administrative ability. He was one of

those Olympian administrators who know everything except Russia,

pronounce a word of extraordinary wisdom, admired by all, about once in

five years, and, after being an eternity in the service, generally die

full of honour and riches, though they have never done anything great,

and have even been hostile to all greatness. This general was Ivan

Fedorovitch’s immediate superior in the service; and it pleased the

latter to look upon him also as a patron. On the other hand, the great

man did not at all consider himself Epanchin’s patron. He was always

very cool to him, while taking advantage of his ready services, and

would instantly have put another in his place if there had been the

slightest reason for the change.

Another guest was an elderly, important-looking gentleman, a distant

relative of Lizabetha Prokofievna’s. This gentleman was rich, held a

good position, was a great talker, and had the reputation of being “one

of the dissatisfied,” though not belonging to the dangerous sections of

that class. He had the manners, to some extent, of the English

aristocracy, and some of their tastes (especially in the matter of

under-done roast beef, harness, men-servants, etc.). He was a great

friend of the dignitary’s, and Lizabetha Prokofievna, for some reason

or other, had got hold of the idea that this worthy intended at no

distant date to offer the advantages of his hand and heart to

Alexandra.

Besides the elevated and more solid individuals enumerated, there were

present a few younger though not less elegant guests. Besides Prince S.

and Evgenie Pavlovitch, we must name the eminent and fascinating Prince

N.—once the vanquisher of female hearts all over Europe. This gentleman

was no longer in the first bloom of youth—he was forty-five, but still

very handsome. He was well off, and lived, as a rule, abroad, and was

noted as a good teller of stories. Then came a few guests belonging to

a lower stratum of society—people who, like the Epanchins themselves,

moved only occasionally in this exalted sphere. The Epanchins liked to

draft among their more elevated guests a few picked representatives of

this lower stratum, and Lizabetha Prokofievna received much praise for

this practice, which proved, her friends said, that she was a woman of

tact. The Epanchins prided themselves upon the good opinion people held

of them.

One of the representatives of the middle-class present today was a

colonel of engineers, a very serious man and a great friend of Prince

S., who had introduced him to the Epanchins. He was extremely silent in

society, and displayed on the forefinger of his right hand a large

ring, probably bestowed upon him for services of some sort. There was

also a poet, German by name, but a Russian poet; very presentable, and

even handsome—the sort of man one could bring into society with

impunity. This gentleman belonged to a German family of decidedly

bourgeois origin, but he had a knack of acquiring the patronage of

“big-wigs,” and of retaining their favour. He had translated some great

German poem into Russian verse, and claimed to have been a friend of a

famous Russian poet, since dead. (It is strange how great a multitude

of literary people there are who have had the advantages of friendship

with some great man of their own profession who is, unfortunately,

dead.) The dignitary’s wife had introduced this worthy to the

Epanchins. This lady posed as the patroness of literary people, and she

certainly had succeeded in obtaining pensions for a few of them, thanks

to her influence with those in authority on such matters. She was a

lady of weight in her own way. Her age was about forty-five, so that

she was a very young wife for such an elderly husband as the dignitary.

She had been a beauty in her day and still loved, as many ladies of

forty-five do love, to dress a little too smartly. Her intellect was

nothing to boast of, and her literary knowledge very doubtful. Literary

patronage was, however, with her as much a mania as was the love of

gorgeous clothes. Many books and translations were dedicated to her by

her proteges, and a few of these talented individuals had published

some of their own letters to her, upon very weighty subjects.

This, then, was the society that the prince accepted at once as true

coin, as pure gold without alloy.

It so happened, however, that on this particular evening all these good

people were in excellent humour and highly pleased with themselves.

Every one of them felt that they were doing the Epanchins the greatest

possible honour by their presence. But alas! the prince never suspected

any such subtleties! For instance, he had no suspicion of the fact that

the Epanchins, having in their mind so important a step as the marriage

of their daughter, would never think of presuming to take it without

having previously “shown off” the proposed husband to the dignitary—the

recognized patron of the family. The latter, too, though he would

probably have received news of a great disaster to the Epanchin family

with perfect composure, would nevertheless have considered it a

personal offence if they had dared to marry their daughter without his

advice, or we might almost say, his leave.

The amiable and undoubtedly witty Prince N. could not but feel that he

was as a sun, risen for one night only to shine upon the Epanchin

drawing-room. He accounted them immeasurably his inferiors, and it was

this feeling which caused his special amiability and delightful ease

and grace towards them. He knew very well that he must tell some story

this evening for the edification of the company, and led up to it with

the inspiration of anticipatory triumph.

The prince, when he heard the story afterwards, felt that he had never

yet come across so wonderful a humorist, or such remarkable brilliancy

as was shown by this man; and yet if he had only known it, this story

was the oldest, stalest, and most worn-out yarn, and every drawing-room

in town was sick to death of it. It was only in the innocent Epanchin

household that it passed for a new and brilliant tale—as a sudden and

striking reminiscence of a splendid and talented man.

Even the German poet, though as amiable as possible, felt that he was

doing the house the greatest of honours by his presence in it.

But the prince only looked at the bright side; he did not turn the coat

and see the shabby lining.

Aglaya had not foreseen that particular calamity. She herself looked

wonderfully beautiful this evening. All three sisters were dressed very

tastefully, and their hair was done with special care.

Aglaya sat next to Evgenie Pavlovitch, and laughed and talked to him

with an unusual display of friendliness. Evgenie himself behaved rather

more sedately than usual, probably out of respect to the dignitary.

Evgenie had been known in society for a long while. He had appeared at

the Epanchins’ today with crape on his hat, and Princess Bielokonski

had commended this action on his part. Not every society man would have

worn crape for “such an uncle.” Lizabetha Prokofievna had liked it

also, but was too preoccupied to take much notice. The prince remarked

that Aglaya looked attentively at him two or three times, and seemed to

be satisfied with his behaviour.

Little by little he became very happy indeed. All his late anxieties

and apprehensions (after his conversation with Lebedeff) now appeared

like so many bad dreams—impossible, and even laughable.

He did not speak much, only answering such questions as were put to

him, and gradually settled down into unbroken silence, listening to

what went on, and steeped in perfect satisfaction and contentment.

Little by little a sort of inspiration, however, began to stir within

him, ready to spring into life at the right moment. When he did begin

to speak, it was accidentally, in response to a question, and

apparently without any special object.

VII.

While he feasted his eyes upon Aglaya, as she talked merrily with

Evgenie and Prince N., suddenly the old anglomaniac, who was talking to

the dignitary in another corner of the room, apparently telling him a

story about something or other—suddenly this gentleman pronounced the

name of “Nicolai Andreevitch Pavlicheff” aloud. The prince quickly

turned towards him, and listened.

The conversation had been on the subject of land, and the present

disorders, and there must have been something amusing said, for the old

man had begun to laugh at his companion’s heated expressions.

The latter was describing in eloquent words how, in consequence of

recent legislation, he was obliged to sell a beautiful estate in the N.

province, not because he wanted ready money—in fact, he was obliged to

sell it at half its value. “To avoid another lawsuit about the

Pavlicheff estate, I ran away,” he said. “With a few more inheritances

of that kind I should soon be ruined!”

At this point General Epanchin, noticing how interested Muishkin had

become in the conversation, said to him, in a low tone:

“That gentleman—Ivan Petrovitch—is a relation of your late friend, Mr.

Pavlicheff. You wanted to find some of his relations, did you not?”

The general, who had been talking to his chief up to this moment, had

observed the prince’s solitude and silence, and was anxious to draw him

into the conversation, and so introduce him again to the notice of some

of the important personages.

“Lef Nicolaievitch was a ward of Nicolai Andreevitch Pavlicheff, after

the death of his own parents,” he remarked, meeting Ivan Petrovitch’s

eye.

“Very happy to meet him, I’m sure,” remarked the latter. “I remember

Lef Nicolaievitch well. When General Epanchin introduced us just now, I

recognized you at once, prince. You are very little changed, though I

saw you last as a child of some ten or eleven years old. There was

something in your features, I suppose, that—”

“You saw me as a child!” exclaimed the prince, with surprise.

“Oh! yes, long ago,” continued Ivan Petrovitch, “while you were living

with my cousin at Zlatoverhoff. You don’t remember me? No, I dare say

you don’t; you had some malady at the time, I remember. It was so

serious that I was surprised—”

“No; I remember nothing!” said the prince. A few more words of

explanation followed, words which were spoken without the smallest

excitement by his companion, but which evoked the greatest agitation in

the prince; and it was discovered that two old ladies to whose care the

prince had been left by Pavlicheff, and who lived at Zlatoverhoff, were

also relations of Ivan Petrovitch.

The latter had no idea and could give no information as to why

Pavlicheff had taken so great an interest in the little prince, his

ward.

“In point of fact I don’t think I thought much about it,” said the old

fellow. He seemed to have a wonderfully good memory, however, for he

told the prince all about the two old ladies, Pavlicheff’s cousins, who

had taken care of him, and whom, he declared, he had taken to task for

being too severe with the prince as a small sickly boy—the elder

sister, at least; the younger had been kind, he recollected. They both

now lived in another province, on a small estate left to them by

Pavlicheff. The prince listened to all this with eyes sparkling with

emotion and delight.

He declared with unusual warmth that he would never forgive himself for

having travelled about in the central provinces during these last six

months without having hunted up his two old friends.

He declared, further, that he had intended to go every day, but had

always been prevented by circumstances; but that now he would promise

himself the pleasure—however far it was, he would find them out. And so

Ivan Petrovitch \_really\_ knew Natalia Nikitishna!—what a saintly nature

was hers!—and Martha Nikitishna! Ivan Petrovitch must excuse him, but

really he was not quite fair on dear old Martha. She was severe,

perhaps; but then what else could she be with such a little idiot as he

was then? (Ha, ha.) He really was an idiot then, Ivan Petrovitch must

know, though he might not believe it. (Ha, ha.) So he had really seen

him there! Good heavens! And was he really and truly and actually a

cousin of Pavlicheff’s?

“I assure you of it,” laughed Ivan Petrovitch, gazing amusedly at the

prince.

“Oh! I didn’t say it because I \_doubt\_ the fact, you know. (Ha, ha.)

How could I doubt such a thing? (Ha, ha, ha.) I made the remark

because—because Nicolai Andreevitch Pavlicheff was such a splendid man,

don’t you see! Such a high-souled man, he really was, I assure you.”

The prince did not exactly pant for breath, but he “seemed almost to

\_choke\_ out of pure simplicity and goodness of heart,” as Adelaida

expressed it, on talking the party over with her fiance, the Prince S.,

next morning.

“But, my goodness me,” laughed Ivan Petrovitch, “why can’t I be cousin

to even a splendid man?”

“Oh, dear!” cried the prince, confused, trying to hurry his words out,

and growing more and more eager every moment: “I’ve gone and said

another stupid thing. I don’t know what to say. I—I didn’t mean that,

you know—I—I—he really was such a splendid man, wasn’t he?”

The prince trembled all over. Why was he so agitated? Why had he flown

into such transports of delight without any apparent reason? He had far

outshot the measure of joy and emotion consistent with the occasion.

Why this was it would be difficult to say.

He seemed to feel warmly and deeply grateful to someone for something

or other—perhaps to Ivan Petrovitch; but likely enough to all the

guests, individually, and collectively. He was much too happy.

Ivan Petrovitch began to stare at him with some surprise; the

dignitary, too, looked at him with considerable attention; Princess

Bielokonski glared at him angrily, and compressed her lips. Prince N.,

Evgenie, Prince S., and the girls, all broke off their own

conversations and listened. Aglaya seemed a little startled; as for

Lizabetha Prokofievna, her heart sank within her.

This was odd of Lizabetha Prokofievna and her daughters. They had

themselves decided that it would be better if the prince did not talk

all the evening. Yet seeing him sitting silent and alone, but perfectly

happy, they had been on the point of exerting themselves to draw him

into one of the groups of talkers around the room. Now that he was in

the midst of a talk they became more than ever anxious and perturbed.

“That he was a splendid man is perfectly true; you are quite right,”

repeated Ivan Petrovitch, but seriously this time. “He was a fine and a

worthy fellow—worthy, one may say, of the highest respect,” he added,

more and more seriously at each pause; “and it is agreeable to see, on

your part, such—”

“Wasn’t it this same Pavlicheff about whom there was a strange story in

connection with some abbot? I don’t remember who the abbot was, but I

remember at one time everybody was talking about it,” remarked the old

dignitary.

“Yes—Abbot Gurot, a Jesuit,” said Ivan Petrovitch. “Yes, that’s the

sort of thing our best men are apt to do. A man of rank, too, and

rich—a man who, if he had continued to serve, might have done anything;

and then to throw up the service and everything else in order to go

over to Roman Catholicism and turn Jesuit—openly, too—almost

triumphantly. By Jove! it was positively a mercy that he died when he

did—it was indeed—everyone said so at the time.”

The prince was beside himself.

“Pavlicheff?—Pavlicheff turned Roman Catholic? Impossible!” he cried,

in horror.

“H’m! impossible is rather a strong word,” said Ivan Petrovitch. “You

must allow, my dear prince... However, of course you value the memory

of the deceased so very highly; and he certainly was the kindest of

men; to which fact, by the way, I ascribe, more than to anything else,

the success of the abbot in influencing his religious convictions. But

you may ask me, if you please, how much trouble and worry I,

personally, had over that business, and especially with this same

Gurot! Would you believe it,” he continued, addressing the dignitary,

“they actually tried to put in a claim under the deceased’s will, and I

had to resort to the very strongest measures in order to bring them to

their senses? I assure you they knew their cue, did these

gentlemen—wonderful! Thank goodness all this was in Moscow, and I got

the Court, you know, to help me, and we soon brought them to their

senses.”

“You wouldn’t believe how you have pained and astonished me,” cried the

prince.

“Very sorry; but in point of fact, you know, it was all nonsense and

would have ended in smoke, as usual—I’m sure of that. Last year,”—he

turned to the old man again,—“Countess K. joined some Roman Convent

abroad. Our people never seem to be able to offer any resistance so

soon as they get into the hands of these—intriguers—especially abroad.”

“That is all thanks to our lassitude, I think,” replied the old man,

with authority. “And then their way of preaching; they have a skilful

manner of doing it! And they know how to startle one, too. I got quite

a fright myself in ’32, in Vienna, I assure you; but I didn’t cave in

to them, I ran away instead, ha, ha!”

“Come, come, I’ve always heard that you ran away with the beautiful

Countess Levitsky that time—throwing up everything in order to do

it—and not from the Jesuits at all,” said Princess Bielokonski,

suddenly.

“Well, yes—but we call it from the Jesuits, you know; it comes to the

same thing,” laughed the old fellow, delighted with the pleasant

recollection.

“You seem to be very religious,” he continued, kindly, addressing the

prince, “which is a thing one meets so seldom nowadays among young

people.”

The prince was listening open-mouthed, and still in a condition of

excited agitation. The old man was evidently interested in him, and

anxious to study him more closely.

“Pavlicheff was a man of bright intellect and a good Christian, a

sincere Christian,” said the prince, suddenly. “How could he possibly

embrace a faith which is unchristian? Roman Catholicism is, so to

speak, simply the same thing as unchristianity,” he added with flashing

eyes, which seemed to take in everybody in the room.

“Come, that’s a little \_too\_ strong, isn’t it?” murmured the old man,

glancing at General Epanchin in surprise.

“How do you make out that the Roman Catholic religion is \_unchristian?\_

What is it, then?” asked Ivan Petrovitch, turning to the prince.

“It is not a Christian religion, in the first place,” said the latter,

in extreme agitation, quite out of proportion to the necessity of the

moment. “And in the second place, Roman Catholicism is, in my opinion,

worse than Atheism itself. Yes—that is my opinion. Atheism only

preaches a negation, but Romanism goes further; it preaches a

disfigured, distorted Christ—it preaches Anti-Christ—I assure you, I

swear it! This is my own personal conviction, and it has long

distressed me. The Roman Catholic believes that the Church on earth

cannot stand without universal temporal Power. He cries ‘non possumus!’

In my opinion the Roman Catholic religion is not a faith at all, but

simply a continuation of the Roman Empire, and everything is

subordinated to this idea—beginning with faith. The Pope has seized

territories and an earthly throne, and has held them with the sword.

And so the thing has gone on, only that to the sword they have added

lying, intrigue, deceit, fanaticism, superstition, swindling;—they have

played fast and loose with the most sacred and sincere feelings of

men;—they have exchanged everything—everything for money, for base

earthly \_power!\_ And is this not the teaching of Anti-Christ? How could

the upshot of all this be other than Atheism? Atheism is the child of

Roman Catholicism—it proceeded from these Romans themselves, though

perhaps they would not believe it. It grew and fattened on hatred of

its parents; it is the progeny of their lies and spiritual feebleness.

Atheism! In our country it is only among the upper classes that you

find unbelievers; men who have lost the root or spirit of their faith;

but abroad whole masses of the people are beginning to profess

unbelief—at first because of the darkness and lies by which they were

surrounded; but now out of fanaticism, out of loathing for the Church

and Christianity!”

The prince paused to get breath. He had spoken with extraordinary

rapidity, and was very pale.

All present interchanged glances, but at last the old dignitary burst

out laughing frankly. Prince N. took out his eye-glass to have a good

look at the speaker. The German poet came out of his corner and crept

nearer to the table, with a spiteful smile.

“You exaggerate the matter very much,” said Ivan Petrovitch, with

rather a bored air. “There are, in the foreign Churches, many

representatives of their faith who are worthy of respect and esteem.”

“Oh, but I did not speak of individual representatives. I was merely

talking about Roman Catholicism, and its essence—of Rome itself. A

Church can never entirely disappear; I never hinted at that!”

“Agreed that all this may be true; but we need not discuss a subject

which belongs to the domain of theology.”

“Oh, no; oh, no! Not to theology alone, I assure you! Why, Socialism is

the progeny of Romanism and of the Romanistic spirit. It and its

brother Atheism proceed from Despair in opposition to Catholicism. It

seeks to replace in itself the moral power of religion, in order to

appease the spiritual thirst of parched humanity and save it; not by

Christ, but by force. ‘Don’t dare to believe in God, don’t dare to

possess any individuality, any property! \_Fraternité ou la Mort\_; two

million heads. ‘By their works ye shall know them’—we are told. And we

must not suppose that all this is harmless and without danger to

ourselves. Oh, no; we must resist, and quickly, quickly! We must let

our Christ shine forth upon the Western nations, our Christ whom we

have preserved intact, and whom they have never known. Not as slaves,

allowing ourselves to be caught by the hooks of the Jesuits, but

carrying our Russian civilization to \_them\_, we must stand before them,

not letting it be said among us that their preaching is ‘skilful,’ as

someone expressed it just now.”

“But excuse me, excuse me;” cried Ivan Petrovitch considerably

disturbed, and looking around uneasily. “Your ideas are, of course,

most praiseworthy, and in the highest degree patriotic; but you

exaggerate the matter terribly. It would be better if we dropped the

subject.”

“No, sir, I do not exaggerate, I understate the matter, if anything,

undoubtedly understate it; simply because I cannot express myself as I

should like, but—”

“Allow me!”

The prince was silent. He sat straight up in his chair and gazed

fervently at Ivan Petrovitch.

“It seems to me that you have been too painfully impressed by the news

of what happened to your good benefactor,” said the old dignitary,

kindly, and with the utmost calmness of demeanour. “You are excitable,

perhaps as the result of your solitary life. If you would make up your

mind to live more among your fellows in society, I trust, I am sure,

that the world would be glad to welcome you, as a remarkable young man;

and you would soon find yourself able to look at things more calmly.

You would see that all these things are much simpler than you think;

and, besides, these rare cases come about, in my opinion, from ennui

and from satiety.”

“Exactly, exactly! That is a true thought!” cried the prince. “From

ennui, from our ennui but not from satiety! Oh, no, you are wrong

there! Say from \_thirst\_ if you like; the thirst of fever! And please

do not suppose that this is so small a matter that we may have a laugh

at it and dismiss it; we must be able to foresee our disasters and arm

against them. We Russians no sooner arrive at the brink of the water,

and realize that we are really at the brink, than we are so delighted

with the outlook that in we plunge and swim to the farthest point we

can see. Why is this? You say you are surprised at Pavlicheff’s action;

you ascribe it to madness, to kindness of heart, and what not, but it

is not so.

“Our Russian intensity not only astonishes ourselves; all Europe

wonders at our conduct in such cases! For, if one of us goes over to

Roman Catholicism, he is sure to become a Jesuit at once, and a rabid

one into the bargain. If one of us becomes an Atheist, he must needs

begin to insist on the prohibition of faith in God by force, that is,

by the sword. Why is this? Why does he then exceed all bounds at once?

Because he has found land at last, the fatherland that he sought in

vain before; and, because his soul is rejoiced to find it, he throws

himself upon it and kisses it! Oh, it is not from vanity alone, it is

not from feelings of vanity that Russians become Atheists and Jesuits!

But from spiritual thirst, from anguish of longing for higher things,

for dry firm land, for foothold on a fatherland which they never

believed in because they never knew it. It is easier for a Russian to

become an Atheist, than for any other nationality in the world. And not

only does a Russian ‘become an Atheist,’ but he actually \_believes in\_

Atheism, just as though he had found a new faith, not perceiving that

he has pinned his faith to a negation. Such is our anguish of thirst!

‘Whoso has no country has no God.’ That is not my own expression; it is

the expression of a merchant, one of the Old Believers, whom I once met

while travelling. He did not say exactly these words. I think his

expression was:

“‘Whoso forsakes his country forsakes his God.’

“But let these thirsty Russian souls find, like Columbus’ discoverers,

a new world; let them find the Russian world, let them search and

discover all the gold and treasure that lies hid in the bosom of their

own land! Show them the restitution of lost humanity, in the future, by

Russian thought alone, and by means of the God and of the Christ of our

Russian faith, and you will see how mighty and just and wise and good a

giant will rise up before the eyes of the astonished and frightened

world; astonished because they expect nothing but the sword from us,

because they think they will get nothing out of us but barbarism. This

has been the case up to now, and the longer matters go on as they are

now proceeding, the more clear will be the truth of what I say; and I—”

But at this moment something happened which put a most unexpected end

to the orator’s speech. All this heated tirade, this outflow of

passionate words and ecstatic ideas which seemed to hustle and tumble

over each other as they fell from his lips, bore evidence of some

unusually disturbed mental condition in the young fellow who had

“boiled over” in such a remarkable manner, without any apparent reason.

Of those who were present, such as knew the prince listened to his

outburst in a state of alarm, some with a feeling of mortification. It

was so unlike his usual timid self-constraint; so inconsistent with his

usual taste and tact, and with his instinctive feeling for the higher

proprieties. They could not understand the origin of the outburst; it

could not be simply the news of Pavlicheff’s perversion. By the ladies

the prince was regarded as little better than a lunatic, and Princess

Bielokonski admitted afterwards that “in another minute she would have

bolted.”

The two old gentlemen looked quite alarmed. The old general (Epanchin’s

chief) sat and glared at the prince in severe displeasure. The colonel

sat immovable. Even the German poet grew a little pale, though he wore

his usual artificial smile as he looked around to see what the others

would do.

In point of fact it is quite possible that the matter would have ended

in a very commonplace and natural way in a few minutes. The undoubtedly

astonished, but now more collected, General Epanchin had several times

endeavoured to interrupt the prince, and not having succeeded he was

now preparing to take firmer and more vigorous measures to attain his

end. In another minute or two he would probably have made up his mind

to lead the prince quietly out of the room, on the plea of his being

ill (and it was more than likely that the general was right in his

belief that the prince \_was\_ actually ill), but it so happened that

destiny had something different in store.

At the beginning of the evening, when the prince first came into the

room, he had sat down as far as possible from the Chinese vase which

Aglaya had spoken of the day before.

Will it be believed that, after Aglaya’s alarming words, an

ineradicable conviction had taken possession of his mind that, however

he might try to avoid this vase next day, he must certainly break it?

But so it was.

During the evening other impressions began to awaken in his mind, as we

have seen, and he forgot his presentiment. But when Pavlicheff was

mentioned and the general introduced him to Ivan Petrovitch, he had

changed his place, and went over nearer to the table; when, it so

happened, he took the chair nearest to the beautiful vase, which stood

on a pedestal behind him, just about on a level with his elbow.

As he spoke his last words he had risen suddenly from his seat with a

wave of his arm, and there was a general cry of horror.

The huge vase swayed backwards and forwards; it seemed to be uncertain

whether or no to topple over on to the head of one of the old men, but

eventually determined to go the other way, and came crashing over

towards the German poet, who darted out of the way in terror.

The crash, the cry, the sight of the fragments of valuable china

covering the carpet, the alarm of the company—what all this meant to

the poor prince it would be difficult to convey to the mind of the

reader, or for him to imagine.

But one very curious fact was that all the shame and vexation and

mortification which he felt over the accident were less powerful than

the deep impression of the almost supernatural truth of his

premonition. He stood still in alarm—in almost superstitious alarm, for

a moment; then all mists seemed to clear away from his eyes; he was

conscious of nothing but light and joy and ecstasy; his breath came and

went; but the moment passed. Thank God it was not that! He drew a long

breath and looked around.

For some minutes he did not seem to comprehend the excitement around

him; that is, he comprehended it and saw everything, but he stood

aside, as it were, like someone invisible in a fairy tale, as though he

had nothing to do with what was going on, though it pleased him to take

an interest in it.

He saw them gather up the broken bits of china; he heard the loud

talking of the guests and observed how pale Aglaya looked, and how very

strangely she was gazing at him. There was no hatred in her expression,

and no anger whatever. It was full of alarm for him, and sympathy and

affection, while she looked around at the others with flashing, angry

eyes. His heart filled with a sweet pain as he gazed at her.

At length he observed, to his amazement, that all had taken their seats

again, and were laughing and talking as though nothing had happened.

Another minute and the laughter grew louder—they were laughing at him,

at his dumb stupor—laughing kindly and merrily. Several of them spoke

to him, and spoke so kindly and cordially, especially Lizabetha

Prokofievna—she was saying the kindest possible things to him.

Suddenly he became aware that General Epanchin was tapping him on the

shoulder; Ivan Petrovitch was laughing too, but still more kind and

sympathizing was the old dignitary. He took the prince by the hand and

pressed it warmly; then he patted it, and quietly urged him to

recollect himself—speaking to him exactly as he would have spoken to a

little frightened child, which pleased the prince wonderfully; and next

seated him beside himself.

The prince gazed into his face with pleasure, but still seemed to have

no power to speak. His breath failed him. The old man’s face pleased

him greatly.

“Do you really forgive me?” he said at last. “And—and Lizabetha

Prokofievna too?” The laugh increased, tears came into the prince’s

eyes, he could not believe in all this kindness—he was enchanted.

“The vase certainly was a very beautiful one. I remember it here for

fifteen years—yes, quite that!” remarked Ivan Petrovitch.

“Oh, what a dreadful calamity! A wretched vase smashed, and a man half

dead with remorse about it,” said Lizabetha Prokofievna, loudly. “What

made you so dreadfully startled, Lef Nicolaievitch?” she added, a

little timidly. “Come, my dear boy! cheer up. You really alarm me,

taking the accident so to heart.”

“Do you forgive me all—\_all\_, besides the vase, I mean?” said the

prince, rising from his seat once more, but the old gentleman caught

his hand and drew him down again—he seemed unwilling to let him go.

“\_C’est très-curieux et c’est très-sérieux\_,” he whispered across the

table to Ivan Petrovitch, rather loudly. Probably the prince heard him.

“So that I have not offended any of you? You will not believe how happy

I am to be able to think so. It is as it should be. As if I \_could\_

offend anyone here! I should offend you again by even suggesting such a

thing.”

“Calm yourself, my dear fellow. You are exaggerating again; you really

have no occasion to be so grateful to us. It is a feeling which does

you great credit, but an exaggeration, for all that.”

“I am not exactly thanking you, I am only feeling a growing admiration

for you—it makes me happy to look at you. I dare say I am speaking very

foolishly, but I must speak—I must explain, if it be out of nothing

better than self-respect.”

All he said and did was abrupt, confused, feverish—very likely the

words he spoke, as often as not, were not those he wished to say. He

seemed to inquire whether he \_might\_ speak. His eyes lighted on

Princess Bielokonski.

“All right, my friend, talk away, talk away!” she remarked. “Only don’t

lose your breath; you were in such a hurry when you began, and look

what you’ve come to now! Don’t be afraid of speaking—all these ladies

and gentlemen have seen far stranger people than yourself; you don’t

astonish \_them\_. You are nothing out-of-the-way remarkable, you know.

You’ve done nothing but break a vase, and give us all a fright.”

The prince listened, smiling.

“Wasn’t it you,” he said, suddenly turning to the old gentleman, “who

saved the student Porkunoff and a clerk called Shoabrin from being sent

to Siberia, two or three months since?”

The old dignitary blushed a little, and murmured that the prince had

better not excite himself further.

“And I have heard of \_you\_,” continued the prince, addressing Ivan

Petrovitch, “that when some of your villagers were burned out you gave

them wood to build up their houses again, though they were no longer

your serfs and had behaved badly towards you.”

“Oh, come, come! You are exaggerating,” said Ivan Petrovitch, beaming

with satisfaction, all the same. He was right, however, in this

instance, for the report had reached the prince’s ears in an incorrect

form.

“And you, princess,” he went on, addressing Princess Bielokonski, “was

it not you who received me in Moscow, six months since, as kindly as

though I had been your own son, in response to a letter from Lizabetha

Prokofievna; and gave me one piece of advice, again as to your own son,

which I shall never forget? Do you remember?”

“What are you making such a fuss about?” said the old lady, with

annoyance. “You are a good fellow, but very silly. One gives you a

halfpenny, and you are as grateful as though one had saved your life.

You think this is praiseworthy on your part, but it is not—it is not,

indeed.”

She seemed to be very angry, but suddenly burst out laughing, quite

good-humouredly.

Lizabetha Prokofievna’s face brightened up, too; so did that of General

Epanchin.

“I told you Lef Nicolaievitch was a man—a man—if only he would not be

in such a hurry, as the princess remarked,” said the latter, with

delight.

Aglaya alone seemed sad and depressed; her face was flushed, perhaps

with indignation.

“He really is very charming,” whispered the old dignitary to Ivan

Petrovitch.

“I came into this room with anguish in my heart,” continued the prince,

with ever-growing agitation, speaking quicker and quicker, and with

increasing strangeness. “I—I was afraid of you all, and afraid of

myself. I was most afraid of myself. When I returned to Petersburg, I

promised myself to make a point of seeing our greatest men, and members

of our oldest families—the old families like my own. I am now among

princes like myself, am I not? I wished to know you, and it was

necessary, very, very necessary. I had always heard so much that was

evil said of you all—more evil than good; as to how small and petty

were your interests, how absurd your habits, how shallow your

education, and so on. There is so much written and said about you! I

came here today with anxious curiosity; I wished to see for myself and

form my own convictions as to whether it were true that the whole of

this upper stratum of Russian society is \_worthless\_, has outlived its

time, has existed too long, and is only fit to die—and yet is dying

with petty, spiteful warring against that which is destined to

supersede it and take its place—hindering the Coming Men, and knowing

not that itself is in a dying condition. I did not fully believe in

this view even before, for there never was such a class among

us—excepting perhaps at court, by accident—or by uniform; but now there

is not even that, is there? It has vanished, has it not?”

“No, not a bit of it,” said Ivan Petrovitch, with a sarcastic laugh.

“Good Lord, he’s off again!” said Princess Bielokonski, impatiently.

“Laissez-le dire! He is trembling all over,” said the old man, in a

warning whisper.

The prince certainly was beside himself.

“Well? What have I seen?” he continued. “I have seen men of graceful

simplicity of intellect; I have seen an old man who is not above

speaking kindly and even \_listening\_ to a boy like myself; I see before

me persons who can understand, who can forgive—kind, good Russian

hearts—hearts almost as kind and cordial as I met abroad. Imagine how

delighted I must have been, and how surprised! Oh, let me express this

feeling! I have so often heard, and I have even believed, that in

society there was nothing but empty forms, and that reality had

vanished; but I now see for myself that this can never be the case

\_here\_, among us—it may be the order elsewhere, but not in Russia.

Surely you are not all Jesuits and deceivers! I heard Prince N.‘s story

just now. Was it not simple-minded, spontaneous humour? Could such

words come from the lips of a man who is dead?—a man whose heart and

talents are dried up? Could dead men and women have treated me so

kindly as you have all been treating me to-day? Is there not material

for the future in all this—for hope? Can such people fail to

\_understand?\_ Can such men fall away from reality?”

“Once more let us beg you to be calm, my dear boy. We’ll talk of all

this another time—I shall do so with the greatest pleasure, for one,”

said the old dignitary, with a smile.

Ivan Petrovitch grunted and twisted round in his chair. General

Epanchin moved nervously. The latter’s chief had started a conversation

with the wife of the dignitary, and took no notice whatever of the

prince, but the old lady very often glanced at him, and listened to

what he was saying.

“No, I had better speak,” continued the prince, with a new outburst of

feverish emotion, and turning towards the old man with an air of

confidential trustfulness. “Yesterday, Aglaya Ivanovna forbade me to

talk, and even specified the particular subjects I must not touch

upon—she knows well enough that I am odd when I get upon these matters.

I am nearly twenty-seven years old, and yet I know I am little better

than a child. I have no right to express my ideas, and said so long

ago. Only in Moscow, with Rogojin, did I ever speak absolutely freely!

He and I read Pushkin together—all his works. Rogojin knew nothing of

Pushkin, had not even heard his name. I am always afraid of spoiling a

great Thought or Idea by my absurd manner. I have no eloquence, I know.

I always make the wrong gestures—inappropriate gestures—and therefore I

degrade the Thought, and raise a laugh instead of doing my subject

justice. I have no sense of proportion either, and that is the chief

thing. I know it would be much better if I were always to sit still and

say nothing. When I do so, I appear to be quite a sensible sort of a

person, and what’s more, I think about things. But now I must speak; it

is better that I should. I began to speak because you looked so kindly

at me; you have such a beautiful face. I promised Aglaya Ivanovna

yesterday that I would not speak all the evening.”

“Really?” said the old man, smiling.

“But, at times, I can’t help thinking that I am wrong in feeling so

about it, you know. Sincerity is more important than elocution, isn’t

it?”

“Sometimes.”

“I want to explain all to you—everything—everything! I know you think

me Utopian, don’t you—an idealist? Oh, no! I’m not, indeed—my ideas are

all so simple. You don’t believe me? You are smiling. Do you know, I am

sometimes very wicked—for I lose my faith? This evening as I came here,

I thought to myself, ‘What shall I talk about? How am I to begin, so

that they may be able to understand partially, at all events?’ How

afraid I was—dreadfully afraid! And yet, how \_could\_ I be afraid—was it

not shameful of me? Was I afraid of finding a bottomless abyss of empty

selfishness? Ah! that’s why I am so happy at this moment, because I

find there is no bottomless abyss at all—but good, healthy material,

full of life.

“It is not such a very dreadful circumstance that we are odd people, is

it? For we really are odd, you know—careless, reckless, easily wearied

of anything. We don’t look thoroughly into matters—don’t care to

understand things. We are all like this—you and I, and all of them!

Why, here are you, now—you are not a bit angry with me for calling you

‘odd,’ are you? And, if so, surely there is good material in you? Do

you know, I sometimes think it is a good thing to be odd. We can

forgive one another more easily, and be more humble. No one can begin

by being perfect—there is much one cannot understand in life at first.

In order to attain to perfection, one must begin by failing to

understand much. And if we take in knowledge too quickly, we very

likely are not taking it in at all. I say all this to you—you who by

this time understand so much—and doubtless have failed to understand so

much, also. I am not afraid of you any longer. You are not angry that a

mere boy should say such words to you, are you? Of course not! You know

how to forget and to forgive. You are laughing, Ivan Petrovitch? You

think I am a champion of other classes of people—that I am \_their\_

advocate, a democrat, and an orator of Equality?” The prince laughed

hysterically; he had several times burst into these little, short

nervous laughs. “Oh, no—it is for you, for myself, and for all of us

together, that I am alarmed. I am a prince of an old family myself, and

I am sitting among my peers; and I am talking like this in the hope of

saving us all; in the hope that our class will not disappear

altogether—into the darkness—unguessing its danger—blaming everything

around it, and losing ground every day. Why should we disappear and

give place to others, when we may still, if we choose, remain in the

front rank and lead the battle? Let us be servants, that we may become

lords in due season!”

He tried to get upon his feet again, but the old man still restrained

him, gazing at him with increasing perturbation as he went on.

“Listen—I know it is best not to speak! It is best simply to give a

good example—simply to begin the work. I have done this—I have begun,

and—and—oh! \_can\_ anyone be unhappy, really? Oh! what does grief

matter—what does misfortune matter, if one knows how to be happy? Do

you know, I cannot understand how anyone can pass by a green tree, and

not feel happy only to look at it! How anyone can talk to a man and not

feel happy in loving him! Oh, it is my own fault that I cannot express

myself well enough! But there are lovely things at every step I

take—things which even the most miserable man must recognize as

beautiful. Look at a little child—look at God’s day dawn—look at the

grass growing—look at the eyes that love you, as they gaze back into

your eyes!”

He had risen, and was speaking standing up. The old gentleman was

looking at him now in unconcealed alarm. Lizabetha Prokofievna wrung

her hands. “Oh, my God!” she cried. She had guessed the state of the

case before anyone else.

Aglaya rushed quickly up to him, and was just in time to receive him in

her arms, and to hear with dread and horror that awful, wild cry as he

fell writhing to the ground.

There he lay on the carpet, and someone quickly placed a cushion under

his head.

No one had expected this.

In a quarter of an hour or so Prince N. and Evgenie Pavlovitch and the

old dignitary were hard at work endeavouring to restore the harmony of

the evening, but it was of no avail, and very soon after the guests

separated and went their ways.

A great deal of sympathy was expressed; a considerable amount of advice

was volunteered; Ivan Petrovitch expressed his opinion that the young

man was “a Slavophile, or something of that sort”; but that it was not

a dangerous development. The old dignitary said nothing.

True enough, most of the guests, next day and the day after, were not

in very good humour. Ivan Petrovitch was a little offended, but not

seriously so. General Epanchin’s chief was rather cool towards him for

some while after the occurrence. The old dignitary, as patron of the

family, took the opportunity of murmuring some kind of admonition to

the general, and added, in flattering terms, that he was most

interested in Aglaya’s future. He was a man who really did possess a

kind heart, although his interest in the prince, in the earlier part of

the evening, was due, among other reasons, to the latter’s connection

with Nastasia Philipovna, according to popular report. He had heard a

good deal of this story here and there, and was greatly interested in

it, so much so that he longed to ask further questions about it.

Princess Bielokonski, as she drove away on this eventful evening, took

occasion to say to Lizabetha Prokofievna:

“Well—he’s a good match—and a bad one; and if you want my opinion, more

bad than good. You can see for yourself the man is an invalid.”

Lizabetha therefore decided that the prince was impossible as a husband

for Aglaya; and during the ensuing night she made a vow that never

while she lived should he marry Aglaya. With this resolve firmly

impressed upon her mind, she awoke next day; but during the morning,

after her early lunch, she fell into a condition of remarkable

inconsistency.

In reply to a very guarded question of her sisters’, Aglaya had

answered coldly, but exceedingly haughtily:

“I have never given him my word at all, nor have I ever counted him as

my future husband—never in my life. He is just as little to me as all

the rest.”

Lizabetha Prokofievna suddenly flared up.

“I did not expect that of you, Aglaya,” she said. “He is an impossible

husband for you,—I know it; and thank God that we agree upon that

point; but I did not expect to hear such words from you. I thought I

should hear a very different tone from you. I would have turned out

everyone who was in the room last night and kept him,—that’s the sort

of man he is, in my opinion!”

Here she suddenly paused, afraid of what she had just said. But she

little knew how unfair she was to her daughter at that moment. It was

all settled in Aglaya’s mind. She was only waiting for the hour that

would bring the matter to a final climax; and every hint, every

careless probing of her wound, did but further lacerate her heart.

VIII.

This same morning dawned for the prince pregnant with no less painful

presentiments,—which fact his physical state was, of course, quite

enough to account for; but he was so indefinably melancholy,—his

sadness could not attach itself to anything in particular, and this

tormented him more than anything else. Of course certain facts stood

before him, clear and painful, but his sadness went beyond all that he

could remember or imagine; he realized that he was powerless to console

himself unaided. Little by little he began to develop the expectation

that this day something important, something decisive, was to happen to

him.

His attack of yesterday had been a slight one. Excepting some little

heaviness in the head and pain in the limbs, he did not feel any

particular effects. His brain worked all right, though his soul was

heavy within him.

He rose late, and immediately upon waking remembered all about the

previous evening; he also remembered, though not quite so clearly, how,

half an hour after his fit, he had been carried home.

He soon heard that a messenger from the Epanchins’ had already been to

inquire after him. At half-past eleven another arrived; and this

pleased him.

Vera Lebedeff was one of the first to come to see him and offer her

services. No sooner did she catch sight of him than she burst into

tears; but when he tried to soothe her she began to laugh. He was quite

struck by the girl’s deep sympathy for him; he seized her hand and

kissed it. Vera flushed crimson.

“Oh, don’t, don’t!” she exclaimed in alarm, snatching her hand away.

She went hastily out of the room in a state of strange confusion.

Lebedeff also came to see the prince, in a great hurry to get away to

the “deceased,” as he called General Ivolgin, who was alive still, but

very ill. Colia also turned up, and begged the prince for pity’s sake

to tell him all he knew about his father which had been concealed from

him till now. He said he had found out nearly everything since

yesterday; the poor boy was in a state of deep affliction. With all the

sympathy which he could bring into play, the prince told Colia the

whole story without reserve, detailing the facts as clearly as he

could. The tale struck Colia like a thunderbolt. He could not speak. He

listened silently, and cried softly to himself the while. The prince

perceived that this was an impression which would last for the whole of

the boy’s life. He made haste to explain his view of the matter, and

pointed out that the old man’s approaching death was probably brought

on by horror at the thought of his action; and that it was not everyone

who was capable of such a feeling.

Colia’s eyes flashed as he listened.

“Gania and Varia and Ptitsin are a worthless lot! I shall not quarrel

with them; but from this moment our feet shall not travel the same

road. Oh, prince, I have felt much that is quite new to me since

yesterday! It is a lesson for me. I shall now consider my mother as

entirely my responsibility; though she may be safe enough with Varia.

Still, meat and drink is not everything.”

He jumped up and hurried off, remembering suddenly that he was wanted

at his father’s bedside; but before he went out of the room he inquired

hastily after the prince’s health, and receiving the latter’s reply,

added:

“Isn’t there something else, prince? I heard yesterday, but I have no

right to talk about this... If you ever want a true friend and

servant—neither you nor I are so very happy, are we?—come to me. I

won’t ask you questions, though.”

He ran off and left the prince more dejected than ever.

Everyone seemed to be speaking prophetically, hinting at some

misfortune or sorrow to come; they had all looked at him as though they

knew something which he did not know. Lebedeff had asked questions,

Colia had hinted, and Vera had shed tears. What was it?

At last, with a sigh of annoyance, he said to himself that it was

nothing but his own cursed sickly suspicion. His face lighted up with

joy when, at about two o’clock, he espied the Epanchins coming along to

pay him a short visit, “just for a minute.” They really had only come

for a minute.

Lizabetha Prokofievna had announced, directly after lunch, that they

would all take a walk together. The information was given in the form

of a command, without explanation, drily and abruptly. All had issued

forth in obedience to the mandate; that is, the girls, mamma, and

Prince S. Lizabetha Prokofievna went off in a direction exactly

contrary to the usual one, and all understood very well what she was

driving at, but held their peace, fearing to irritate the good lady.

She, as though anxious to avoid any conversation, walked ahead, silent

and alone. At last Adelaida remarked that it was no use racing along at

such a pace, and that she could not keep up with her mother.

“Look here,” said Lizabetha Prokofievna, turning round suddenly; “we

are passing his house. Whatever Aglaya may think, and in spite of

anything that may happen, he is not a stranger to us; besides which, he

is ill and in misfortune. I, for one, shall call in and see him. Let

anyone follow me who cares to.”

Of course every one of them followed her.

The prince hastened to apologize, very properly, for yesterday’s mishap

with the vase, and for the scene generally.

“Oh, that’s nothing,” replied Lizabetha; “I’m not sorry for the vase,

I’m sorry for you. H’m! so you can see that there was a ‘scene,’ can

you? Well, it doesn’t matter much, for everyone must realize now that

it is impossible to be hard on you. Well, \_au revoir\_. I advise you to

have a walk, and then go to sleep again if you can. Come in as usual,

if you feel inclined; and be assured, once for all, whatever happens,

and whatever may have happened, you shall always remain the friend of

the family—mine, at all events. I can answer for myself.”

In response to this challenge all the others chimed in and re-echoed

mamma’s sentiments.

And so they took their departure; but in this hasty and kindly designed

visit there was hidden a fund of cruelty which Lizabetha Prokofievna

never dreamed of. In the words “as usual,” and again in her added,

“mine, at all events,” there seemed an ominous knell of some evil to

come.

The prince began to think of Aglaya. She had certainly given him a

wonderful smile, both at coming and again at leave-taking, but had not

said a word, not even when the others all professed their friendship

for him. She had looked very intently at him, but that was all. Her

face had been paler than usual; she looked as though she had slept

badly.

The prince made up his mind that he would make a point of going there

“as usual,” tonight, and looked feverishly at his watch.

Vera came in three minutes after the Epanchins had left. “Lef

Nicolaievitch,” she said, “Aglaya Ivanovna has just given me a message

for you.”

The prince trembled.

“Is it a note?”

“No, a verbal message; she had hardly time even for that. She begs you

earnestly not to go out of the house for a single moment all to-day,

until seven o’clock in the evening. It may have been nine; I didn’t

quite hear.”

“But—but, why is this? What does it mean?”

“I don’t know at all; but she said I was to tell you particularly.”

“Did she say that?”

“Not those very words. She only just had time to whisper as she went

by; but by the way she looked at me I knew it was important. She looked

at me in a way that made my heart stop beating.”

The prince asked a few more questions, and though he learned nothing

else, he became more and more agitated.

Left alone, he lay down on the sofa, and began to think.

“Perhaps,” he thought, “someone is to be with them until nine tonight

and she is afraid that I may come and make a fool of myself again, in

public.” So he spent his time longing for the evening and looking at

his watch. But the clearing-up of the mystery came long before the

evening, and came in the form of a new and agonizing riddle.

Half an hour after the Epanchins had gone, Hippolyte arrived, so tired

that, almost unconscious, he sank into a chair, and broke into such a

fit of coughing that he could not stop. He coughed till the blood came.

His eyes glittered, and two red spots on his cheeks grew brighter and

brighter. The prince murmured something to him, but Hippolyte only

signed that he must be left alone for a while, and sat silent. At last

he came to himself.

“I am off,” he said, hoarsely, and with difficulty.

“Shall I see you home?” asked the prince, rising from his seat, but

suddenly stopping short as he remembered Aglaya’s prohibition against

leaving the house. Hippolyte laughed.

“I don’t mean that I am going to leave your house,” he continued, still

gasping and coughing. “On the contrary, I thought it absolutely

necessary to come and see you; otherwise I should not have troubled

you. I am off there, you know, and this time I believe, seriously, that

I am off! It’s all over. I did not come here for sympathy, believe me.

I lay down this morning at ten o’clock with the intention of not rising

again before that time; but I thought it over and rose just once more

in order to come here; from which you may deduce that I had some reason

for wishing to come.”

“It grieves me to see you so, Hippolyte. Why didn’t you send me a

message? I would have come up and saved you this trouble.”

“Well, well! Enough! You’ve pitied me, and that’s all that good manners

exact. I forgot, how are you?”

“I’m all right; yesterday I was a little—”

“I know, I heard; the china vase caught it! I’m sorry I wasn’t there.

I’ve come about something important. In the first place I had, the

pleasure of seeing Gavrila Ardalionovitch and Aglaya Ivanovna enjoying

a rendezvous on the green bench in the park. I was astonished to see

what a fool a man can look. I remarked upon the fact to Aglaya Ivanovna

when he had gone. I don’t think anything ever surprises you, prince!”

added Hippolyte, gazing incredulously at the prince’s calm demeanour.

“To be astonished by nothing is a sign, they say, of a great intellect.

In my opinion it would serve equally well as a sign of great

foolishness. I am not hinting about you; pardon me! I am very

unfortunate today in my expressions.”

“I knew yesterday that Gavrila Ardalionovitch—” began the prince, and

paused in evident confusion, though Hippolyte had shown annoyance at

his betraying no surprise.

“You knew it? Come, that’s news! But no—perhaps better not tell me. And

were you a witness of the meeting?”

“If you were there yourself you must have known that I was \_not\_

there!”

“Oh! but you may have been sitting behind the bushes somewhere.

However, I am very glad, on your account, of course. I was beginning to

be afraid that Mr. Gania—might have the preference!”

“May I ask you, Hippolyte, not to talk of this subject? And not to use

such expressions?”

“Especially as you know all, eh?”

“You are wrong. I know scarcely anything, and Aglaya Ivanovna is aware

that I know nothing. I knew nothing whatever about this meeting. You

say there was a meeting. Very well; let’s leave it so—”

“Why, what do you mean? You said you knew, and now suddenly you know

nothing! You say ‘very well; let’s leave it so.’ But I say, don’t be so

confiding, especially as you know nothing. You are confiding simply

\_because\_ you know nothing. But do you know what these good people have

in their minds’ eye—Gania and his sister? Perhaps you are suspicious?

Well, well, I’ll drop the subject!” he added, hastily, observing the

prince’s impatient gesture. “But I’ve come to you on my own business; I

wish to make you a clear explanation. What a nuisance it is that one

cannot die without explanations! I have made such a quantity of them

already. Do you wish to hear what I have to say?”

“Speak away, I am listening.”

“Very well, but I’ll change my mind, and begin about Gania. Just fancy

to begin with, if you can, that I, too, was given an appointment at the

green bench today! However, I won’t deceive you; I asked for the

appointment. I said I had a secret to disclose. I don’t know whether I

came there too early, I think I must have; but scarcely had I sat down

beside Aglaya Ivanovna than I saw Gavrila Ardalionovitch and his sister

Varia coming along, arm in arm, just as though they were enjoying a

morning walk together. Both of them seemed very much astonished, not to

say disturbed, at seeing me; they evidently had not expected the

pleasure. Aglaya Ivanovna blushed up, and was actually a little

confused. I don’t know whether it was merely because I was there, or

whether Gania’s beauty was too much for her! But anyway, she turned

crimson, and then finished up the business in a very funny manner. She

jumped up from her seat, bowed back to Gania, smiled to Varia, and

suddenly observed: ‘I only came here to express my gratitude for all

your kind wishes on my behalf, and to say that if I find I need your

services, believe me—’ Here she bowed them away, as it were, and they

both marched off again, looking very foolish. Gania evidently could not

make head nor tail of the matter, and turned as red as a lobster; but

Varia understood at once that they must get away as quickly as they

could, so she dragged Gania away; she is a great deal cleverer than he

is. As for myself, I went there to arrange a meeting to be held between

Aglaya Ivanovna and Nastasia Philipovna.”

“Nastasia Philipovna!” cried the prince.

“Aha! I think you are growing less cool, my friend, and are beginning

to be a trifle surprised, aren’t you? I’m glad that you are not above

ordinary human feelings, for once. I’ll console you a little now, after

your consternation. See what I get for serving a young and high-souled

maiden! This morning I received a slap in the face from the lady!”

“A—a moral one?” asked the prince, involuntarily.

“Yes—not a physical one! I don’t suppose anyone—even a woman—would

raise a hand against me now. Even Gania would hesitate! I did think at

one time yesterday, that he would fly at me, though. I bet anything

that I know what you are thinking of now! You are thinking: ‘Of course

one can’t strike the little wretch, but one could suffocate him with a

pillow, or a wet towel, when he is asleep! One \_ought\_ to get rid of

him somehow.’ I can see in your face that you are thinking that at this

very second.”

“I never thought of such a thing for a moment,” said the prince, with

disgust.

“I don’t know—I dreamed last night that I was being suffocated with a

wet cloth by—somebody. I’ll tell you who it was—Rogojin! What do you

think, can a man be suffocated with a wet cloth?”

“I don’t know.”

“I’ve heard so. Well, we’ll leave that question just now. Why am I a

scandal-monger? Why did she call me a scandal-monger? And mind, \_after\_

she had heard every word I had to tell her, and had asked all sorts of

questions besides—but such is the way of women. For \_her\_ sake I

entered into relations with Rogojin—an interesting man! At \_her\_

request I arranged a personal interview between herself and Nastasia

Philipovna. Could she have been angry because I hinted that she was

enjoying Nastasia Philipovna’s ‘leavings’? Why, I have been impressing

it upon her all this while for her own good. Two letters have I written

her in that strain, and I began straight off today about its being

humiliating for her. Besides, the word ‘leavings’ is not my invention.

At all events, they all used it at Gania’s, and she used it herself. So

why am I a scandal-monger? I see—I see you are tremendously amused, at

this moment! Probably you are laughing at me and fitting those silly

lines to my case—

“‘Maybe sad Love upon his setting smiles, And with vain hopes his

farewell hour beguiles.’

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Hippolyte suddenly burst into a fit of hysterical laughter, which

turned into a choking cough.

“Observe,” he gasped, through his coughing, “what a fellow Gania is! He

talks about Nastasia’s ‘leavings,’ but what does he want to take

himself?”

The prince sat silent for a long while. His mind was filled with dread

and horror.

“You spoke of a meeting with Nastasia Philipovna,” he said at last, in

a low voice.

“Oh—come! Surely you must know that there is to be a meeting today

between Nastasia and Aglaya Ivanovna, and that Nastasia has been sent

for on purpose, through Rogojin, from St. Petersburg? It has been

brought about by invitation of Aglaya Ivanovna and my own efforts, and

Nastasia is at this moment with Rogojin, not far from here—at Dana

Alexeyevna’s—that curious friend of hers; and to this questionable

house Aglaya Ivanovna is to proceed for a friendly chat with Nastasia

Philipovna, and for the settlement of several problems. They are going

to play at arithmetic—didn’t you know about it? Word of honour?”

“It’s a most improbable story.”

“Oh, very well! if it’s improbable—it is—that’s all! And yet—where

should you have heard it? Though I must say, if a fly crosses the room

it’s known all over the place here. However, I’ve warned you, and you

may be grateful to me. Well—\_au revoir\_—probably in the next world! One

more thing—don’t think that I am telling you all this for your sake.

Oh, dear, no! Do you know that I dedicated my confession to Aglaya

Ivanovna? I did though, and how she took it, ha, ha! Oh, no! I am not

acting from any high, exalted motives. But though I may have behaved

like a cad to you, I have not done \_her\_ any harm. I don’t apologize

for my words about ‘leavings’ and all that. I am atoning for that, you

see, by telling you the place and time of the meeting. Goodbye! You had

better take your measures, if you are worthy the name of a man! The

meeting is fixed for this evening—that’s certain.”

Hippolyte walked towards the door, but the prince called him back and

he stopped.

“Then you think Aglaya Ivanovna herself intends to go to Nastasia

Philipovna’s tonight?” he asked, and bright hectic spots came out on

his cheeks and forehead.

“I don’t know absolutely for certain; but in all probability it is so,”

replied Hippolyte, looking round. “Nastasia would hardly go to her; and

they can’t meet at Gania’s, with a man nearly dead in the house.”

“It’s impossible, for that very reason,” said the prince. “How would

she get out if she wished to? You don’t know the habits of that

house—she \_could\_ not get away alone to Nastasia Philipovna’s! It’s all

nonsense!”

“Look here, my dear prince, no one jumps out of the window if they can

help it; but when there’s a fire, the dandiest gentleman or the finest

lady in the world will skip out! When the moment comes, and there’s

nothing else to be done—our young lady will go to Nastasia

Philipovna’s! Don’t they let the young ladies out of the house alone,

then?”

“I didn’t mean that exactly.”

“If you didn’t mean that, then she has only to go down the steps and

walk off, and she need never come back unless she chooses: Ships are

burned behind one sometimes, and one doesn’t care to return whence one

came. Life need not consist only of lunches, and dinners, and Prince

S’s. It strikes me you take Aglaya Ivanovna for some conventional

boarding-school girl. I said so to her, and she quite agreed with me.

Wait till seven or eight o’clock. In your place I would send someone

there to keep watch, so as to seize the exact moment when she steps out

of the house. Send Colia. He’ll play the spy with pleasure—for you at

least. Ha, ha, ha!”

Hippolyte went out.

There was no reason for the prince to set anyone to watch, even if he

had been capable of such a thing. Aglaya’s command that he should stay

at home all day seemed almost explained now. Perhaps she meant to call

for him, herself, or it might be, of course, that she was anxious to

make sure of his not coming there, and therefore bade him remain at

home. His head whirled; the whole room seemed to be turning round. He

lay down on the sofa, and closed his eyes.

One way or the other the question was to be decided at last—finally.

Oh, no, he did not think of Aglaya as a boarding-school miss, or a

young lady of the conventional type! He had long since feared that she

might take some such step as this. But why did she wish to see

Nastasia?

He shivered all over as he lay; he was in high fever again.

No! he did not account her a child. Certain of her looks, certain of

her words, of late, had filled him with apprehension. At times it had

struck him that she was putting too great a restraint upon herself, and

he remembered that he had been alarmed to observe this. He had tried,

all these days, to drive away the heavy thoughts that oppressed him;

but what was the hidden mystery of that soul? The question had long

tormented him, although he implicitly trusted that soul. And now it was

all to be cleared up. It was a dreadful thought. And “that woman”

again! Why did he always feel as though “that woman” were fated to

appear at each critical moment of his life, and tear the thread of his

destiny like a bit of rotten string? That he always \_had\_ felt this he

was ready to swear, although he was half delirious at the moment. If he

had tried to forget her, all this time, it was simply because he was

afraid of her. Did he love the woman or hate her? This question he did

not once ask himself today; his heart was quite pure. He knew whom he

loved. He was not so much afraid of this meeting, nor of its

strangeness, nor of any reasons there might be for it, unknown to

himself; he was afraid of the woman herself, Nastasia Philipovna. He

remembered, some days afterwards, how during all those fevered hours he

had seen but \_her\_ eyes, \_her\_ look, had heard \_her\_ voice, strange

words of hers; he remembered that this was so, although he could not

recollect the details of his thoughts.

He could remember that Vera brought him some dinner, and that he took

it; but whether he slept after dinner, or no, he could not recollect.

He only knew that he began to distinguish things clearly from the

moment when Aglaya suddenly appeared, and he jumped up from the sofa

and went to meet her. It was just a quarter past seven then.

Aglaya was quite alone, and dressed, apparently hastily, in a light

mantle. Her face was pale, as it had been in the morning, and her eyes

were ablaze with bright but subdued fire. He had never seen that

expression in her eyes before.

She gazed attentively at him.

“You are quite ready, I observe,” she said, with absolute composure,

“dressed, and your hat in your hand. I see somebody has thought fit to

warn you, and I know who. Hippolyte?”

“Yes, he told me,” said the prince, feeling only half alive.

“Come then. You know, I suppose, that you must escort me there? You are

well enough to go out, aren’t you?”

“I am well enough; but is it really possible?—”

He broke off abruptly, and could not add another word. This was his one

attempt to stop the mad child, and, after he had made it, he followed

her as though he had no will of his own. Confused as his thoughts were,

he was, nevertheless, capable of realizing the fact that if he did not

go with her, she would go alone, and so he must go with her at all

hazards. He guessed the strength of her determination; it was beyond

him to check it.

They walked silently, and said scarcely a word all the way. He only

noticed that she seemed to know the road very well; and once, when he

thought it better to go by a certain lane, and remarked to her that it

would be quieter and less public, she only said, “it’s all the same,”

and went on.

When they were almost arrived at Daria Alexeyevna’s house (it was a

large wooden structure of ancient date), a gorgeously-dressed lady and

a young girl came out of it. Both these ladies took their seats in a

carriage, which was waiting at the door, talking and laughing loudly

the while, and drove away without appearing to notice the approaching

couple.

No sooner had the carriage driven off than the door opened once more;

and Rogojin, who had apparently been awaiting them, let them in and

closed it after them.

“There is not another soul in the house now excepting our four selves,”

he said aloud, looking at the prince in a strange way.

Nastasia Philipovna was waiting for them in the first room they went

into. She was dressed very simply, in black.

She rose at their entrance, but did not smile or give her hand, even to

the prince. Her anxious eyes were fixed upon Aglaya. Both sat down, at

a little distance from one another—Aglaya on the sofa, in the corner of

the room, Nastasia by the window. The prince and Rogojin remained

standing, and were not invited to sit.

Muishkin glanced at Rogojin in perplexity, but the latter only smiled

disagreeably, and said nothing. The silence continued for some few

moments.

An ominous expression passed over Nastasia Philipovna’s face, of a

sudden. It became obstinate-looking, hard, and full of hatred; but she

did not take her eyes off her visitors for a moment.

Aglaya was clearly confused, but not frightened. On entering she had

merely glanced momentarily at her rival, and then had sat still, with

her eyes on the ground, apparently in thought. Once or twice she

glanced casually round the room. A shade of disgust was visible in her

expression; she looked as though she were afraid of contamination in

this place.

She mechanically arranged her dress, and fidgeted uncomfortably,

eventually changing her seat to the other end of the sofa. Probably she

was unconscious of her own movements; but this very unconsciousness

added to the offensiveness of their suggested meaning.

At length she looked straight into Nastasia’s eyes, and instantly read

all there was to read in her rival’s expression. Woman understood

woman! Aglaya shuddered.

“You know of course why I requested this meeting?” she said at last,

quietly, and pausing twice in the delivery of this very short sentence.

“No—I know nothing about it,” said Nastasia, drily and abruptly.

Aglaya blushed. Perhaps it struck her as very strange and impossible

that she should really be sitting here and waiting for “that woman’s”

reply to her question.

At the first sound of Nastasia’s voice a shudder ran through her frame.

Of course “that woman” observed and took in all this.

“You know quite well, but you are pretending to be ignorant,” said

Aglaya, very low, with her eyes on the ground.

“Why should I?” asked Nastasia Philipovna, smiling slightly.

“You want to take advantage of my position, now that I am in your

house,” continued Aglaya, awkwardly.

“For that position \_you\_ are to blame and not I,” said Nastasia,

flaring up suddenly. “\_I\_ did not invite \_you\_, but you me; and to this

moment I am quite ignorant as to why I am thus honoured.”

Aglaya raised her head haughtily.

“Restrain your tongue!” she said. “I did not come here to fight you

with your own weapons.

“Oh! then you did come ‘to fight,’ I may conclude? Dear me!—and I

thought you were cleverer—”

They looked at one another with undisguised malice. One of these women

had written to the other, so lately, such letters as we have seen; and

it all was dispersed at their first meeting. Yet it appeared that not

one of the four persons in the room considered this in any degree

strange.

The prince who, up to yesterday, would not have believed that he could

even dream of such an impossible scene as this, stood and listened and

looked on, and felt as though he had long foreseen it all. The most

fantastic dream seemed suddenly to have been metamorphosed into the

most vivid reality.

One of these women so despised the other, and so longed to express her

contempt for her (perhaps she had only come for that very purpose, as

Rogojin said next day), that howsoever fantastical was the other woman,

howsoever afflicted her spirit and disturbed her understanding, no

preconceived idea of hers could possibly stand up against that deadly

feminine contempt of her rival. The prince felt sure that Nastasia

would say nothing about the letters herself; but he could judge by her

flashing eyes and the expression of her face what the thought of those

letters must be costing her at this moment. He would have given half

his life to prevent Aglaya from speaking of them. But Aglaya suddenly

braced herself up, and seemed to master herself fully, all in an

instant.

“You have not quite understood,” she said. “I did not come to quarrel

with you, though I do not like you. I came to speak to you as... as one

human being to another. I came with my mind made up as to what I had to

say to you, and I shall not change my intention, although you may

misunderstand me. So much the worse for you, not for myself! I wished

to reply to all you have written to me and to reply personally, because

I think that is the more convenient way. Listen to my reply to all your

letters. I began to be sorry for Prince Lef Nicolaievitch on the very

day I made his acquaintance, and when I heard—afterwards—of all that

took place at your house in the evening, I was sorry for him because he

was such a simple-minded man, and because he, in the simplicity of his

soul, believed that he could be happy with a woman of your character.

What I feared actually took place; you could not love him, you tortured

him, and threw him over. You could not love him because you are too

proud—no, not proud, that is an error; because you are too vain—no, not

quite that either; too self-loving; you are self-loving to madness.

Your letters to me are a proof of it. You could not love so simple a

soul as his, and perhaps in your heart you despised him and laughed at

him. All you could love was your shame and the perpetual thought that

you were disgraced and insulted. If you were less shameful, or had no

cause at all for shame, you would be still more unhappy than you are

now.”

Aglaya brought out these thronging words with great satisfaction. They

came from her lips hurriedly and impetuously, and had been prepared and

thought out long ago, even before she had ever dreamed of the present

meeting. She watched with eagerness the effect of her speech as shown

in Nastasia’s face, which was distorted with agitation.

“You remember,” she continued, “he wrote me a letter at that time; he

says you know all about that letter and that you even read it. I

understand all by means of this letter, and understand it correctly. He

has since confirmed it all to me—what I now say to you, word for word.

After receiving his letter I waited; I guessed that you would soon come

back here, because you could never do without Petersburg; you are still

too young and lovely for the provinces. However, this is not my own

idea,” she added, blushing dreadfully; and from this moment the colour

never left her cheeks to the end of her speech. “When I next saw the

prince I began to feel terribly pained and hurt on his account. Do not

laugh; if you laugh you are unworthy of understanding what I say.”

“Surely you see that I am not laughing,” said Nastasia, sadly and

sternly.

“However, it’s all the same to me; laugh or not, just as you please.

When I asked him about you, he told me that he had long since ceased to

love you, that the very recollection of you was a torture to him, but

that he was sorry for you; and that when he thought of you his heart

was pierced. I ought to tell you that I never in my life met a man

anything like him for noble simplicity of mind and for boundless

trustfulness. I guessed that anyone who liked could deceive him, and

that he would immediately forgive anyone who did deceive him; and it

was for this that I grew to love him—”

Aglaya paused for a moment, as though suddenly brought up in

astonishment that she could have said these words, but at the same time

a great pride shone in her eyes, like a defiant assertion that it would

not matter to her if “this woman” laughed in her face for the admission

just made.

“I have told you all now, and of course you understand what I wish of

you.”

“Perhaps I do; but tell me yourself,” said Nastasia Philipovna,

quietly.

Aglaya flushed up angrily.

“I wished to find out from you,” she said, firmly, “by what right you

dare to meddle with his feelings for me? By what right you dared send

me those letters? By what right do you continually remind both me and

him that you love him, after you yourself threw him over and ran away

from him in so insulting and shameful a way?”

“I never told either him or you that I loved him!” replied Nastasia

Philipovna, with an effort. “And—and I did run away from him—you are

right there,” she added, scarcely audibly.

“Never told either him or me?” cried Aglaya. “How about your letters?

Who asked you to try to persuade me to marry him? Was not that a

declaration from you? Why do you force yourself upon us in this way? I

confess I thought at first that you were anxious to arouse an aversion

for him in my heart by your meddling, in order that I might give him

up; and it was only afterwards that I guessed the truth. You imagined

that you were doing an heroic action! How could you spare any love for

him, when you love your own vanity to such an extent? Why could you not

simply go away from here, instead of writing me those absurd letters?

Why do you not \_now\_ marry that generous man who loves you, and has

done you the honour of offering you his hand? It is plain enough why;

if you marry Rogojin you lose your grievance; you will have nothing

more to complain of. You will be receiving too much honour. Evgenie

Pavlovitch was saying the other day that you had read too many poems

and are too well educated for—your position; and that you live in

idleness. Add to this your vanity, and, there you have reason enough—”

“And do you not live in idleness?”

Things had come to this unexpected point too quickly. Unexpected

because Nastasia Philipovna, on her way to Pavlofsk, had thought and

considered a good deal, and had expected something different, though

perhaps not altogether good, from this interview; but Aglaya had been

carried away by her own outburst, just as a rolling stone gathers

impetus as it careers downhill, and could not restrain herself in the

satisfaction of revenge.

It was strange, Nastasia Philipovna felt, to see Aglaya like this. She

gazed at her, and could hardly believe her eyes and ears for a moment

or two.

Whether she were a woman who had read too many poems, as Evgenie

Pavlovitch supposed, or whether she were mad, as the prince had assured

Aglaya, at all events, this was a woman who, in spite of her

occasionally cynical and audacious manner, was far more refined and

trustful and sensitive than appeared. There was a certain amount of

romantic dreaminess and caprice in her, but with the fantastic was

mingled much that was strong and deep.

The prince realized this, and great suffering expressed itself in his

face.

Aglaya observed it, and trembled with anger.

“How dare you speak so to me?” she said, with a haughtiness which was

quite indescribable, replying to Nastasia’s last remark.

“You must have misunderstood what I said,” said Nastasia, in some

surprise.

“If you wished to preserve your good name, why did you not give up

your—your ‘guardian,’ Totski, without all that theatrical posturing?”

said Aglaya, suddenly a propos of nothing.

“What do you know of my position, that you dare to judge me?” cried

Nastasia, quivering with rage, and growing terribly white.

“I know this much, that you did not go out to honest work, but went

away with a rich man, Rogojin, in order to pose as a fallen angel. I

don’t wonder that Totski was nearly driven to suicide by such a fallen

angel.”

“Silence!” cried Nastasia Philipovna. “You are about as fit to

understand me as the housemaid here, who bore witness against her lover

in court the other day. She would understand me better than you do.”

“Probably an honest girl living by her own toil. Why do you speak of a

housemaid so contemptuously?”

“I do not despise toil; I despise you when you speak of toil.”

“If you had cared to be an honest woman, you would have gone out as a

laundress.”

Both had risen, and were gazing at one another with pallid faces.

“Aglaya, don’t! This is unfair,” cried the prince, deeply distressed.

Rogojin was not smiling now; he sat and listened with folded arms, and

lips tight compressed.

“There, look at her,” cried Nastasia, trembling with passion. “Look at

this young lady! And I imagined her an angel! Did you come to me

without your governess, Aglaya Ivanovna? Oh, fie, now shall I just tell

you why you came here today? Shall I tell you without any

embellishments? You came because you were afraid of me!”

“Afraid of \_you?\_” asked Aglaya, beside herself with naive amazement

that the other should dare talk to her like this.

“Yes, me, of course! Of course you were afraid of me, or you would not

have decided to come. You cannot despise one you fear. And to think

that I have actually esteemed you up to this very moment! Do you know

why you are afraid of me, and what is your object now? You wished to

satisfy yourself with your own eyes as to which he loves best, myself

or you, because you are fearfully jealous.”

“He has told me already that he hates you,” murmured Aglaya, scarcely

audibly.

“Perhaps, perhaps! I am not worthy of him, I know. But I think you are

lying, all the same. He cannot hate me, and he cannot have said so. I

am ready to forgive you, in consideration of your position; but I

confess I thought better of you. I thought you were wiser, and more

beautiful, too; I did, indeed! Well, take your treasure! See, he is

gazing at you, he can’t recollect himself. Take him, but on one

condition; go away at once, this instant!”

She fell back into a chair, and burst into tears. But suddenly some new

expression blazed in her eyes. She stared fixedly at Aglaya, and rose

from her seat.

“Or would you like me to bid him, \_bid him\_, do you hear, \_command

him\_, now, at once, to throw you up, and remain mine for ever? Shall I?

He will stay, and he will marry me too, and you shall trot home all

alone. Shall I?—shall I say the word?” she screamed like a madwoman,

scarcely believing herself that she could really pronounce such wild

words.

Aglaya had made for the door in terror, but she stopped at the

threshold, and listened. “Shall I turn Rogojin off? Ha! ha! you thought

I would marry him for your benefit, did you? Why, I’ll call out \_now\_,

if you like, in your presence, ‘Rogojin, get out!’ and say to the

prince, ‘Do you remember what you promised me?’ Heavens! what a fool I

have been to humiliate myself before them! Why, prince, you yourself

gave me your word that you would marry me whatever happened, and would

never abandon me. You said you loved me and would forgive me all,

and—and resp—yes, you even said that! I only ran away from you in order

to set you free, and now I don’t care to let you go again. Why does she

treat me so—so shamefully? I am not a loose woman—ask Rogojin there!

He’ll tell you. Will you go again now that she has insulted me, before

your eyes, too; turn away from me and lead her away, arm-in-arm? May

you be accursed too, for you were the only one I trusted among them

all! Go away, Rogojin, I don’t want you,” she continued, blind with

fury, and forcing the words out with dry lips and distorted features,

evidently not believing a single word of her own tirade, but, at the

same time, doing her utmost to prolong the moment of self-deception.

The outburst was so terribly violent that the prince thought it would

have killed her.

“There he is!” she shrieked again, pointing to the prince and

addressing Aglaya. “There he is! and if he does not approach me at once

and take \_me\_ and throw you over, then have him for your own—I give him

up to you! I don’t want him!”

Both she and Aglaya stood and waited as though in expectation, and both

looked at the prince like madwomen.

But he, perhaps, did not understand the full force of this challenge;

in fact, it is certain he did not. All he could see was the poor

despairing face which, as he had said to Aglaya, “had pierced his heart

for ever.”

He could bear it no longer, and with a look of entreaty, mingled with

reproach, he addressed Aglaya, pointing to Nastasia the while:

“How can you?” he murmured; “she is so unhappy.”

But he had no time to say another word before Aglaya’s terrible look

bereft him of speech. In that look was embodied so dreadful a suffering

and so deadly a hatred, that he gave a cry and flew to her; but it was

too late.

She could not hold out long enough even to witness his movement in her

direction. She had hidden her face in her hands, cried once “Oh, my

God!” and rushed out of the room. Rogojin followed her to undo the

bolts of the door and let her out into the street.

The prince made a rush after her, but he was caught and held back. The

distorted, livid face of Nastasia gazed at him reproachfully, and her

blue lips whispered:

“What? Would you go to her—to her?”

She fell senseless into his arms.

He raised her, carried her into the room, placed her in an arm-chair,

and stood over her, stupefied. On the table stood a tumbler of water.

Rogojin, who now returned, took this and sprinkled a little in her

face. She opened her eyes, but for a moment she understood nothing.

Suddenly she looked around, shuddered, gave a loud cry, and threw

herself in the prince’s arms.

“Mine, mine!” she cried. “Has the proud young lady gone? Ha, ha, ha!”

she laughed hysterically. “And I had given him up to her! Why—why did

I? Mad—mad! Get away, Rogojin! Ha, ha, ha!”

Rogojin stared intently at them; then he took his hat, and without a

word, left the room.

A few moments later, the prince was seated by Nastasia on the sofa,

gazing into her eyes and stroking her face and hair, as he would a

little child’s. He laughed when she laughed, and was ready to cry when

she cried. He did not speak, but listened to her excited, disconnected

chatter, hardly understanding a word of it the while. No sooner did he

detect the slightest appearance of complaining, or weeping, or

reproaching, than he would smile at her kindly, and begin stroking her

hair and her cheeks, soothing and consoling her once more, as if she

were a child.

IX.

A fortnight had passed since the events recorded in the last chapter,

and the position of the actors in our story had become so changed that

it is almost impossible for us to continue the tale without some few

explanations. Yet we feel that we ought to limit ourselves to the

simple record of facts, without much attempt at explanation, for a very

patent reason: because we ourselves have the greatest possible

difficulty in accounting for the facts to be recorded. Such a statement

on our part may appear strange to the reader. How is anyone to tell a

story which he cannot understand himself? In order to keep clear of a

false position, we had perhaps better give an example of what we mean;

and probably the intelligent reader will soon understand the

difficulty. More especially are we inclined to take this course since

the example will constitute a distinct march forward of our story, and

will not hinder the progress of the events remaining to be recorded.

During the next fortnight—that is, through the early part of July—the

history of our hero was circulated in the form of strange, diverting,

most unlikely-sounding stories, which passed from mouth to mouth,

through the streets and villas adjoining those inhabited by Lebedeff,

Ptitsin, Nastasia Philipovna and the Epanchins; in fact, pretty well

through the whole town and its environs. All society—both the

inhabitants of the place and those who came down of an evening for the

music—had got hold of one and the same story, in a thousand varieties

of detail—as to how a certain young prince had raised a terrible

scandal in a most respectable household, had thrown over a daughter of

the family, to whom he was engaged, and had been captured by a woman of

shady reputation whom he was determined to marry at once—breaking off

all old ties for the satisfaction of his insane idea; and, in spite of

the public indignation roused by his action, the marriage was to take

place in Pavlofsk openly and publicly, and the prince had announced his

intention of going through with it with head erect and looking the

whole world in the face. The story was so artfully adorned with

scandalous details, and persons of so great eminence and importance

were apparently mixed up in it, while, at the same time, the evidence

was so circumstantial, that it was no wonder the matter gave food for

plenty of curiosity and gossip.

According to the reports of the most talented gossip-mongers—those who,

in every class of society, are always in haste to explain every event

to their neighbours—the young gentleman concerned was of good family—a

prince—fairly rich—weak of intellect, but a democrat and a dabbler in

the Nihilism of the period, as exposed by Mr. Turgenieff. He could

hardly talk Russian, but had fallen in love with one of the Miss

Epanchins, and his suit met with so much encouragement that he had been

received in the house as the recognized bridegroom-to-be of the young

lady. But like the Frenchman of whom the story is told that he studied

for holy orders, took all the oaths, was ordained priest, and next

morning wrote to his bishop informing him that, as he did not believe

in God and considered it wrong to deceive the people and live upon

their pockets, he begged to surrender the orders conferred upon him the

day before, and to inform his lordship that he was sending this letter

to the public press,—like this Frenchman, the prince played a false

game. It was rumoured that he had purposely waited for the solemn

occasion of a large evening party at the house of his future bride, at

which he was introduced to several eminent persons, in order publicly

to make known his ideas and opinions, and thereby insult the

“big-wigs,” and to throw over his bride as offensively as possible; and

that, resisting the servants who were told off to turn him out of the

house, he had seized and thrown down a magnificent china vase. As a

characteristic addition to the above, it was currently reported that

the young prince really loved the lady to whom he was engaged, and had

thrown her over out of purely Nihilistic motives, with the intention of

giving himself the satisfaction of marrying a fallen woman in the face

of all the world, thereby publishing his opinion that there is no

distinction between virtuous and disreputable women, but that all women

are alike, free; and a “fallen” woman, indeed, somewhat superior to a

virtuous one.

It was declared that he believed in no classes or anything else,

excepting “the woman question.”

All this looked likely enough, and was accepted as fact by most of the

inhabitants of the place, especially as it was borne out, more or less,

by daily occurrences.

Of course much was said that could not be determined absolutely. For

instance, it was reported that the poor girl had so loved her future

husband that she had followed him to the house of the other woman, the

day after she had been thrown over; others said that he had insisted on

her coming, himself, in order to shame and insult her by his taunts and

Nihilistic confessions when she reached the house. However all these

things might be, the public interest in the matter grew daily,

especially as it became clear that the scandalous wedding was

undoubtedly to take place.

So that if our readers were to ask an explanation, not of the wild

reports about the prince’s Nihilistic opinions, but simply as to how

such a marriage could possibly satisfy his real aspirations, or as to

the spiritual condition of our hero at this time, we confess that we

should have great difficulty in giving the required information.

All we know is, that the marriage really was arranged, and that the

prince had commissioned Lebedeff and Keller to look after all the

necessary business connected with it; that he had requested them to

spare no expense; that Nastasia herself was hurrying on the wedding;

that Keller was to be the prince’s best man, at his own earnest

request; and that Burdovsky was to give Nastasia away, to his great

delight. The wedding was to take place before the middle of July.

But, besides the above, we are cognizant of certain other undoubted

facts, which puzzle us a good deal because they seem flatly to

contradict the foregoing.

We suspect, for instance, that having commissioned Lebedeff and the

others, as above, the prince immediately forgot all about masters of

ceremonies and even the ceremony itself; and we feel quite certain that

in making these arrangements he did so in order that he might

absolutely escape all thought of the wedding, and even forget its

approach if he could, by detailing all business concerning it to

others.

What did he think of all this time, then? What did he wish for? There

is no doubt that he was a perfectly free agent all through, and that as

far as Nastasia was concerned, there was no force of any kind brought

to bear on him. Nastasia wished for a speedy marriage, true!—but the

prince agreed at once to her proposals; he agreed, in fact, so casually

that anyone might suppose he was but acceding to the most simple and

ordinary suggestion.

There are many strange circumstances such as this before us; but in our

opinion they do but deepen the mystery, and do not in the smallest

degree help us to understand the case.

However, let us take one more example. Thus, we know for a fact that

during the whole of this fortnight the prince spent all his days and

evenings with Nastasia; he walked with her, drove with her; he began to

be restless whenever he passed an hour without seeing her—in fact, to

all appearances, he sincerely loved her. He would listen to her for

hours at a time with a quiet smile on his face, scarcely saying a word

himself. And yet we know, equally certainly, that during this period he

several times set off, suddenly, to the Epanchins’, not concealing the

fact from Nastasia Philipovna, and driving the latter to absolute

despair. We know also that he was not received at the Epanchins’ so

long as they remained at Pavlofsk, and that he was not allowed an

interview with Aglaya;—but next day he would set off once more on the

same errand, apparently quite oblivious of the fact of yesterday’s

visit having been a failure,—and, of course, meeting with another

refusal. We know, too, that exactly an hour after Aglaya had fled from

Nastasia Philipovna’s house on that fateful evening, the prince was at

the Epanchins’,—and that his appearance there had been the cause of the

greatest consternation and dismay; for Aglaya had not been home, and

the family only discovered then, for the first time, that the two of

them had been to Nastasia’s house together.

It was said that Elizabetha Prokofievna and her daughters had there and

then denounced the prince in the strongest terms, and had refused any

further acquaintance and friendship with him; their rage and

denunciations being redoubled when Varia Ardalionovna suddenly arrived

and stated that Aglaya had been at her house in a terrible state of

mind for the last hour, and that she refused to come home.

This last item of news, which disturbed Lizabetha Prokofievna more than

anything else, was perfectly true. On leaving Nastasia’s, Aglaya had

felt that she would rather die than face her people, and had therefore

gone straight to Nina Alexandrovna’s. On receiving the news, Lizabetha

and her daughters and the general all rushed off to Aglaya, followed by

Prince Lef Nicolaievitch—undeterred by his recent dismissal; but

through Varia he was refused a sight of Aglaya here also. The end of

the episode was that when Aglaya saw her mother and sisters crying over

her and not uttering a word of reproach, she had flung herself into

their arms and gone straight home with them.

It was said that Gania managed to make a fool of himself even on this

occasion; for, finding himself alone with Aglaya for a minute or two

when Varia had gone to the Epanchins’, he had thought it a fitting

opportunity to make a declaration of his love, and on hearing this

Aglaya, in spite of her state of mind at the time, had suddenly burst

out laughing, and had put a strange question to him. She asked him

whether he would consent to hold his finger to a lighted candle in

proof of his devotion! Gania—it was said—looked so comically bewildered

that Aglaya had almost laughed herself into hysterics, and had rushed

out of the room and upstairs,—where her parents had found her.

Hippolyte told the prince this last story, sending for him on purpose.

When Muishkin heard about the candle and Gania’s finger he had laughed

so that he had quite astonished Hippolyte,—and then shuddered and burst

into tears. The prince’s condition during those days was strange and

perturbed. Hippolyte plainly declared that he thought he was out of his

mind;—this, however, was hardly to be relied upon.

Offering all these facts to our readers and refusing to explain them,

we do not for a moment desire to justify our hero’s conduct. On the

contrary, we are quite prepared to feel our share of the indignation

which his behaviour aroused in the hearts of his friends. Even Vera

Lebedeff was angry with him for a while; so was Colia; so was Keller,

until he was selected for best man; so was Lebedeff himself,—who began

to intrigue against him out of pure irritation;—but of this anon. In

fact we are in full accord with certain forcible words spoken to the

prince by Evgenie Pavlovitch, quite unceremoniously, during the course

of a friendly conversation, six or seven days after the events at

Nastasia Philipovna’s house.

We may remark here that not only the Epanchins themselves, but all who

had anything to do with them, thought it right to break with the prince

in consequence of his conduct. Prince S. even went so far as to turn

away and cut him dead in the street. But Evgenie Pavlovitch was not

afraid to compromise himself by paying the prince a visit, and did so,

in spite of the fact that he had recommenced to visit at the

Epanchins’, where he was received with redoubled hospitality and

kindness after the temporary estrangement.

Evgenie called upon the prince the day after that on which the

Epanchins left Pavlofsk. He knew of all the current rumours,—in fact,

he had probably contributed to them himself. The prince was delighted

to see him, and immediately began to speak of the Epanchins;—which

simple and straightforward opening quite took Evgenie’s fancy, so that

he melted at once, and plunged \_in medias res\_ without ceremony.

The prince did not know, up to this, that the Epanchins had left the

place. He grew very pale on hearing the news; but a moment later he

nodded his head, and said thoughtfully:

“I knew it was bound to be so.” Then he added quickly:

“Where have they gone to?”

Evgenie meanwhile observed him attentively, and the rapidity of the

questions, their simplicity, the prince’s candour, and at the same

time, his evident perplexity and mental agitation, surprised him

considerably. However, he told Muishkin all he could, kindly and in

detail. The prince hardly knew anything, for this was the first

informant from the household whom he had met since the estrangement.

Evgenie reported that Aglaya had been really ill, and that for two

nights she had not slept at all, owing to high fever; that now she was

better and out of serious danger, but still in a nervous, hysterical

state.

“It’s a good thing that there is peace in the house, at all events,” he

continued. “They never utter a hint about the past, not only in

Aglaya’s presence, but even among themselves. The old people are

talking of a trip abroad in the autumn, immediately after Adelaida’s

wedding; Aglaya received the news in silence.”

Evgenie himself was very likely going abroad also; so were Prince S.

and his wife, if affairs allowed of it; the general was to stay at

home. They were all at their estate of Colmina now, about twenty miles

or so from St. Petersburg. Princess Bielokonski had not returned to

Moscow yet, and was apparently staying on for reasons of her own.

Lizabetha Prokofievna had insisted that it was quite impossible to

remain in Pavlofsk after what had happened. Evgenie had told her of all

the rumours current in town about the affair; so that there could be no

talk of their going to their house on the Yelagin as yet.

“And in point of fact, prince,” added Evgenie Pavlovitch, “you must

allow that they could hardly have stayed here, considering that they

knew of all that went on at your place, and in the face of your daily

visits to their house, visits which you insisted upon making in spite

of their refusal to see you.”

“Yes—yes, quite so; you are quite right. I wished to see Aglaya

Ivanovna, you know!” said the prince, nodding his head.

“Oh, my dear fellow,” cried Evgenie, warmly, with real sorrow in his

voice, “how could you permit all that to come about as it has? Of

course, of course, I know it was all so unexpected. I admit that you,

only naturally, lost your head, and—and could not stop the foolish

girl; that was not in your power. I quite see so much; but you really

should have understood how seriously she cared for you. She could not

bear to share you with another; and you could bring yourself to throw

away and shatter such a treasure! Oh, prince, prince!”

“Yes, yes, you are quite right again,” said the poor prince, in anguish

of mind. “I was wrong, I know. But it was only Aglaya who looked on

Nastasia Philipovna so; no one else did, you know.”

“But that’s just the worst of it all, don’t you see, that there was

absolutely nothing serious about the matter in reality!” cried Evgenie,

beside himself: “Excuse me, prince, but I have thought over all this; I

have thought a great deal over it; I know all that had happened before;

I know all that took place six months since; and I know there was

\_nothing\_ serious about the matter, it was but fancy, smoke, fantasy,

distorted by agitation, and only the alarmed jealousy of an absolutely

inexperienced girl could possibly have mistaken it for serious

reality.”

Here Evgenie Pavlovitch quite let himself go, and gave the reins to his

indignation.

Clearly and reasonably, and with great psychological insight, he drew a

picture of the prince’s past relations with Nastasia Philipovna.

Evgenie Pavlovitch always had a ready tongue, but on this occasion his

eloquence, surprised himself. “From the very beginning,” he said, “you

began with a lie; what began with a lie was bound to end with a lie;

such is the law of nature. I do not agree, in fact I am angry, when I

hear you called an idiot; you are far too intelligent to deserve such

an epithet; but you are so far \_strange\_ as to be unlike others; that

you must allow, yourself. Now, I have come to the conclusion that the

basis of all that has happened, has been first of all your innate

inexperience (remark the expression ‘innate,’ prince). Then follows

your unheard-of simplicity of heart; then comes your absolute want of

sense of proportion (to this want you have several times confessed);

and lastly, a mass, an accumulation, of intellectual convictions which

you, in your unexampled honesty of soul, accept unquestionably as also

innate and natural and true. Admit, prince, that in your relations with

Nastasia Philipovna there has existed, from the very first, something

democratic, and the fascination, so to speak, of the ‘woman question’?

I know all about that scandalous scene at Nastasia Philipovna’s house

when Rogojin brought the money, six months ago. I’ll show you yourself

as in a looking-glass, if you like. I know exactly all that went on, in

every detail, and why things have turned out as they have. You

thirsted, while in Switzerland, for your home-country, for Russia; you

read, doubtless, many books about Russia, excellent books, I dare say,

but hurtful to \_you\_; and you arrived here; as it were, on fire with

the longing to be of service. Then, on the very day of your arrival,

they tell you a sad story of an ill-used woman; they tell \_you\_, a

knight, pure and without reproach, this tale of a poor woman! The same

day you actually \_see\_ her; you are attracted by her beauty, her

fantastic, almost demoniacal, beauty—(I admit her beauty, of course).

“Add to all this your nervous nature, your epilepsy, and your sudden

arrival in a strange town—the day of meetings and of exciting scenes,

the day of unexpected acquaintanceships, the day of sudden actions, the

day of meeting with the three lovely Epanchin girls, and among them

Aglaya—add your fatigue, your excitement; add Nastasia’ s evening

party, and the tone of that party, and—what were you to expect of

yourself at such a moment as that?”

“Yes, yes, yes!” said the prince, once more, nodding his head, and

blushing slightly. “Yes, it was so, or nearly so—I know it. And

besides, you see, I had not slept the night before, in the train, or

the night before that, either, and I was very tired.”

“Of course, of course, quite so; that’s what I am driving at!”

continued Evgenie, excitedly. “It is as clear as possible, and most

comprehensible, that you, in your enthusiasm, should plunge headlong

into the first chance that came of publicly airing your great idea that

you, a prince, and a pure-living man, did not consider a woman

disgraced if the sin were not her own, but that of a disgusting social

libertine! Oh, heavens! it’s comprehensible enough, my dear prince, but

that is not the question, unfortunately! The question is, was there any

reality and truth in your feelings? Was it nature, or nothing but

intellectual enthusiasm? What do you think yourself? We are told, of

course, that a far worse woman was \_forgiven\_, but we don’t find that

she was told that she had done well, or that she was worthy of honour

and respect! Did not your common-sense show you what was the real state

of the case, a few months later? The question is now, not whether she

is an innocent woman (I do not insist one way or the other—I do not

wish to); but can her whole career justify such intolerable pride, such

insolent, rapacious egotism as she has shown? Forgive me, I am too

violent, perhaps, but—”

“Yes—I dare say it is all as you say; I dare say you are quite right,”

muttered the prince once more. “She is very sensitive and easily put

out, of course; but still, she...”

“She is worthy of sympathy? Is that what you wished to say, my good

fellow? But then, for the mere sake of vindicating her worthiness of

sympathy, you should not have insulted and offended a noble and

generous girl in her presence! This is a terrible exaggeration of

sympathy! How can you love a girl, and yet so humiliate her as to throw

her over for the sake of another woman, before the very eyes of that

other woman, when you have already made her a formal proposal of

marriage? And you \_did\_ propose to her, you know; you did so before her

parents and sisters. Can you be an honest man, prince, if you act so? I

ask you! And did you not deceive that beautiful girl when you assured

her of your love?”

“Yes, you are quite right. Oh! I feel that I am very guilty!” said

Muishkin, in deepest distress.

“But as if that is enough!” cried Evgenie, indignantly. “As if it is

enough simply to say: ‘I know I am very guilty!’ You are to blame, and

yet you persevere in evil-doing. Where was your heart, I should like to

know, your \_christian heart\_, all that time? Did she look as though she

were suffering less, at that moment? You saw her face—was she suffering

less than the other woman? How could you see her suffering and allow it

to continue? How could you?”

“But I did not allow it,” murmured the wretched prince.

“How—what do you mean you didn’t allow?”

“Upon my word, I didn’t! To this moment I don’t know how it all

happened. I—I ran after Aglaya Ivanovna, but Nastasia Philipovna fell

down in a faint; and since that day they won’t let me see Aglaya—that’s

all I know.”

“It’s all the same; you ought to have run after Aglaya though the other

was fainting.”

“Yes, yes, I ought—but I couldn’t! She would have died—she would have

killed herself. You don’t know her; and I should have told Aglaya

everything afterwards—but I see, Evgenie Pavlovitch, you don’t know

all. Tell me now, why am I not allowed to see Aglaya? I should have

cleared it all up, you know. Neither of them kept to the real point,

you see. I could never explain what I mean to you, but I think I could

to Aglaya. Oh! my God, my God! You spoke just now of Aglaya’s face at

the moment when she ran away. Oh, my God! I remember it! Come along,

come along—quick!” He pulled at Evgenie’s coat-sleeve nervously and

excitedly, and rose from his chair.

“Where to?”

“Come to Aglaya—quick, quick!”

“But I told you she is not at Pavlofsk. And what would be the use if

she were?”

“Oh, she’ll understand, she’ll understand!” cried the prince, clasping

his hands. “She would understand that all this is not the point—not a

bit the real point—it is quite foreign to the real question.”

“How can it be foreign? You \_are\_ going to be married, are you not?

Very well, then you are persisting in your course. \_Are\_ you going to

marry her or not?”

“Yes, I shall marry her—yes.”

“Then why is it ‘not the point’?”

“Oh, no, it is not the point, not a bit. It makes no difference, my

marrying her—it means nothing.”

“How ‘means nothing’? You are talking nonsense, my friend. You are

marrying the woman you love in order to secure her happiness, and

Aglaya sees and knows it. How can you say that it’s ‘not the point’?”

“Her happiness? Oh, no! I am only marrying her—well, because she wished

it. It means nothing—it’s all the same. She would certainly have died.

I see now that that marriage with Rogojin was an insane idea. I

understand all now that I did not understand before; and, do you know,

when those two stood opposite to one another, I could not bear Nastasia

Philipovna’s face! You must know, Evgenie Pavlovitch, I have never told

anyone before—not even Aglaya—that I cannot bear Nastasia Philipovna’s

face.” (He lowered his voice mysteriously as he said this.) “You

described that evening at Nastasia Philipovna’s (six months since) very

accurately just now; but there is one thing which you did not mention,

and of which you took no account, because you do not know. I mean her

\_face\_—I looked at her face, you see. Even in the morning when I saw

her portrait, I felt that I could not \_bear\_ to look at it. Now,

there’s Vera Lebedeff, for instance, her eyes are quite different, you

know. I’m \_afraid\_ of her face!” he added, with real alarm.

“You are \_afraid\_ of it?”

“Yes—she’s mad!” he whispered, growing pale.

“Do you know this for certain?” asked Evgenie, with the greatest

curiosity.

“Yes, for certain—quite for certain, now! I have discovered it

\_absolutely\_ for certain, these last few days.”

“What are you doing, then?” cried Evgenie, in horror. “You must be

marrying her solely out of \_fear\_, then! I can’t make head or tail of

it, prince. Perhaps you don’t even love her?”

“Oh, no; I love her with all my soul. Why, she is a child! She’s a

child now—a real child. Oh! you know nothing about it at all, I see.”

“And are you assured, at the same time, that you love Aglaya too?”

“Yes—yes—oh; yes!”

“How so? Do you want to make out that you love them \_both?\_”

“Yes—yes—both! I do!”

“Excuse me, prince, but think what you are saying! Recollect yourself!”

“Without Aglaya—I—I \_must\_ see Aglaya!—I shall die in my sleep very

soon—I thought I was dying in my sleep last night. Oh! if Aglaya only

knew all—I mean really, \_really\_ all! Because she must know

\_all\_—that’s the first condition towards understanding. Why cannot we

ever know all about another, especially when that other has been

guilty? But I don’t know what I’m talking about—I’m so confused. You

pained me so dreadfully. Surely—surely Aglaya has not the same

expression now as she had at the moment when she ran away? Oh, yes! I

am guilty and I know it—I know it! Probably I am in fault all round—I

don’t quite know how—but I am in fault, no doubt. There is something

else, but I cannot explain it to you, Evgenie Pavlovitch. I have no

words; but Aglaya will understand. I have always believed Aglaya will

understand—I am assured she will.”

“No, prince, she will not. Aglaya loved like a woman, like a human

being, not like an abstract spirit. Do you know what, my poor prince?

The most probable explanation of the matter is that you never loved

either the one or the other in reality.”

“I don’t know—perhaps you are right in much that you have said, Evgenie

Pavlovitch. You are very wise, Evgenie Pavlovitch—oh! how my head is

beginning to ache again! Come to her, quick—for God’s sake, come!”

“But I tell you she is not in Pavlofsk! She’s in Colmina.”

“Oh, come to Colmina, then! Come—let us go at once!”

“No—no, impossible!” said Evgenie, rising.

“Look here—I’ll write a letter—take a letter for me!”

“No—no, prince; you must forgive me, but I can’t undertake any such

commissions! I really can’t.”

And so they parted.

Evgenie Pavlovitch left the house with strange convictions. He, too,

felt that the prince must be out of his mind.

“And what did he mean by that \_face\_—a face which he so fears, and yet

so loves? And meanwhile he really may die, as he says, without seeing

Aglaya, and she will never know how devotedly he loves her! Ha, ha, ha!

How does the fellow manage to love two of them? Two different kinds of

love, I suppose! This is very interesting—poor idiot! What on earth

will become of him now?”

X.

The prince did not die before his wedding—either by day or night, as he

had foretold that he might. Very probably he passed disturbed nights,

and was afflicted with bad dreams; but, during the daytime, among his

fellow-men, he seemed as kind as ever, and even contented; only a

little thoughtful when alone.

The wedding was hurried on. The day was fixed for exactly a week after

Evgenie’s visit to the prince. In the face of such haste as this, even

the prince’s best friends (if he had had any) would have felt the

hopelessness of any attempt to save “the poor madman.” Rumour said that

in the visit of Evgenie Pavlovitch was to be discerned the influence of

Lizabetha Prokofievna and her husband... But if those good souls, in

the boundless kindness of their hearts, were desirous of saving the

eccentric young fellow from ruin, they were unable to take any stronger

measures to attain that end. Neither their position, nor their private

inclination, perhaps (and only naturally), would allow them to use any

more pronounced means.

We have observed before that even some of the prince’s nearest

neighbours had begun to oppose him. Vera Lebedeff’s passive

disagreement was limited to the shedding of a few solitary tears; to

more frequent sitting alone at home, and to a diminished frequency in

her visits to the prince’s apartments.

Colia was occupied with his father at this time. The old man died

during a second stroke, which took place just eight days after the

first. The prince showed great sympathy in the grief of the family, and

during the first days of their mourning he was at the house a great

deal with Nina Alexandrovna. He went to the funeral, and it was

observable that the public assembled in church greeted his arrival and

departure with whisperings, and watched him closely.

The same thing happened in the park and in the street, wherever he

went. He was pointed out when he drove by, and he often overheard the

name of Nastasia Philipovna coupled with his own as he passed. People

looked out for her at the funeral, too, but she was not there; and

another conspicuous absentee was the captain’s widow, whom Lebedeff had

prevented from coming.

The funeral service produced a great effect on the prince. He whispered

to Lebedeff that this was the first time he had ever heard a Russian

funeral service since he was a little boy. Observing that he was

looking about him uneasily, Lebedeff asked him whom he was seeking.

“Nothing. I only thought I—”

“Is it Rogojin?”

“Why—is he here?”

“Yes, he’s in church.”

“I thought I caught sight of his eyes!” muttered the prince, in

confusion. “But what of it!—Why is he here? Was he asked?”

“Oh, dear, no! Why, they don’t even know him! Anyone can come in, you

know. Why do you look so amazed? I often meet him; I’ve seen him at

least four times, here at Pavlofsk, within the last week.”

“I haven’t seen him once—since that day!” the prince murmured.

As Nastasia Philipovna had not said a word about having met Rogojin

since “that day,” the prince concluded that the latter had his own

reasons for wishing to keep out of sight. All the day of the funeral

our hero was in a deeply thoughtful state, while Nastasia Philipovna

was particularly merry, both in the daytime and in the evening.

Colia had made it up with the prince before his father’s death, and it

was he who urged him to make use of Keller and Burdovsky, promising to

answer himself for the former’s behaviour. Nina Alexandrovna and

Lebedeff tried to persuade him to have the wedding in St. Petersburg,

instead of in the public fashion contemplated, down here at Pavlofsk in

the height of the season. But the prince only said that Nastasia

Philipovna desired to have it so, though he saw well enough what

prompted their arguments.

The next day Keller came to visit the prince. He was in a high state of

delight with the post of honour assigned to him at the wedding.

Before entering he stopped on the threshold, raised his hand as if

making a solemn vow, and cried:

“I won’t drink!”

Then he went up to the prince, seized both his hands, shook them

warmly, and declared that he had at first felt hostile towards the

project of this marriage, and had openly said so in the billiard-rooms,

but that the reason simply was that, with the impatience of a friend,

he had hoped to see the prince marry at least a Princess de Rohan or de

Chabot; but that now he saw that the prince’s way of thinking was ten

times more noble than that of “all the rest put together.” For he

desired neither pomp nor wealth nor honour, but only the truth! The

sympathies of exalted personages were well known, and the prince was

too highly placed by his education, and so on, not to be in some sense

an exalted personage!

“But all the common herd judge differently; in the town, at the

meetings, in the villas, at the band, in the inns and the

billiard-rooms, the coming event has only to be mentioned and there are

shouts and cries from everybody. I have even heard talk of getting up a

‘charivari’ under the windows on the wedding-night. So if ‘you have

need of the pistol’ of an honest man, prince, I am ready to fire half a

dozen shots even before you rise from your nuptial couch!”

Keller also advised, in anticipation of the crowd making a rush after

the ceremony, that a fire-hose should be placed at the entrance to the

house; but Lebedeff was opposed to this measure, which he said might

result in the place being pulled down.

“I assure you, prince, that Lebedeff is intriguing against you. He

wants to put you under control. Imagine that! To take ‘from you the use

of your free-will and your money’—that is to say, the two things that

distinguish us from the animals! I have heard it said positively. It is

the sober truth.”

The prince recollected that somebody had told him something of the kind

before, and he had, of course, scoffed at it. He only laughed now, and

forgot the hint at once.

Lebedeff really had been busy for some little while; but, as usual, his

plans had become too complex to succeed, through sheer excess of

ardour. When he came to the prince—the very day before the wedding—to

confess (for he always confessed to the persons against whom he

intrigued, especially when the plan failed), he informed our hero that

he himself was a born Talleyrand, but for some unknown reason had

become simple Lebedeff. He then proceeded to explain his whole game to

the prince, interesting the latter exceedingly.

According to Lebedeff’s account, he had first tried what he could do

with General Epanchin. The latter informed him that he wished well to

the unfortunate young man, and would gladly do what he could to “save

him,” but that he did not think it would be seemly for him to interfere

in this matter. Lizabetha Prokofievna would neither hear nor see him.

Prince S. and Evgenie Pavlovitch only shrugged their shoulders, and

implied that it was no business of theirs. However, Lebedeff had not

lost heart, and went off to a clever lawyer,—a worthy and respectable

man, whom he knew well. This old gentleman informed him that the thing

was perfectly feasible if he could get hold of competent witnesses as

to Muishkin’s mental incapacity. Then, with the assistance of a few

influential persons, he would soon see the matter arranged.

Lebedeff immediately procured the services of an old doctor, and

carried the latter away to Pavlofsk to see the prince, by way of

viewing the ground, as it were, and to give him (Lebedeff) counsel as

to whether the thing was to be done or not. The visit was not to be

official, but merely friendly.

Muishkin remembered the doctor’s visit quite well. He remembered that

Lebedeff had said that he looked ill, and had better see a doctor; and

although the prince scouted the idea, Lebedeff had turned up almost

immediately with his old friend, explaining that they had just met at

the bedside of Hippolyte, who was very ill, and that the doctor had

something to tell the prince about the sick man.

The prince had, of course, at once received him, and had plunged into a

conversation about Hippolyte. He had given the doctor an account of

Hippolyte’s attempted suicide; and had proceeded thereafter to talk of

his own malady,—of Switzerland, of Schneider, and so on; and so deeply

was the old man interested by the prince’s conversation and his

description of Schneider’s system, that he sat on for two hours.

Muishkin gave him excellent cigars to smoke, and Lebedeff, for his

part, regaled him with liqueurs, brought in by Vera, to whom the

doctor—a married man and the father of a family—addressed such

compliments that she was filled with indignation. They parted friends,

and, after leaving the prince, the doctor said to Lebedeff: “If all

such people were put under restraint, there would be no one left for

keepers.” Lebedeff then, in tragic tones, told of the approaching

marriage, whereupon the other nodded his head and replied that, after

all, marriages like that were not so rare; that he had heard that the

lady was very fascinating and of extraordinary beauty, which was enough

to explain the infatuation of a wealthy man; that, further, thanks to

the liberality of Totski and of Rogojin, she possessed—so he had

heard—not only money, but pearls, diamonds, shawls, and furniture, and

consequently she could not be considered a bad match. In brief, it

seemed to the doctor that the prince’s choice, far from being a sign of

foolishness, denoted, on the contrary, a shrewd, calculating, and

practical mind. Lebedeff had been much struck by this point of view,

and he terminated his confession by assuring the prince that he was

ready, if need be, to shed his very life’s blood for him.

Hippolyte, too, was a source of some distraction to the prince at this

time; he would send for him at any and every hour of the day. They

lived,—Hippolyte and his mother and the children,—in a small house not

far off, and the little ones were happy, if only because they were able

to escape from the invalid into the garden. The prince had enough to do

in keeping the peace between the irritable Hippolyte and his mother,

and eventually the former became so malicious and sarcastic on the

subject of the approaching wedding, that Muishkin took offence at last,

and refused to continue his visits.

A couple of days later, however, Hippolyte’s mother came with tears in

her eyes, and begged the prince to come back, “or \_he\_ would eat her up

bodily.” She added that Hippolyte had a great secret to disclose. Of

course the prince went. There was no secret, however, unless we reckon

certain pantings and agitated glances around (probably all put on) as

the invalid begged his visitor to “beware of Rogojin.”

“He is the sort of man,” he continued, “who won’t give up his object,

you know; he is not like you and me, prince—he belongs to quite a

different order of beings. If he sets his heart on a thing he won’t be

afraid of anything—” and so on.

Hippolyte was very ill, and looked as though he could not long survive.

He was tearful at first, but grew more and more sarcastic and malicious

as the interview proceeded.

The prince questioned him in detail as to his hints about Rogojin. He

was anxious to seize upon some facts which might confirm Hippolyte’s

vague warnings; but there were none; only Hippolyte’s own private

impressions and feelings.

However, the invalid—to his immense satisfaction—ended by seriously

alarming the prince.

At first Muishkin had not cared to make any reply to his sundry

questions, and only smiled in response to Hippolyte’s advice to “run

for his life—abroad, if necessary. There are Russian priests

everywhere, and one can get married all over the world.”

But it was Hippolyte’s last idea which upset him.

“What I am really alarmed about, though,” he said, “is Aglaya Ivanovna.

Rogojin knows how you love her. Love for love. You took Nastasia

Philipovna from him. He will murder Aglaya Ivanovna; for though she is

not yours, of course, now, still such an act would pain you,—wouldn’t

it?”

He had attained his end. The prince left the house beside himself with

terror.

These warnings about Rogojin were expressed on the day before the

wedding. That evening the prince saw Nastasia Philipovna for the last

time before they were to meet at the altar; but Nastasia was not in a

position to give him any comfort or consolation. On the contrary, she

only added to his mental perturbation as the evening went on. Up to

this time she had invariably done her best to cheer him—she was afraid

of his looking melancholy; she would try singing to him, and telling

him every sort of funny story or reminiscence that she could recall.

The prince nearly always pretended to be amused, whether he were so

actually or no; but often enough he laughed sincerely, delighted by the

brilliancy of her wit when she was carried away by her narrative, as

she very often was. Nastasia would be wild with joy to see the

impression she had made, and to hear his laugh of real amusement; and

she would remain the whole evening in a state of pride and happiness.

But this evening her melancholy and thoughtfulness grew with every

hour.

The prince had told Evgenie Pavlovitch with perfect sincerity that he

loved Nastasia Philipovna with all his soul. In his love for her there

was the sort of tenderness one feels for a sick, unhappy child which

cannot be left alone. He never spoke of his feelings for Nastasia to

anyone, not even to herself. When they were together they never

discussed their “feelings,” and there was nothing in their cheerful,

animated conversation which an outsider could not have heard. Daria

Alexeyevna, with whom Nastasia was staying, told afterwards how she had

been filled with joy and delight only to look at them, all this time.

Thanks to the manner in which he regarded Nastasia’s mental and moral

condition, the prince was to some extent freed from other perplexities.

She was now quite different from the woman he had known three months

before. He was not astonished, for instance, to see her now so

impatient to marry him—she who formerly had wept with rage and hurled

curses and reproaches at him if he mentioned marriage! “It shows that

she no longer fears, as she did then, that she would make me unhappy by

marrying me,” he thought. And he felt sure that so sudden a change

could not be a natural one. This rapid growth of self-confidence could

not be due only to her hatred for Aglaya. To suppose that would be to

suspect the depth of her feelings. Nor could it arise from dread of the

fate that awaited her if she married Rogojin. These causes, indeed, as

well as others, might have played a part in it, but the true reason,

Muishkin decided, was the one he had long suspected—that the poor sick

soul had come to the end of its forces. Yet this was an explanation

that did not procure him any peace of mind. At times he seemed to be

making violent efforts to think of nothing, and one would have said

that he looked on his marriage as an unimportant formality, and on his

future happiness as a thing not worth considering. As to conversations

such as the one held with Evgenie Pavlovitch, he avoided them as far as

possible, feeling that there were certain objections to which he could

make no answer.

The prince had observed that Nastasia knew well enough what Aglaya was

to him. He never spoke of it, but he had seen her face when she had

caught him starting off for the Epanchins’ house on several occasions.

When the Epanchins left Pavlofsk, she had beamed with radiance and

happiness. Unsuspicious and unobservant as he was, he had feared at

that time that Nastasia might have some scheme in her mind for a scene

or scandal which would drive Aglaya out of Pavlofsk. She had encouraged

the rumours and excitement among the inhabitants of the place as to her

marriage with the prince, in order to annoy her rival; and, finding it

difficult to meet the Epanchins anywhere, she had, on one occasion,

taken him for a drive past their house. He did not observe what was

happening until they were almost passing the windows, when it was too

late to do anything. He said nothing, but for two days afterwards he

was ill.

Nastasia did not try that particular experiment again. A few days

before that fixed for the wedding, she grew grave and thoughtful. She

always ended by getting the better of her melancholy, and becoming

merry and cheerful again, but not quite so unaffectedly happy as she

had been some days earlier.

The prince redoubled his attentive study of her symptoms. It was a most

curious circumstance, in his opinion, that she never spoke of Rogojin.

But once, about five days before the wedding, when the prince was at

home, a messenger arrived begging him to come at once, as Nastasia

Philipovna was very ill.

He had found her in a condition approaching to absolute madness. She

screamed, and trembled, and cried out that Rogojin was hiding out there

in the garden—that she had seen him herself—and that he would murder

her in the night—that he would cut her throat. She was terribly

agitated all day. But it so happened that the prince called at

Hippolyte’s house later on, and heard from his mother that she had been

in town all day, and had there received a visit from Rogojin, who had

made inquiries about Pavlofsk. On inquiry, it turned out that Rogojin

visited the old lady in town at almost the same moment when Nastasia

declared that she had seen him in the garden; so that the whole thing

turned out to be an illusion on her part. Nastasia immediately went

across to Hippolyte’s to inquire more accurately, and returned

immensely relieved and comforted.

On the day before the wedding, the prince left Nastasia in a state of

great animation. Her wedding-dress and all sorts of finery had just

arrived from town. Muishkin had not imagined that she would be so

excited over it, but he praised everything, and his praise rendered her

doubly happy.

But Nastasia could not hide the cause of her intense interest in her

wedding splendour. She had heard of the indignation in the town, and

knew that some of the populace was getting up a sort of charivari with

music, that verses had been composed for the occasion, and that the

rest of Pavlofsk society more or less encouraged these preparations.

So, since attempts were being made to humiliate her, she wanted to hold

her head even higher than usual, and to overwhelm them all with the

beauty and taste of her toilette. “Let them shout and whistle, if they

dare!” Her eyes flashed at the thought. But, underneath this, she had

another motive, of which she did not speak. She thought that possibly

Aglaya, or at any rate someone sent by her, would be present incognito

at the ceremony, or in the crowd, and she wished to be prepared for

this eventuality.

The prince left her at eleven, full of these thoughts, and went home.

But it was not twelve o’clock when a messenger came to say that

Nastasia was very bad, and he must come at once.

On hurrying back he found his bride locked up in her own room and could

hear her hysterical cries and sobs. It was some time before she could

be made to hear that the prince had come, and then she opened the door

only just sufficiently to let him in, and immediately locked it behind

him. She then fell on her knees at his feet. (So at least Dana

Alexeyevna reported.)

“What am I doing? What am I doing to you?” she sobbed convulsively,

embracing his knees.

The prince was a whole hour soothing and comforting her, and left her,

at length, pacified and composed. He sent another messenger during the

night to inquire after her, and two more next morning. The last brought

back a message that Nastasia was surrounded by a whole army of

dressmakers and maids, and was as happy and as busy as such a beauty

should be on her wedding morning, and that there was not a vestige of

yesterday’s agitation remaining. The message concluded with the news

that at the moment of the bearer’s departure there was a great

confabulation in progress as to which diamonds were to be worn, and

how.

This message entirely calmed the prince’s mind.

The following report of the proceedings on the wedding day may be

depended upon, as coming from eye-witnesses.

The wedding was fixed for eight o’clock in the evening. Nastasia

Philipovna was ready at seven. From six o’clock groups of people began

to gather at Nastasia’s house, at the prince’s, and at the church door,

but more especially at the former place. The church began to fill at

seven.

Colia and Vera Lebedeff were very anxious on the prince’s account, but

they were so busy over the arrangements for receiving the guests after

the wedding, that they had not much time for the indulgence of personal

feelings.

There were to be very few guests besides the best men and so on; only

Dana Alexeyevna, the Ptitsins, Gania, and the doctor. When the prince

asked Lebedeff why he had invited the doctor, who was almost a

stranger, Lebedeff replied:

“Why, he wears an ‘order,’ and it looks so well!”

This idea amused the prince.

Keller and Burdovsky looked wonderfully correct in their dress-coats

and white kid gloves, although Keller caused the bridegroom some alarm

by his undisguisedly hostile glances at the gathering crowd of

sight-seers outside.

At about half-past seven the prince started for the church in his

carriage.

We may remark here that he seemed anxious not to omit a single one of

the recognized customs and traditions observed at weddings. He wished

all to be done as openly as possible, and “in due order.”

Arrived at the church, Muishkin, under Keller’s guidance, passed

through the crowd of spectators, amid continuous whispering and excited

exclamations. The prince stayed near the altar, while Keller made off

once more to fetch the bride.

On reaching the gate of Daria Alexeyevna’s house, Keller found a far

denser crowd than he had encountered at the prince’s. The remarks and

exclamations of the spectators here were of so irritating a nature that

Keller was very near making them a speech on the impropriety of their

conduct, but was luckily caught by Burdovsky, in the act of turning to

address them, and hurried indoors.

Nastasia Philipovna was ready. She rose from her seat, looked into the

glass and remarked, as Keller told the tale afterwards, that she was

“as pale as a corpse.” She then bent her head reverently, before the

ikon in the corner, and left the room.

A torrent of voices greeted her appearance at the front door. The crowd

whistled, clapped its hands, and laughed and shouted; but in a moment

or two isolated voices were distinguishable.

“What a beauty!” cried one.

“Well, she isn’t the first in the world, nor the last,” said another.

“Marriage covers everything,” observed a third.

“I defy you to find another beauty like that,” said a fourth.

“She’s a real princess! I’d sell my soul for such a princess as that!”

Nastasia came out of the house looking as white as any handkerchief;

but her large dark eyes shone upon the vulgar crowd like blazing coals.

The spectators’ cries were redoubled, and became more exultant and

triumphant every moment. The door of the carriage was open, and Keller

had given his hand to the bride to help her in, when suddenly with a

loud cry she rushed from him, straight into the surging crowd. Her

friends about her were stupefied with amazement; the crowd parted as

she rushed through it, and suddenly, at a distance of five or six yards

from the carriage, appeared Rogojin. It was his look that had caught

her eyes.

Nastasia rushed to him like a madwoman, and seized both his hands.

“Save me!” she cried. “Take me away, anywhere you like, quick!”

Rogojin seized her in his arms and almost carried her to the carriage.

Then, in a flash, he tore a hundred-rouble note out of his pocket and

held it to the coachman.

“To the station, quick! If you catch the train you shall have another.

Quick!”

He leaped into the carriage after Nastasia and banged the door. The

coachman did not hesitate a moment; he whipped up the horses, and they

were off.

“One more second and I should have stopped him,” said Keller,

afterwards. In fact, he and Burdovsky jumped into another carriage and

set off in pursuit; but it struck them as they drove along that it was

not much use trying to bring Nastasia back by force.

“Besides,” said Burdovsky, “the prince would not like it, would he?” So

they gave up the pursuit.

Rogojin and Nastasia Philipovna reached the station just in time for

the train. As he jumped out of the carriage and was almost on the point

of entering the train, Rogojin accosted a young girl standing on the

platform and wearing an old-fashioned, but respectable-looking, black

cloak and a silk handkerchief over her head.

“Take fifty roubles for your cloak?” he shouted, holding the money out

to the girl. Before the astonished young woman could collect her

scattered senses, he pushed the money into her hand, seized the mantle,

and threw it and the handkerchief over Nastasia’s head and shoulders.

The latter’s wedding-array would have attracted too much attention, and

it was not until some time later that the girl understood why her old

cloak and kerchief had been bought at such a price.

The news of what had happened reached the church with extraordinary

rapidity. When Keller arrived, a host of people whom he did not know

thronged around to ask him questions. There was much excited talking,

and shaking of heads, even some laughter; but no one left the church,

all being anxious to observe how the now celebrated bridegroom would

take the news. He grew very pale upon hearing it, but took it quite

quietly.

“I was afraid,” he muttered, scarcely audibly, “but I hardly thought it

would come to this.” Then after a short silence, he added: “However, in

her state, it is quite consistent with the natural order of things.”

Even Keller admitted afterwards that this was “extraordinarily

philosophical” on the prince’s part. He left the church quite calm, to

all appearances, as many witnesses were found to declare afterwards. He

seemed anxious to reach home and be left alone as quickly as possible;

but this was not to be. He was accompanied by nearly all the invited

guests, and besides this, the house was almost besieged by excited

bands of people, who insisted upon being allowed to enter the verandah.

The prince heard Keller and Lebedeff remonstrating and quarrelling with

these unknown individuals, and soon went out himself. He approached the

disturbers of his peace, requested courteously to be told what was

desired; then politely putting Lebedeff and Keller aside, he addressed

an old gentleman who was standing on the verandah steps at the head of

the band of would-be guests, and courteously requested him to honour

him with a visit. The old fellow was quite taken aback by this, but

entered, followed by a few more, who tried to appear at their ease. The

rest remained outside, and presently the whole crowd was censuring

those who had accepted the invitation. The prince offered seats to his

strange visitors, tea was served, and a general conversation sprang up.

Everything was done most decorously, to the considerable surprise of

the intruders. A few tentative attempts were made to turn the

conversation to the events of the day, and a few indiscreet questions

were asked; but Muishkin replied to everybody with such simplicity and

good-humour, and at the same time with so much dignity, and showed such

confidence in the good breeding of his guests, that the indiscreet

talkers were quickly silenced. By degrees the conversation became

almost serious. One gentleman suddenly exclaimed, with great vehemence:

“Whatever happens, I shall not sell my property; I shall wait.

Enterprise is better than money, and there, sir, you have my whole

system of economy, if you wish!” He addressed the prince, who warmly

commended his sentiments, though Lebedeff whispered in his ear that

this gentleman, who talked so much of his “property,” had never had

either house or home.

Nearly an hour passed thus, and when tea was over the visitors seemed

to think that it was time to go. As they went out, the doctor and the

old gentleman bade Muishkin a warm farewell, and all the rest took

their leave with hearty protestations of good-will, dropping remarks to

the effect that “it was no use worrying,” and that “perhaps all would

turn out for the best,” and so on. Some of the younger intruders would

have asked for champagne, but they were checked by the older ones. When

all had departed, Keller leaned over to Lebedeff, and said:

“With you and me there would have been a scene. We should have shouted

and fought, and called in the police. But he has simply made some new

friends—and such friends, too! I know them!”

Lebedeff, who was slightly intoxicated, answered with a sigh:

“Things are hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes.

I have applied those words to him before, but now I add that God has

preserved the babe himself from the abyss, He and all His saints.”

At last, about half-past ten, the prince was left alone. His head

ached. Colia was the last to go, after having helped him to change his

wedding clothes. They parted on affectionate terms, and, without

speaking of what had happened, Colia promised to come very early the

next day. He said later that the prince had given no hint of his

intentions when they said good-bye, but had hidden them even from him.

Soon there was hardly anyone left in the house. Burdovsky had gone to

see Hippolyte; Keller and Lebedeff had wandered off together somewhere.

Only Vera Lebedeff remained hurriedly rearranging the furniture in the

rooms. As she left the verandah, she glanced at the prince. He was

seated at the table, with both elbows upon it, and his head resting on

his hands. She approached him, and touched his shoulder gently. The

prince started and looked at her in perplexity; he seemed to be

collecting his senses for a minute or so, before he could remember

where he was. As recollection dawned upon him, he became violently

agitated. All he did, however, was to ask Vera very earnestly to knock

at his door and awake him in time for the first train to Petersburg

next morning. Vera promised, and the prince entreated her not to tell

anyone of his intention. She promised this, too; and at last, when she

had half-closed the door, he called her back a third time, took her

hands in his, kissed them, then kissed her forehead, and in a rather

peculiar manner said to her, “Until tomorrow!”

Such was Vera’s story afterwards.

She went away in great anxiety about him, but when she saw him in the

morning, he seemed to be quite himself again, greeted her with a smile,

and told her that he would very likely be back by the evening. It

appears that he did not consider it necessary to inform anyone

excepting Vera of his departure for town.

XI.

An hour later he was in St. Petersburg, and by ten o’clock he had rung

the bell at Rogojin’s.

He had gone to the front door, and was kept waiting a long while before

anyone came. At last the door of old Mrs. Rogojin’s flat was opened,

and an aged servant appeared.

“Parfen Semionovitch is not at home,” she announced from the doorway.

“Whom do you want?”

“Parfen Semionovitch.”

“He is not in.”

The old woman examined the prince from head to foot with great

curiosity.

“At all events tell me whether he slept at home last night, and whether

he came alone?”

The old woman continued to stare at him, but said nothing.

“Was not Nastasia Philipovna here with him, yesterday evening?”

“And, pray, who are you yourself?”

“Prince Lef Nicolaievitch Muishkin; he knows me well.”

“He is not at home.”

The woman lowered her eyes.

“And Nastasia Philipovna?”

“I know nothing about it.”

“Stop a minute! When will he come back?”

“I don’t know that either.”

The door was shut with these words, and the old woman disappeared. The

prince decided to come back within an hour. Passing out of the house,

he met the porter.

“Is Parfen Semionovitch at home?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Why did they tell me he was not at home, then?”

“Where did they tell you so,—at his door?”

“No, at his mother’s flat; I rang at Parfen Semionovitch’s door and

nobody came.”

“Well, he may have gone out. I can’t tell. Sometimes he takes the keys

with him, and leaves the rooms empty for two or three days.”

“Do you know for certain that he was at home last night?”

“Yes, he was.”

“Was Nastasia Philipovna with him?”

“I don’t know; she doesn’t come often. I think I should have known if

she had come.”

The prince went out deep in thought, and walked up and down the

pavement for some time. The windows of all the rooms occupied by

Rogojin were closed, those of his mother’s apartments were open. It was

a hot, bright day. The prince crossed the road in order to have a good

look at the windows again; not only were Rogojin’s closed, but the

white blinds were all down as well.

He stood there for a minute and then, suddenly and strangely enough, it

seemed to him that a little corner of one of the blinds was lifted, and

Rogojin’s face appeared for an instant and then vanished. He waited

another minute, and decided to go and ring the bell once more; however,

he thought better of it again and put it off for an hour.

The chief object in his mind at this moment was to get as quickly as he

could to Nastasia Philipovna’s lodging. He remembered that, not long

since, when she had left Pavlofsk at his request, he had begged her to

put up in town at the house of a respectable widow, who had

well-furnished rooms to let, near the Ismailofsky barracks. Probably

Nastasia had kept the rooms when she came down to Pavlofsk this last

time; and most likely she would have spent the night in them, Rogojin

having taken her straight there from the station.

The prince took a droshky. It struck him as he drove on that he ought

to have begun by coming here, since it was most improbable that Rogojin

should have taken Nastasia to his own house last night. He remembered

that the porter said she very rarely came at all, so that it was still

less likely that she would have gone there so late at night.

Vainly trying to comfort himself with these reflections, the prince

reached the Ismailofsky barracks more dead than alive.

To his consternation the good people at the lodgings had not only heard

nothing of Nastasia, but all came out to look at him as if he were a

marvel of some sort. The whole family, of all ages, surrounded him, and

he was begged to enter. He guessed at once that they knew perfectly

well who he was, and that yesterday ought to have been his wedding-day;

and further that they were dying to ask about the wedding, and

especially about why he should be here now, inquiring for the woman who

in all reasonable human probability might have been expected to be with

him in Pavlofsk.

He satisfied their curiosity, in as few words as possible, with regard

to the wedding, but their exclamations and sighs were so numerous and

sincere that he was obliged to tell the whole story—in a short form, of

course. The advice of all these agitated ladies was that the prince

should go at once and knock at Rogojin’s until he was let in: and when

let in insist upon a substantial explanation of everything. If Rogojin

was really not at home, the prince was advised to go to a certain

house, the address of which was given, where lived a German lady, a

friend of Nastasia Philipovna’s. It was possible that she might have

spent the night there in her anxiety to conceal herself.

The prince rose from his seat in a condition of mental collapse. The

good ladies reported afterwards that “his pallor was terrible to see,

and his legs seemed to give way underneath him.” With difficulty he was

made to understand that his new friends would be glad of his address,

in order to act with him if possible. After a moment’s thought he gave

the address of the small hotel, on the stairs of which he had had a fit

some five weeks since. He then set off once more for Rogojin’s.

This time they neither opened the door at Rogojin’s flat nor at the one

opposite. The prince found the porter with difficulty, but when found,

the man would hardly look at him or answer his questions, pretending to

be busy. Eventually, however, he was persuaded to reply so far as to

state that Rogojin had left the house early in the morning and gone to

Pavlofsk, and that he would not return today at all.

“I shall wait; he may come back this evening.”

“He may not be home for a week.”

“Then, at all events, he \_did\_ sleep here, did he?”

“Well—he did sleep here, yes.”

All this was suspicious and unsatisfactory. Very likely the porter had

received new instructions during the interval of the prince’s absence;

his manner was so different now. He had been obliging—now he was as

obstinate and silent as a mule. However, the prince decided to call

again in a couple of hours, and after that to watch the house, in case

of need. His hope was that he might yet find Nastasia at the address

which he had just received. To that address he now set off at full

speed.

But alas! at the German lady’s house they did not even appear to

understand what he wanted. After a while, by means of certain hints, he

was able to gather that Nastasia must have had a quarrel with her

friend two or three weeks ago, since which date the latter had neither

heard nor seen anything of her. He was given to understand that the

subject of Nastasia’s present whereabouts was not of the slightest

interest to her; and that Nastasia might marry all the princes in the

world for all she cared! So Muishkin took his leave hurriedly. It

struck him now that she might have gone away to Moscow just as she had

done the last time, and that Rogojin had perhaps gone after her, or

even \_with\_ her. If only he could find some trace!

However, he must take his room at the hotel; and he started off in that

direction. Having engaged his room, he was asked by the waiter whether

he would take dinner; replying mechanically in the affirmative, he sat

down and waited; but it was not long before it struck him that dining

would delay him. Enraged at this idea, he started up, crossed the dark

passage (which filled him with horrible impressions and gloomy

forebodings), and set out once more for Rogojin’s. Rogojin had not

returned, and no one came to the door. He rang at the old lady’s door

opposite, and was informed that Parfen Semionovitch would not return

for three days. The curiosity with which the old servant stared at him

again impressed the prince disagreeably. He could not find the porter

this time at all.

As before, he crossed the street and watched the windows from the other

side, walking up and down in anguish of soul for half an hour or so in

the stifling heat. Nothing stirred; the blinds were motionless; indeed,

the prince began to think that the apparition of Rogojin’s face could

have been nothing but fancy. Soothed by this thought, he drove off once

more to his friends at the Ismailofsky barracks. He was expected there.

The mother had already been to three or four places to look for

Nastasia, but had not found a trace of any kind.

The prince said nothing, but entered the room, sat down silently, and

stared at them, one after the other, with the air of a man who cannot

understand what is being said to him. It was strange—one moment he

seemed to be so observant, the next so absent; his behaviour struck all

the family as most remarkable. At length he rose from his seat, and

begged to be shown Nastasia’s rooms. The ladies reported afterwards how

he had examined everything in the apartments. He observed an open book

on the table, Madam Bovary, and requested the leave of the lady of the

house to take it with him. He had turned down the leaf at the open

page, and pocketed it before they could explain that it was a library

book. He had then seated himself by the open window, and seeing a

card-table, he asked who played cards.

He was informed that Nastasia used to play with Rogojin every evening,

either at “preference” or “little fool,” or “whist”; that this had been

their practice since her last return from Pavlofsk; that she had taken

to this amusement because she did not like to see Rogojin sitting

silent and dull for whole evenings at a time; that the day after

Nastasia had made a remark to this effect, Rogojin had whipped a pack

of cards out of his pocket. Nastasia had laughed, but soon they began

playing. The prince asked where were the cards, but was told that

Rogojin used to bring a new pack every day, and always carried it away

in his pocket.

The good ladies recommended the prince to try knocking at Rogojin’s

once more—not at once, but in the evening. Meanwhile, the mother would

go to Pavlofsk to inquire at Dana Alexeyevna’s whether anything had

been heard of Nastasia there. The prince was to come back at ten

o’clock and meet her, to hear her news and arrange plans for the

morrow.

In spite of the kindly-meant consolations of his new friends, the

prince walked to his hotel in inexpressible anguish of spirit, through

the hot, dusty streets, aimlessly staring at the faces of those who

passed him. Arrived at his destination, he determined to rest awhile in

his room before he started for Rogojin’s once more. He sat down, rested

his elbows on the table and his head on his hands, and fell to

thinking.

Heaven knows how long and upon what subjects he thought. He thought of

many things—of Vera Lebedeff, and of her father; of Hippolyte; of

Rogojin himself, first at the funeral, then as he had met him in the

park, then, suddenly, as they had met in this very passage, outside,

when Rogojin had watched in the darkness and awaited him with uplifted

knife. The prince remembered his enemy’s eyes as they had glared at him

in the darkness. He shuddered, as a sudden idea struck him.

This idea was, that if Rogojin were in Petersburg, though he might hide

for a time, yet he was quite sure to come to him—the prince—before

long, with either good or evil intentions, but probably with the same

intention as on that other occasion. At all events, if Rogojin were to

come at all he would be sure to seek the prince here—he had no other

town address—perhaps in this same corridor; he might well seek him here

if he needed him. And perhaps he did need him. This idea seemed quite

natural to the prince, though he could not have explained why he should

so suddenly have become necessary to Rogojin. Rogojin would not come if

all were well with him, that was part of the thought; he would come if

all were not well; and certainly, undoubtedly, all would not be well

with him. The prince could not bear this new idea; he took his hat and

rushed out towards the street. It was almost dark in the passage.

“What if he were to come out of that corner as I go by and—and stop

me?” thought the prince, as he approached the familiar spot. But no one

came out.

He passed under the gateway and into the street. The crowds of people

walking about—as is always the case at sunset in Petersburg, during the

summer—surprised him, but he walked on in the direction of Rogojin’s

house.

About fifty yards from the hotel, at the first cross-road, as he passed

through the crowd of foot-passengers sauntering along, someone touched

his shoulder, and said in a whisper into his ear:

“Lef Nicolaievitch, my friend, come along with me.” It was Rogojin.

The prince immediately began to tell him, eagerly and joyfully, how he

had but the moment before expected to see him in the dark passage of

the hotel.

“I was there,” said Rogojin, unexpectedly. “Come along.” The prince was

surprised at this answer; but his astonishment increased a couple of

minutes afterwards, when he began to consider it. Having thought it

over, he glanced at Rogojin in alarm. The latter was striding along a

yard or so ahead, looking straight in front of him, and mechanically

making way for anyone he met.

“Why did you not ask for me at my room if you were in the hotel?” asked

the prince, suddenly.

Rogojin stopped and looked at him; then reflected, and replied as

though he had not heard the question:

“Look here, Lef Nicolaievitch, you go straight on to the house; I shall

walk on the other side. See that we keep together.”

So saying, Rogojin crossed the road.

Arrived on the opposite pavement, he looked back to see whether the

prince were moving, waved his hand in the direction of the Gorohovaya,

and strode on, looking across every moment to see whether Muishkin

understood his instructions. The prince supposed that Rogojin desired

to look out for someone whom he was afraid to miss; but if so, why had

he not told \_him\_ whom to look out for? So the two proceeded for half a

mile or so. Suddenly the prince began to tremble from some unknown

cause. He could not bear it, and signalled to Rogojin across the road.

The latter came at once.

“Is Nastasia Philipovna at your house?”

“Yes.”

“And was it you looked out of the window under the blind this morning?”

“Yes.”

“Then why did—”

But the prince could not finish his question; he did not know what to

say. Besides this, his heart was beating so that he found it difficult

to speak at all. Rogojin was silent also and looked at him as before,

with an expression of deep thoughtfulness.

“Well, I’m going,” he said, at last, preparing to recross the road.

“You go along here as before; we will keep to different sides of the

road; it’s better so, you’ll see.”

When they reached the Gorohovaya, and came near the house, the prince’s

legs were trembling so that he could hardly walk. It was about ten

o’clock. The old lady’s windows were open, as before; Rogojin’s were

all shut, and in the darkness the white blinds showed whiter than ever.

Rogojin and the prince each approached the house on his respective side

of the road; Rogojin, who was on the near side, beckoned the prince

across. He went over to the doorway.

“Even the porter does not know that I have come home now. I told him,

and told them at my mother’s too, that I was off to Pavlofsk,” said

Rogojin, with a cunning and almost satisfied smile. “We’ll go in

quietly and nobody will hear us.”

He had the key in his hand. Mounting the staircase he turned and

signalled to the prince to go more softly; he opened the door very

quietly, let the prince in, followed him, locked the door behind him,

and put the key in his pocket.

“Come along,” he whispered.

He had spoken in a whisper all the way. In spite of his apparent

outward composure, he was evidently in a state of great mental

agitation. Arrived in a large salon, next to the study, he went to the

window and cautiously beckoned the prince up to him.

“When you rang the bell this morning I thought it must be you. I went

to the door on tip-toe and heard you talking to the servant opposite. I

had told her before that if anyone came and rang—especially you, and I

gave her your name—she was not to tell about me. Then I thought, what

if he goes and stands opposite and looks up, or waits about to watch

the house? So I came to this very window, looked out, and there you

were staring straight at me. That’s how it came about.”

“Where is Nastasia Philipovna?” asked the prince, breathlessly.

“She’s here,” replied Rogojin, slowly, after a slight pause.

“Where?”

Rogojin raised his eyes and gazed intently at the prince.

“Come,” he said.

He continued to speak in a whisper, very deliberately as before, and

looked strangely thoughtful and dreamy. Even while he told the story of

how he had peeped through the blind, he gave the impression of wishing

to say something else. They entered the study. In this room some

changes had taken place since the prince last saw it. It was now

divided into two equal parts by a heavy green silk curtain stretched

across it, separating the alcove beyond, where stood Rogojin’s bed,

from the rest of the room.

The heavy curtain was drawn now, and it was very dark. The bright

Petersburg summer nights were already beginning to close in, and but

for the full moon, it would have been difficult to distinguish anything

in Rogojin’s dismal room, with the drawn blinds. They could just see

one anothers faces, however, though not in detail. Rogojin’s face was

white, as usual. His glittering eyes watched the prince with an intent

stare.

“Had you not better light a candle?” said Muishkin.

“No, I needn’t,” replied Rogojin, and taking the other by the hand he

drew him down to a chair. He himself took a chair opposite and drew it

up so close that he almost pressed against the prince’s knees. At their

side was a little round table.

“Sit down,” said Rogojin; “let’s rest a bit.” There was silence for a

moment.

“I knew you would be at that hotel,” he continued, just as men

sometimes commence a serious conversation by discussing any outside

subject before leading up to the main point. “As I entered the passage

it struck me that perhaps you were sitting and waiting for me, just as

I was waiting for you. Have you been to the old lady at Ismailofsky

barracks?”

“Yes,” said the prince, squeezing the word out with difficulty owing to

the dreadful beating of his heart.

“I thought you would. ‘They’ll talk about it,’ I thought; so I

determined to go and fetch you to spend the night here—‘We will be

together,’ I thought, ‘for this one night—’”

“Rogojin, \_where\_ is Nastasia Philipovna?” said the prince, suddenly

rising from his seat. He was quaking in all his limbs, and his words

came in a scarcely audible whisper. Rogojin rose also.

“There,” he whispered, nodding his head towards the curtain.

“Asleep?” whispered the prince.

Rogojin looked intently at him again, as before.

“Let’s go in—but you mustn’t—well—let’s go in.”

He lifted the curtain, paused—and turned to the prince. “Go in,” he

said, motioning him to pass behind the curtain. Muishkin went in.

“It’s so dark,” he said.

“You can see quite enough,” muttered Rogojin.

“I can just see there’s a bed—”

“Go nearer,” suggested Rogojin, softly.

The prince took a step forward—then another—and paused. He stood and

stared for a minute or two.

Neither of the men spoke a word while at the bedside. The prince’s

heart beat so loud that its knocking seemed to be distinctly audible in

the deathly silence.

But now his eyes had become so far accustomed to the darkness that he

could distinguish the whole of the bed. Someone was asleep upon it—in

an absolutely motionless sleep. Not the slightest movement was

perceptible, not the faintest breathing could be heard. The sleeper was

covered with a white sheet; the outline of the limbs was hardly

distinguishable. He could only just make out that a human being lay

outstretched there.

All around, on the bed, on a chair beside it, on the floor, were

scattered the different portions of a magnificent white silk dress,

bits of lace, ribbons and flowers. On a small table at the bedside

glittered a mass of diamonds, torn off and thrown down anyhow. From

under a heap of lace at the end of the bed peeped a small white foot,

which looked as though it had been chiselled out of marble; it was

terribly still.

The prince gazed and gazed, and felt that the more he gazed the more

death-like became the silence. Suddenly a fly awoke somewhere, buzzed

across the room, and settled on the pillow. The prince shuddered.

“Let’s go,” said Rogojin, touching his shoulder. They left the alcove

and sat down in the two chairs they had occupied before, opposite to

one another. The prince trembled more and more violently, and never

took his questioning eyes off Rogojin’s face.

“I see you are shuddering, Lef Nicolaievitch,” said the latter, at

length, “almost as you did once in Moscow, before your fit; don’t you

remember? I don’t know what I shall do with you—”

The prince bent forward to listen, putting all the strain he could

muster upon his understanding in order to take in what Rogojin said,

and continuing to gaze at the latter’s face.

“Was it you?” he muttered, at last, motioning with his head towards the

curtain.

“Yes, it was I,” whispered Rogojin, looking down.

Neither spoke for five minutes.

“Because, you know,” Rogojin recommenced, as though continuing a former

sentence, “if you were ill now, or had a fit, or screamed, or anything,

they might hear it in the yard, or even in the street, and guess that

someone was passing the night in the house. They would all come and

knock and want to come in, because they know I am not at home. I didn’t

light a candle for the same reason. When I am not here—for two or three

days at a time, now and then—no one comes in to tidy the house or

anything; those are my orders. So that I want them to not know we are

spending the night here—”

“Wait,” interrupted the prince. “I asked both the porter and the woman

whether Nastasia Philipovna had spent last night in the house; so they

knew—”

“I know you asked. I told them that she had called in for ten minutes,

and then gone straight back to Pavlofsk. No one knows she slept here.

Last night we came in just as carefully as you and I did today. I

thought as I came along with her that she would not like to creep in so

secretly, but I was quite wrong. She whispered, and walked on tip-toe;

she carried her skirt over her arm, so that it shouldn’t rustle, and

she held up her finger at me on the stairs, so that I shouldn’t make a

noise—it was you she was afraid of. She was mad with terror in the

train, and she begged me to bring her to this house. I thought of

taking her to her rooms at the Ismailofsky barracks first; but she

wouldn’t hear of it. She said, ‘No—not there; he’ll find me out at once

there. Take me to your own house, where you can hide me, and tomorrow

we’ll set off for Moscow.’ Thence she would go to Orel, she said. When

she went to bed, she was still talking about going to Orel.”

“Wait! What do you intend to do now, Parfen?”

“Well, I’m afraid of you. You shudder and tremble so. We’ll pass the

night here together. There are no other beds besides that one; but I’ve

thought how we’ll manage. I’ll take the cushions off all the sofas, and

lay them down on the floor, up against the curtain here—for you and

me—so that we shall be together. For if they come in and look about

now, you know, they’ll find her, and carry her away, and they’ll be

asking me questions, and I shall say I did it, and then they’ll take me

away, too, don’t you see? So let her lie close to us—close to you and

me.”

“Yes, yes,” agreed the prince, warmly.

“So we will not say anything about it, or let them take her away?”

“Not for anything!” cried the other; “no, no, no!”

“So I had decided, my friend; not to give her up to anyone,” continued

Rogojin. “We’ll be very quiet. I have only been out of the house one

hour all day, all the rest of the time I have been with her. I dare say

the air is very bad here. It is so hot. Do you find it bad?”

“I don’t know—perhaps—by morning it will be.”

“I’ve covered her with oilcloth—best American oilcloth, and put the

sheet over that, and four jars of disinfectant, on account of the

smell—as they did at Moscow—you remember? And she’s lying so still; you

shall see, in the morning, when it’s light. What! can’t you get up?”

asked Rogojin, seeing the other was trembling so that he could not rise

from his seat.

“My legs won’t move,” said the prince; “it’s fear, I know. When my fear

is over, I’ll get up—”

“Wait a bit—I’ll make the bed, and you can lie down. I’ll lie down,

too, and we’ll listen and watch, for I don’t know yet what I shall

do... I tell you beforehand, so that you may be ready in case I—”

Muttering these disconnected words, Rogojin began to make up the beds.

It was clear that he had devised these beds long before; last night he

slept on the sofa. But there was no room for two on the sofa, and he

seemed anxious that he and the prince should be close to one another;

therefore, he now dragged cushions of all sizes and shapes from the

sofas, and made a sort of bed of them close by the curtain. He then

approached the prince, and gently helped him to rise, and led him

towards the bed. But the prince could now walk by himself, so that his

fear must have passed; for all that, however, he continued to shudder.

“It’s hot weather, you see,” continued Rogojin, as he lay down on the

cushions beside Muishkin, “and, naturally, there will be a smell. I

daren’t open the window. My mother has some beautiful flowers in pots;

they have a delicious scent; I thought of fetching them in, but that

old servant will find out, she’s very inquisitive.”

“Yes, she is inquisitive,” assented the prince.

“I thought of buying flowers, and putting them all round her; but I was

afraid it would make us sad to see her with flowers round her.”

“Look here,” said the prince; he was bewildered, and his brain

wandered. He seemed to be continually groping for the questions he

wished to ask, and then losing them. “Listen—tell me—how did you—with a

knife?—That same one?”

“Yes, that same one.”

“Wait a minute, I want to ask you something else, Parfen; all sorts of

things; but tell me first, did you intend to kill her before my

wedding, at the church door, with your knife?”

“I don’t know whether I did or not,” said Rogojin, drily, seeming to be

a little astonished at the question, and not quite taking it in.

“Did you never take your knife to Pavlofsk with you?”

“No. As to the knife,” he added, “this is all I can tell you about it.”

He was silent for a moment, and then said, “I took it out of the locked

drawer this morning about three, for it was in the early morning all

this—happened. It has been inside the book ever since—and—and—this is

what is such a marvel to me, the knife only went in a couple of inches

at most, just under her left breast, and there wasn’t more than half a

tablespoonful of blood altogether, not more.”

“Yes—yes—yes—” The prince jumped up in extraordinary agitation. “I

know, I know, I’ve read of that sort of thing—it’s internal

haemorrhage, you know. Sometimes there isn’t a drop—if the blow goes

straight to the heart—”

“Wait—listen!” cried Rogojin, suddenly, starting up. “Somebody’s

walking about, do you hear? In the hall.” Both sat up to listen.

“I hear,” said the prince in a whisper, his eyes fixed on Rogojin.

“Footsteps?”

“Yes.”

“Shall we shut the door, and lock it, or not?”

“Yes, lock it.”

They locked the door, and both lay down again. There was a long

silence.

“Yes, by-the-by,” whispered the prince, hurriedly and excitedly as

before, as though he had just seized hold of an idea and was afraid of

losing it again. “I—I wanted those cards! They say you played cards

with her?”

“Yes, I played with her,” said Rogojin, after a short silence.

“Where are the cards?”

“Here they are,” said Rogojin, after a still longer pause.

He pulled out a pack of cards, wrapped in a bit of paper, from his

pocket, and handed them to the prince. The latter took them, with a

sort of perplexity. A new, sad, helpless feeling weighed on his heart;

he had suddenly realized that not only at this moment, but for a long

while, he had not been saying what he wanted to say, had not been

acting as he wanted to act; and that these cards which he held in his

hand, and which he had been so delighted to have at first, were now of

no use—no use... He rose, and wrung his hands. Rogojin lay motionless,

and seemed neither to hear nor see his movements; but his eyes blazed

in the darkness, and were fixed in a wild stare.

The prince sat down on a chair, and watched him in alarm. Half an hour

went by.

Suddenly Rogojin burst into a loud abrupt laugh, as though he had quite

forgotten that they must speak in whispers.

“That officer, eh!—that young officer—don’t you remember that fellow at

the band? Eh? Ha, ha, ha! Didn’t she whip him smartly, eh?”

The prince jumped up from his seat in renewed terror. When Rogojin

quieted down (which he did at once) the prince bent over him, sat down

beside him, and with painfully beating heart and still more painful

breath, watched his face intently. Rogojin never turned his head, and

seemed to have forgotten all about him. The prince watched and waited.

Time went on—it began to grow light.

Rogojin began to wander—muttering disconnectedly; then he took to

shouting and laughing. The prince stretched out a trembling hand and

gently stroked his hair and his cheeks—he could do nothing more. His

legs trembled again and he seemed to have lost the use of them. A new

sensation came over him, filling his heart and soul with infinite

anguish.

Meanwhile the daylight grew full and strong; and at last the prince lay

down, as though overcome by despair, and laid his face against the

white, motionless face of Rogojin. His tears flowed on to Rogojin’s

cheek, though he was perhaps not aware of them himself.

At all events when, after many hours, the door was opened and people

thronged in, they found the murderer unconscious and in a raging fever.

The prince was sitting by him, motionless, and each time that the sick

man gave a laugh, or a shout, he hastened to pass his own trembling

hand over his companion’s hair and cheeks, as though trying to soothe

and quiet him. But alas! he understood nothing of what was said to him,

and recognized none of those who surrounded him.

If Schneider himself had arrived then and seen his former pupil and

patient, remembering the prince’s condition during the first year in

Switzerland, he would have flung up his hands, despairingly, and cried,

as he did then:

“An idiot!”

XII.

When the widow hurried away to Pavlofsk, she went straight to Daria

Alexeyevna’s house, and telling all she knew, threw her into a state of

great alarm. Both ladies decided to communicate at once with Lebedeff,

who, as the friend and landlord of the prince, was also much agitated.

Vera Lebedeff told all she knew, and by Lebedeff’s advice it was

decided that all three should go to Petersburg as quickly as possible,

in order to avert “what might so easily happen.”

This is how it came about that at eleven o’clock next morning Rogojin’s

flat was opened by the police in the presence of Lebedeff, the two

ladies, and Rogojin’s own brother, who lived in the wing.

The evidence of the porter went further than anything else towards the

success of Lebedeff in gaining the assistance of the police. He

declared that he had seen Rogojin return to the house last night,

accompanied by a friend, and that both had gone upstairs very secretly

and cautiously. After this there was no hesitation about breaking open

the door, since it could not be got open in any other way.

Rogojin suffered from brain fever for two months. When he recovered

from the attack he was at once brought up on trial for murder.

He gave full, satisfactory, and direct evidence on every point; and the

prince’s name was, thanks to this, not brought into the proceedings.

Rogojin was very quiet during the progress of the trial. He did not

contradict his clever and eloquent counsel, who argued that the brain

fever, or inflammation of the brain, was the cause of the crime;

clearly proving that this malady had existed long before the murder was

perpetrated, and had been brought on by the sufferings of the accused.

But Rogojin added no words of his own in confirmation of this view, and

as before, he recounted with marvellous exactness the details of his

crime. He was convicted, but with extenuating circumstances, and

condemned to hard labour in Siberia for fifteen years. He heard his

sentence grimly, silently, and thoughtfully. His colossal fortune, with

the exception of the comparatively small portion wasted in the first

wanton period of his inheritance, went to his brother, to the great

satisfaction of the latter.

The old lady, Rogojin’s mother, is still alive, and remembers her

favourite son Parfen sometimes, but not clearly. God spared her the

knowledge of this dreadful calamity which had overtaken her house.

Lebedeff, Keller, Gania, Ptitsin, and many other friends of ours

continue to live as before. There is scarcely any change in them, so

that there is no need to tell of their subsequent doings.

Hippolyte died in great agitation, and rather sooner than he expected,

about a fortnight after Nastasia Philipovna’s death. Colia was much

affected by these events, and drew nearer to his mother in heart and

sympathy. Nina Alexandrovna is anxious, because he is “thoughtful

beyond his years,” but he will, we think, make a useful and active man.

The prince’s further fate was more or less decided by Colia, who

selected, out of all the persons he had met during the last six or

seven months, Evgenie Pavlovitch, as friend and confidant. To him he

made over all that he knew as to the events above recorded, and as to

the present condition of the prince. He was not far wrong in his

choice. Evgenie Pavlovitch took the deepest interest in the fate of the

unfortunate “idiot,” and, thanks to his influence, the prince found

himself once more with Dr. Schneider, in Switzerland.

Evgenie Pavlovitch, who went abroad at this time, intending to live a

long while on the continent, being, as he often said, quite superfluous

in Russia, visits his sick friend at Schneider’s every few months.

But Dr. Schneider frowns ever more and more and shakes his head; he

hints that the brain is fatally injured; he does not as yet declare

that his patient is incurable, but he allows himself to express the

gravest fears.

Evgenie takes this much to heart, and he has a heart, as is proved by

the fact that he receives and even answers letters from Colia. But

besides this, another trait in his character has become apparent, and

as it is a good trait we will make haste to reveal it. After each visit

to Schneider’s establishment, Evgenie Pavlovitch writes another letter,

besides that to Colia, giving the most minute particulars concerning

the invalid’s condition. In these letters is to be detected, and in

each one more than the last, a growing feeling of friendship and

sympathy.

The individual who corresponds thus with Evgenie Pavlovitch, and who

engages so much of his attention and respect, is Vera Lebedeff. We have

never been able to discover clearly how such relations sprang up. Of

course the root of them was in the events which we have already

recorded, and which so filled Vera with grief on the prince’s account

that she fell seriously ill. But exactly how the acquaintance and

friendship came about, we cannot say.

We have spoken of these letters chiefly because in them is often to be

found some news of the Epanchin family, and of Aglaya in particular.

Evgenie Pavlovitch wrote of her from Paris, that after a short and

sudden attachment to a certain Polish count, an exile, she had suddenly

married him, quite against the wishes of her parents, though they had

eventually given their consent through fear of a terrible scandal.

Then, after a six months’ silence, Evgenie Pavlovitch informed his

correspondent, in a long letter, full of detail, that while paying his

last visit to Dr. Schneider’s establishment, he had there come across

the whole Epanchin family (excepting the general, who had remained in

St. Petersburg) and Prince S. The meeting was a strange one. They all

received Evgenie Pavlovitch with effusive delight; Adelaida and

Alexandra were deeply grateful to him for his “angelic kindness to the

unhappy prince.”

Lizabetha Prokofievna, when she saw poor Muishkin, in his enfeebled and

humiliated condition, had wept bitterly. Apparently all was forgiven

him.

Prince S. had made a few just and sensible remarks. It seemed to

Evgenie Pavlovitch that there was not yet perfect harmony between

Adelaida and her fiance, but he thought that in time the impulsive

young girl would let herself be guided by his reason and experience.

Besides, the recent events that had befallen her family had given

Adelaida much to think about, especially the sad experiences of her

younger sister. Within six months, everything that the family had

dreaded from the marriage with the Polish count had come to pass. He

turned out to be neither count nor exile—at least, in the political

sense of the word—but had had to leave his native land owing to some

rather dubious affair of the past. It was his noble patriotism, of

which he made a great display, that had rendered him so interesting in

Aglaya’s eyes. She was so fascinated that, even before marrying him,

she joined a committee that had been organized abroad to work for the

restoration of Poland; and further, she visited the confessional of a

celebrated Jesuit priest, who made an absolute fanatic of her. The

supposed fortune of the count had dwindled to a mere nothing, although

he had given almost irrefutable evidence of its existence to Lizabetha

Prokofievna and Prince S.

Besides this, before they had been married half a year, the count and

his friend the priest managed to bring about a quarrel between Aglaya

and her family, so that it was now several months since they had seen

her. In a word, there was a great deal to say; but Mrs. Epanchin, and

her daughters, and even Prince S., were still so much distressed by

Aglaya’s latest infatuations and adventures, that they did not care to

talk of them, though they must have known that Evgenie knew much of the

story already.

Poor Lizabetha Prokofievna was most anxious to get home, and, according

to Evgenie’s account, she criticized everything foreign with much

hostility.

“They can’t bake bread anywhere, decently; and they all freeze in their

houses, during winter, like a lot of mice in a cellar. At all events,

I’ve had a good Russian cry over this poor fellow,” she added, pointing

to the prince, who had not recognized her in the slightest degree. “So

enough of this nonsense; it’s time we faced the truth. All this

continental life, all this Europe of yours, and all the trash about

‘going abroad’ is simply foolery, and it is mere foolery on our part to

come. Remember what I say, my friend; you’ll live to agree with me

yourself.”

So spoke the good lady, almost angrily, as she took leave of Evgenie

Pavlovitch.

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