

# **MAXIM GORKY**

Collected Works in  
Ten Volumes

Volume VIII

The Artamonovs

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ДЕЛО АРТАМОНОВЫХ

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To Romain Rolland  
man  
and poet



About two years after the emancipation, the parish of the Church of St. Nicholas noticed an "outsider" at Mass on Transfiguration day. Through the thick of the crowd he pushed, rudely jostling the people, and set up massive candles before the icons most revered in the town of Dryornov. A man of powerful build, with a large, crisp beard, heavily splotted with grey, and a thick crown of blackish hair, as curly as a Gypsy's; with a big nose, and blue-grey eyes that looked out boldly from beneath shaggy, beetling brows. It was noticed that, when his arms hung free, his broad palms touched his knees.

He approached the cross among the first, the most prominent townspeople. That displeased them most of all; and after Mass the leading people of Dryomov stopped on the church porch to exchange views about the stranger. Some thought him a cattle dealer, others—a bailiff; and the town's elder, Yevsei Baimakov, a peace-loving man of weak health but good heart, said, coughing mildly:

"Like as not, he used to be a manor serf—a huntsman, or something else of that kind, in charge of the gentry's amusements."

The draper, Pomyalov, nicknamed "Widowed Cockroach," a fidgety sensualist and lover of malicious words, a pock-marked and ugly man, pronounced inimically:

"Did you see his arms—how long they are? And look how he walks—as if it was him all the church bells are ringing for."

Broad-shouldered, big nosed, the man strode down the street, stepping firmly, as on his own land. He wore a blue coat of good cloth, and well-made boots of Russian leather. His hands were thrust into his pockets, his elbows pressed close to his body. Commissioning Yerdanskaya, who baked prosphoras, to find out who the man was, the

townsfolk turned home, to the ringing of the bells, for their holiday meal, with an invitation to meet in Pomyalov's orchard for evening tea.

After dinner, other townspeople saw the stranger across the river, on the "Cow's Tongue" point, on the lands of the princes Ratsky. He moved about among the willow bushes, measuring the sandy point with broad, even paces. Shading his eyes with his hand, he looked back at the town, and at the Oka and its tangled tributary, the marshy, winding little Vataraksha. The people of Dryomov were cautious folk. None had the courage to call out and ask the man who he was, and what he was about. Still, they delegated Mishka Stupa—town jester and drunkard. Shamelessly, before all the people, unembarrassed by the women, Stupa pulled off his trousers; but he kept his crumpled shako on his head. Wading across the slimy Vataraksha, he puffed up his drunken belly and approached the stranger at a ridiculous goose step. Very loud, to keep his courage up, he demanded:

"Who are you?"

The stranger's answer was not heard, but Stupa returned to his people at once, and told the story:

"He wanted to know where I lost my decency. He's got a wicked look in his eyes, just like a highwayman."

In Pomyalov's orchard, that evening, the goitrous prosphora baker, Yerdanskaya, famed as a wise woman and a fortuneteller, reported to the town's best people, goggling frightfully:

"His name is Artamonov, christened Ilya. Says he's going to live here for his business, only I couldn't find out what sort of business. He came by the road from Vorgorod, and left by the same road a little after three this afternoon."

That was all. They could learn nothing more of interest about the man. It was unpleasant—as though someone had tapped at the window by night, and vanished, bringing wordless warning of approaching calamity.

Some three weeks passed, and the impression had almost faded from the townspeople's memory, when suddenly this Artamonov appeared with three boys, and went straight to Baimakov, declaring assertively:

"Well, Yevsei Mitrich, here are new dwellers under your wise rule. Kindly help me settle here, with you, and build a good life."

Speaking briefly, to the point, he explained that he was a former serf of the princes Ratsky, from their estate near Kursk, on the river Ratj, where he had worked as steward for Prince Georgi. After the emancipation he had left, receiving a handsome sum, and decided to start a business of his own: a linen mill. He was a widower. The boys' names: Pyotr, the eldest; Nikita, the hunchback, and Alyosha, the youngest—a nephew, but legally adopted.

"Our peasants don't sow much flax," Baimakov remarked thoughtfully.

"We'll make them sow more."

Artamonov's voice was thick and coarse, and his speech was like a big drum beating. But Baimakov, all his life, had walked the earth cautiously and spoken softly, as though afraid of awakening some fearsome being. Blinking his kindly eyes, of a mournful lilac, he glanced at Artamonov's boys, who waited stonily by the door. They were of very different types. The eldest resembled his father—broad-chested, bushy-browed, with tiny, bearish eyes. Nikita had the eyes of a girl, large, and blue as his shirt. Alexei was a fine-looking lad, red-cheeked, white-skinned, curly-headed, with a frank, merry look.

"One for the army?" Baimakov asked.

"No, I need the boys myself. I've got a release."

Artamonov motioned to the boys, commanding:

"Get out."

When they had left the room—quietly, in a single file, by order of age—he laid his heavy hand on Baimakov's knee and said:

"Yevsei Mitrich, while I'm at it, I've a match to make: I want your daughter for my eldest."

Baimakov actually took fright, waving his arms and starting up from the bench on which he sat.

"The Lord be with you! I've never seen you before, I don't know anything about you, and you come out with a thing like that! I only have one daughter, and she's too young to be married. And, besides, you've never seen her; you don't know what she's like. How can you say such things?"

But Artamonov only smiled into his curly beard, and said:

"You can find out about me from the *ispravnik*.<sup>\*</sup> He's much indebted to my prince, and the prince has written him to give me help in all I undertake. You'll hear nothing bad, I can swear by the holy icons. I know your daughter, too. I know everything in this town of yours. I've been here four times, quietly, and found everything out. My eldest has been here too, and he's seen your daughter—don't you worry about that!"

Feeling like a man in the hug of a bear, Baimakov asked his visitor:

"You wait...."

"I can wait, but not long. I'm too old to wait long," sternly replied the masterful stranger. Leaning out through the window, he shouted into the yard:

"Come and bow to your host."

When they had taken their leave, Baimakov turned fearfully to the icons, crossed himself three times, and whispered:

"The Lord save us! What sort of people are these? Protect us from harm."

Leaning heavily on his staff, he dragged himself out to the orchard, where his wife and daughter were making jam in the shade of a linden tree. His portly, handsome wife asked:

"Who were those young fellows in the yard, Mitrich?"

"Nobody knows. Where's Natalya?"

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<sup>\*</sup> *Ispravnik*—*uyezd* (district) chief of police.—*Tr.*



"Gone to the pantry for sugar."

"For sugar," Baimakov repeated glumly, seating himself on a grassy mound. "Sugar. Yes, it's true what they say: the emancipation is going to make people a lot of trouble."

Looking at him intently, his wife asked, with a note of alarm:

"What's wrong? Feeling bad again?"

"My heart is troubled. I have a feeling that man has come to take my place in the world."

His wife tried to console him.

"Don't be silly! There's plenty of people coming into town from the country nowadays."

"That's just it. They're coming. I won't tell you anything just yet. Let me think it over."

Five days later Baimakov took to his bed, and twelve days later he died. His death threw an even heavier shadow over Artamonov and his boys. Artamonov visited the mayor twice during his illness, and they talked together lengthily, alone. The second time, Baimakov called in his wife and said, folding his arms wearily on his chest:

"There—talk to her. It looks like I won't be meddling in affairs of this world any longer. Let me rest."

"Come with me, Ulyana Ivanovna," said Artamonov, and left the room, without even glancing back to see whether she was following.

"Go, Ulyana. It seems to be fate," the town's elder quietly advised his wife, seeing that she hesitated to follow the visitor. She was a woman of strong character, and clever, one who undertook no action without due consideration; yet, somehow, things turned out so that she returned to her husband, an hour later, and said, shaking the tears from her fine, long lashes:

"Well, Mitrich, it does seem to be fate. Give our daughter your blessing."

That evening she led her daughter, festively attired, to the father's bedside. Artamonov pushed his son forward,

and the boy and girl, avoiding one another's eyes, took hands and dropped to their knees. They bowed their heads, and Baimakov, labouring for breath, held over them the ancient, pearl-studded family icon.

"In the name of the Father and the Son.... Lord, do not abandon my only child!"

To Artamonov, he said sternly:

"Remember: you will answer to God for my daughter!"

Artamonov bowed, touching his hand to the floor.

"I know."

Without a kind word for his future daughter-in-law, with barely a glance at her and at his son, he nodded at the door.

"Go."

When the betrothed had left the room, he sat down on the edge of the bed and said firmly:

"Rest easy. Everything will go well. For thirty-seven years I served my princes, and I never got in trouble. And man isn't God. Man isn't merciful. He's hard to please. You won't regret it either, kinswoman Ulyana. You'll be a mother to my boys, and they'll be ordered to respect you."

Baimakov listened without a word, staring at the icons in the corner. Tears trickled from his eyes; and Ulyana was also crying. But this man went on, regretfully:

"Ah, Yevsei Mitrich, you're leaving us early. You didn't take care of yourself. And just when I need you so bad—it's like a knife at my throat!"

He drew a hand across his beard, in a slashing motion, and sighed loudly.

"I know your affairs. Honest you are, and a good head. You and me together—what couldn't we get done, in another five years! Well, but that's God's will."

Ulyana cried out tearfully:

"Why do you caw like a raven? Why do you frighten us? Maybe...."

But Artamonov got up, and bowed low to Baimakov, as to the dead.

"Thanks for your trust. Good-bye. I have to go down to the river—the barge is in with my stuff."

When he was gone, Baimakova cried indignantly:

"The country lout! Couldn't say a kind word to his own son's betrothed!"

But her husband stopped her.

"Don't fret. Don't worry me."

After a little thought, he said:

"You stick to him. I have a feeling that man's better than our folk here."

The whole town came to honour Baimakov at his burial, and the priesthood of all five churches joined in the services. The Artamonovs followed the coffin immediately behind the wife and daughter of the deceased, to the displeasure of the townspeople. The hunchback, Nikita, walking behind his father and brothers, heard grumbling voices in the crowd.

"A man nobody knows, and he pushes right off into first place."

Pomyalov whispered, rolling his round, acorn-coloured eyes:

"Yevsei, peace to his soul, was a cautious man, and Ulyana's careful too. They'd never do things without good reason. There's a secret in it somewhere. That hawky fellow must have tempted them somehow, or else why should they take him into their kin?"

"Ye-es, it's a dark business."

"That's what I say—a dark business. Counterfeit money, most likely. And to think what a saint Baimakov made himself out!"

Hearing this talk, Nikita bowed his head, and arched his hump as though expecting a blow. It was a windy day. The wind blew at the backs of the people, and the dust raised by hundreds of feet raced after the throng in a smoky cloud, thickly powdering the well-greased, uncovered heads. Somebody said:

"Look at Artamonov, all peppered with our dust. The Gypsy's turned grey."

Ten days after the funeral, Ulyana Baimakova and her daughter set out for a nunnery, and Artamonov rented their house. He and the boys lived as though in a whirlwind. From morning to night they were to be seen, striding rapidly up and down all the streets of the town, with a hasty sign of the cross when they passed a church. The father was noisy, indefatigable in his furious energy; the eldest son—glum and reticent, and, seemingly, either timid or bashful. Handsome Alyosha defied the town boys, and winked boldly at the girls. As to Nikita, with his angular hump, he would start out at sunrise to the "Cow's Tongue", across the river. Here carpenters and bricklayers flocked like rooks, erecting a long brick barrack and, some distance off, near the Oka, a big, two-storey house of twelve-inch logs—a house that resembled a prison. Of an evening, the people of Dryomov would gather on the bank of the Vataraksha, nibbling at pumpkin and sunflower seeds and listening to the snorting and whining of the saws, the shuffling of the planes, the resounding blows of the sharp axes. They would speak in mocking tones of the fruitless building of the tower of Babel, and Pomyalov would reassure them, predicting every misfortune to the strangers.

"The spring waters will sap these hideous structures. There might be a fire, too, with the carpenters smoking tobacco, and shavings all over the place."

Consumptive priest Vasili would respond:

"They build on sand."

"When they herd in workers for their mill, we'll have drunkenness, and thievery, and depravity."

To this Luka Barsky, miller and tavern keeper, an enormous man, bloated and padded with fat, would return in a hoarse bass:

"The more people, the more customers. That's all right—let the people work."

Nikita Artamonov afforded the townspeople much amusement. He cleared a large square of land, cutting and uprooting the willow bushes. Then he spent long days

dipping up thick mud from the bottom of the Vataraksha, or cutting peat in the bog, and carting it in a wheelbarrow, bent until his hump pointed straight to the sky. He scattered the mud and peat in little black heaps all over his square of sandy soil.

"He's trying to make a vegetable garden," said the townspeople wisely. "What a fool! Who can fertilize sand?"

At sundown the Artamonovs would wade back across the river, single file, the father at the head, their shadows falling on the greenish water. Pomyalov would whisper, pointing:

"Look, look—the hunchback's shadow!"

And everyone would see that the third shadow, Nikita's, quivered and trembled on the water, and seemed heavier than the longer shadows of the other brothers. One day, after a heavy rain, when the water was high, the hunchback caught his foot on a snag, or perhaps slipped into a pit, and disappeared beneath the surface. All the people on the bank guffawed with pleasure, except for little Olga Orlova, the drunken watchmaker's thirteen-year-old daughter, who cried plaintively:

"Oh, oh, he'll drown!"

She was soundly clipped, and told:

"Don't scream over nothing."

Alexei, wading last, dived, seized his brother, and set him on his feet. When they reached the bank, both soaking wet and black with mud, Alexei advanced straight upon the townspeople, so that they made way before him, and one of them murmured fearfully:

"Ah, the young beast!"

"They don't like us," Pyotr remarked. His father looked back at him, without stopping, and said:

"Give me time—they will."

He scolded Nikita.

"You—scarecrow! Keep your eyes open, and don't make yourself a laughingstock. We're no comedians, drumhead!"

The Artamonovs kept to themselves, seeking acquaintance with none. Their household was run by a fat old woman, dressed all in black, who tied her black kerchief around her head so that the ends stuck up like horns. She spoke very little, and grumbled her words so strangely that no one could understand her, as if she were not a Russian. There was no information about the Artamonovs to be gotten from her.

"They make themselves out to be monks, the ruffians," people said.

It was ascertained that the father and the eldest son made frequent trips through the surrounding countryside, urging the peasants to sow flax. During one such trip, Ilya Artamonov was attacked by runaway soldiers. With his only weapon, a two-pound weight attached to a rawhide strap, he killed one of the soldiers and cracked another's head. The third ran away. The ispravnik praised Artamonov, and the young priest of the poverty-stricken Ilyinsky parish imposed a penance for the taking of life: forty nights of prayer in the church.

Of an autumn evening, Nikita would read aloud to his father and brothers from the lives of the saints and the sermons of the fathers of the church; but his father would often stop him, saying:

"It's too high-flown, that wisdom, beyond our understanding. We're plain working people, and it's not for us to think about such matters. We were born for simple things. Prince Yuri, peace to his soul—he read through seven thousand books, and he got so deep in all those thoughts that he lost his faith in God. He travelled all over the world, and every king gave him audience. A famous man! But when he built a cloth mill, he couldn't make it pay. Yes, and whatever he put his hand to, it would never work. And so he lived all his life on his peasants.

He would enunciate his words distinctly, pausing to meditate, and to hear the sound of his own speech, before continuing his homily:

"Life will be hard for you. You have to be your own law, and your own protection. Me, I didn't live by my own will—I lived as I was bid. If things were wrong, I could see it, but I couldn't mend it. It was the gentry's affair, not mine. I didn't dare act on my own. I was even afraid to think, for fear of mixing up my own thoughts with the gentry's. Are you listening, Pyotr?"

"I'm listening."

"That's right. I want you to understand. A man's alive, and yet it's just as if he wasn't there. Of course, there's less to answer for. You don't take your own way, you're steered. Life is easier, with nothing to answer for, only—what's the good?"

Sometimes he would talk for an hour, or even two, frequently stopping to inquire whether the boys were listening. He would sit on the stove, his legs dangling, his fingers sunk in his curly beard, and forge his chain of words, link by link, without haste. A warm murk would gather in the clean, roomy kitchen, while the storm whistled out of doors, sliding silkily across the window-panes; or, perhaps, the world would be blue with frost. Pyotr would sit at the table, with a tallow candle before him, rustling documents and softly casting accounts on the abacus, with Alexei's assistance, while Nikita sat apart, skilfully plaiting osier baskets.

"Now, the tsar, our ruler, has given us freedom. We've got to understand—what's the reason behind it? A person won't let a sheep, even, out of the fold without a reason, and here the whole people's let out—millions of people. That means, the tsar understands there's nothing much to be got out of the gentry, because they use up all they have themselves. Prince Georgi felt it, even before we got our freedom. He told me—serf labour don't pay. And so now the trust is put in us, to work as free men. Even a soldier don't have to drag his gun for twenty-five years, any more. Go ahead and work! Now it's up to everyone to show what he's good for. The nobility—their doom is sealed. You're the nobility yourselves—do you hear what I say?"

Ulyana Baimakova stayed at the nunnery for almost three months. When she got home, Artamonov waited only one day before asking:

"How soon do we set the wedding?"

She glared at him indignantly.

"What are you thinking of? Her father's dead less than half a year, and you talk.... Don't you know it's a sin?"

But Artamonov sternly cut her short.

"I don't see any sin in it, kinswoman. The gentry do worse things than that, and God stands that. It's necessity, with me. Pyotr needs a wife."

Then he asked how much money she had. She replied:

"I won't give more than five hundred with my daughter!"

"You'll give more," the big man said, confidently and indifferently, staring straight into her eyes. They sat facing one another across the table, Artamonov leaning on his elbows, both hands sunk in the tangled wool of his beard. The woman frowned, and drew herself up apprehensively. She was in her late thirties, but looked much younger. Her greyish eyes, set in a plump, rosy face, gleamed with stern intelligence. Artamonov got up, throwing back his shoulders.

"You're good to look at, Ulyana Ivanovna."

"What next?" she demanded, her tone at once angry and ironic.

"Nothing."

He left the room reluctantly, with heavy step. Baimakova turned to look after him, and her glance lingered, in passing, on the cold glass of the mirror. She whispered in vexation:

"The bearded devil. What does he want?"

Oppressed by vague premonitions of danger from this man, she went up the stairs to her daughter's bedroom. But Natalya was not there. Baimakova glanced through the window into the yard. There stood her daughter, by the gate, with Pyotr. The widow ran quickly downstairs and shouted from the porch:



"Natalya! Come home!"

Pyotr bowed to her.

"That's no way, my fine young man, talking to a girl when her mother's not looking. No more of that, now!"

"We're betrothed," Pyotr reminded her.

"That's all the same. We have our own customs here," Baimakova retorted. But to herself she wondered:

"What's wrong with me? They're young—why shouldn't they want to be together? It isn't nice of me. As if I envied my own daughter."

Indoors, nevertheless, she pulled her daughter's plait painfully and forbade her to speak with Pyotr alone.

"You may be betrothed, but who can tell—maybe rain, and maybe snow, maybe yes, and maybe no!" she said severely.

A dark anxiety confused her thoughts. A few days later, she went to Yerdanskaya to ask about the future. All the women of the town carried their sins, their fears and sorrows, to the fat, bell-shaped, goitrous fortune-teller.

"There's no need to ask the cards about it," said Yerdanskaya. "I can tell you straight, my dear: you hold on to that man. It's not for nothing I've got such goggle eyes—I understand people. I see into them, like I see into my own deck of cards. See how lucky he is! Everything he starts goes rolling, and all our menfolk are just slobbering with envy. Don't you be afraid of him, my dear. He don't live like the fox, he lives like the bear."

"That's just it, like a bear," the widow agreed, and sighed. She told the fortuneteller:

"I'm frightened. Ever since I first saw him, when he came around asking for my girl. He frightened me. He came so suddenly, as if he fell out of the clouds, a stranger to everyone, and pushing right off into kin. Who ever heard of such a thing? I remember, he talked and I just stared into those bold eyes of his, and said yes to everything, just agreed to everything, as if he had me by the throat."

"That means he believes in his own strength," explained the wise proshchik baker.

But all this did not soothe Baimakova's anxiety, though, as she was leaving the dark room, saturated with the heavy odours of drying herbs, the fortuneteller added:

"Remember: it's only in fairy tales that fools are lucky."

She was suspiciously loud in her praises of Artamonov, loud and loquacious as a woman bribed. Huge Matryona Barskaya, dark and grim as a salt sander, spoke differently:

"The whole town's groaning and moaning over you, Ulyana. Aren't you afraid of those outsiders? Take care! It's no accident one of the boys is hunchbacked. No light sin his parents must have sinned, for him to be born such a monster."

It was hard on the widow Baimakova, and more and more often she took things out on her daughter, though she realized herself that the girl was in no way to blame. She tried to see as little as possible of her lodgers; but more and more often these people confronted her, shadowing life with alarm.

Winter stole upon the town unnoticed, and descended in a sudden fury of clamorous storms and biting frosts. It heaped the streets and houses with sugary mounds of snow, capped birdhouses and church domes with cotton fluff, and prisoned rivers and rusty swamp water in fetters of white iron. On holidays, the townsfolk gathered on the icebound Oka to do battle with their fists against the peasants of the nearby villages. Alexei joined in every contest and each time returned home bruised and furious.

"What's wrong, Alyosha?" Artamonov would ask. "Do they fight better here than in our parts?"

Alexei would maintain a gloomy silence, rubbing his bruises with a copper coin or a bit of ice, his hawk eyes glittering.

But one day Pyotr said:

"Alexei fights well. It's our own side, the townsfolk, that bruise him up."

Laying his clenched fist on the table, Ilya Artamonov asked:

"Why?"

"Out of hate."

"For him?"

"For all of us taken together."

The father struck the table with his fist. The candle tumbled over and went out. Through the darkness came a muffled growl:

"Hate and love—you talk like a girl! Don't let me hear the like again!"

Lighting the candle, Nikita said quietly:

"Alyosha shouldn't go to the fights."

"So people will laugh, and say—Artamonov's afraid! Shut up, sexton! Weakling!"

Ilya gave them all a thorough dressing down. A few days later, at supper, he said, with gruff affection:

"You ought to go out after bears, fellows—that's good sport! I used to go with Prince Georgi, in the Ryazan forests. Spears, we used. It was fine!"

Growing enthusiastic, he described a few successful hunts. A week later, he went to the forest with Pyotr and Alexei, and killed a big bear—an old veteran. Then the brothers went alone, and roused a mother bear. She tore Alexei's sheepskin jacket, and scratched his hip; but in the end the brothers conquered. They brought home a pair of cubs, leaving the dead beast in the forest for the wolves.

"Well, how are your Artamonovs behaving themselves?" the townspeople would ask Baimakova.

"Why, they're all right."

"While winter lasts, swine keep the peace," remarked Pomyalov.

Incredulously, the widow realized that, for some time now, the hostile attitude towards the Artamonovs had begun to offend her, the general dislike for them to breathe its cold on her as well. She saw that the

Artamonovs lived in sobriety and concord, persevering in the task they had set themselves, and giving no cause for any thought of evil. Watchfully observing her daughter and Pyotr, she came to the conviction that this stocky, reticent young man was grave beyond his years. He never tried to press Natalya in a dark corner, to tickle her, or whisper bad words in her ear, as a town boy would. Baimakova was somewhat disturbed by Pyotr's strange attitude towards the girl, cold, though at the same time solicitous, and even jealous.

"He won't make a tender husband."

One day, however, coming down the stairs, she heard her daughter's voice in the entry:

"Are you going after bears again?"

"We're planning to. Why?"

"It's dangerous. Alyosha got hurt, last time."

"That was his own fault. He was too hasty. So you think about me?"

"I didn't say anything about you."

"You little minx!" the mother thought. She smiled, and sighed. "But he's pretty simple."

Ilya Artamonov told her often, more and more persistently:

"Hurry the wedding, or they'll hurry themselves."

She saw, indeed, that he was right. The girl slept badly, and could not conceal her physical unease. Towards Easter, she took her off again to a nunnery. Returning home, a month later, she found her neglected orchard in model order, the paths weeded, the lichen removed from the trees, the berry bushes trimmed and tied, all by a skilful hand. Turning down the path towards the river, she saw Nikita. He was repairing the fence, which the spring waters had damaged. His bony hump protruded pitifully, sharply outlined under his long linen shirt, and almost concealing his big head and straight, fair hair. To keep the hair back from his face, Nikita had bound it with a supple twig of birch. Grey among the luscious greenery, he called to mind some aged hermit, absorbed to self-oblivion in his

task. His axe gleamed silver in the sunlight as he worked, skilfully sharpening a stake. In a thin, girlish voice, he was singing softly—some church tune. The water shimmered, silky green, beyond the fence, and flecks of sunlight played about in it like darting goldfish.

"God speed your work," the woman said, with a warmth quite unexpected to herself. Turning the mild light of his blue eyes to her, Nikita answered softly:

"Heaven bless you."

"Was it you who fixed up the orchard?"

"Yes."

"You did it nicely. Are you fond of orchards?"

Still kneeling at his work, he explained briefly that from the age of nine he had been apprenticed to the prince's gardener. Now he was nineteen.

"For all he's humped, he isn't bitter," the woman thought to herself.

In the evening, when she and her daughter sat at tea in their upstairs room, Nikita appeared in the doorway, with a bunch of flowers in his hand and a smile on his sallow, ugly, cheerless face.

"May I offer you a bouquet?"

"What for?" Baimakova asked perplexedly, with a suspicious look at the prettily arranged flowers and grasses. Nikita explained to her that when he lived with the gentry it had been his duty to bring the princess flowers every morning.

"I see," said Baimakova. Flushing a little, she raised her head proudly. "But do I remind you of your princess? She must be beautiful."

"Ah, but so are you."

Baimakova flushed still more. To herself, she thought:

"Did his father put it in his head?"

"Well, thanks for the honour," she said; but she did not invite Nikita to join them at tea. When he was gone, she thought aloud:

"He has nice eyes. Not like his father's. Perhaps they come from the mother's side."

She sighed.

"It looks as if it's fate for us to live with them."

She did not press Artamonov very hard to postpone the wedding until the fall, when a year would have elapsed since her husband's death; but she told him resolutely:

"Only don't you meddle in this business, Ilya Vasilyevich. Let me arrange it all, our own way, the good old way. It will help you, too—you'll get right in among our best people, right in sight of everyone."

"Umph," grunted Artamonov with proud disdain. "They can see me well enough as it is."

Vexed by his arrogance, she replied:

"They don't like you here."

"Well, then, they'll fear me."

He chuckled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Pyotr, too—he's always droning about likes and dislikes. You make me laugh."

"Maybe. But I get my share of the dislike, too."

"Don't you worry, kinswoman!"

Artamonov raised a long arm, clenching his fist until the taut skin turned crimson.

"I'm good at breaking people. No one can bother me long. I'll get along without being liked."

The woman said nothing. Shuddering fearfully, she thought:

"The brute!"

And so the day came when her cosy home was thronged with Natalya's friends, the daughters of the town's best families, all richly dressed in brocade gowns of ancient cut, with huge puff sleeves of fine white linen, bright with Mordovian embroidery in coloured silk, with lace at the wrists; all shod in kidskin or morocco slippers, and wearing ribbons in their long braids. The bride-to-be, suffocating in a heavy gown of silver brocade, fastened by gilt openwork buttons from collar to floor, with a jacket of gold brocade thrown over her shoulders, and white and blue ribbons in her hair, sat in the corner under the icons,

like a statue of ice, wiping her perspiring face with a lace handkerchief, and "versifying":

*Over meadows so gra-assy,  
Over flowers, ah, blue as skies,  
Rush the waters of the springtime flood,  
Frigid waters, ah, and turbid.*

Loud and clear, the girls caught up the sinking tones of the maiden's complaint:

*Send me forth, then, send the maiden forth,  
Send me forth to carry water home.  
Send me barefoot through the icy flood,  
Send me naked, ah, and unattired.*

Alexei, invisible in the crowd of girls, shouted with laughter:

"That's a funny song! They dress the girl up in brocade like a turkey in a tin pail, and then they cry she's naked and unattired!"

Nikita sat near the bride, in a new jacket of blue cloth that bunched up in ugly, ridiculous folds over his hump. His blue eyes, open wide, were fixed on Natalya with a strange expression, as though he feared the girl might melt away and vanish. In the doorway, filling it completely, stood Matryona Barskaya, rolling her eyes and droning, in her deep bass:

"I hear no lament in your song, maidens."

She stepped into the room, with the broad stride of a horse, and began to instruct them sternly in the old customs, in the fear and trembling that must fill the maiden's heart when she prepares for her nuptials.

"It is said, 'Marriage is a stone wall.' Know, then: the wall is strong, not to be broken; the wall is high, not to be overleapt."

But the girls would not listen. It was hot in the room, and crowded. Pushing rudely past the old woman, they raced out of doors, into the orchard. Alexei whirled among them like a bee among flowers, in his yellow silk

blouse and wide velveteen pantaloons, noisy and merry as though he were drunk.

Her eyes goggling, her thick lips pursed offensively, Barskaya gathered up her damask skirt and ascended the stairs, like a cloud of heavy smoke, to inform Ulyana prophetically:

"Your daughter is merry. It isn't right. It goes against custom. A merry beginning brings a bad end!"

Baimakova was on her knees, rummaging absorbedly in a big, ironbound trunk. Damask, taffeta, red Moscow bunting, Cashmere shawls, ribbons, and embroidered towels were scattered around her, on the bed and on the floor, as in a booth at the fair. A broad sunbeam lay across the bright fabrics, making the colours blaze like a cloud at sunset.

"That's no way, for the groom to live in the bride's home before the wedding. The Artamonovs should have moved."

"Why didn't you say so before? It's too late to talk about it now," grumbled Ulyana, bending low over the trunk to hide her troubled face. The bass voice replied:

"People always called you clever, so I held my tongue. I thought you'd have that much sense. What's it to me? For me, I only want to say the truth. If people won't take it, the Lord will hold it to my credit."

Barskaya stood like a monument, bearing her head as though it were a bowl full to the brim of wisdom. Receiving no answer, she pushed out through the door. Ulyana, kneeling among the flaming colours, whispered in fear and anguish:

"Dear Lord, help me! Don't take my mind."

Again there was a rustling at the door, and she thrust her head hastily down into the trunk, to conceal her tears. It was Nikita.

"Natalya Yevseyevna sent me to ask if you didn't need any help."

"Thanks, dear boy."



"Little Olga Orlova spilled the syrup all over herself, down in the kitchen."

"You don't say! She's a nice little girl, just the bride for you."

"Who'd marry me?"

Out in the orchard, home-brewed beer was in the drinking. At a round table in the shade of a linden tree sat Ilya Artamonov, Gavril Barsky, Pomyalov, the bride's god-father, Zhiteikin, the blank-eyed tanner, and the wagonmaker, Voroponov. Pyotr stood nearby, leaning against the tree, his dark hair so plentifully greased that his head had a metallic lustre. He listened respectfully to the conversation of his elders.

"Your customs are different," said Artamonov thoughtfully. Pomyalov boasted, in reply:

"We're the 'real thing old-timers' here, Great Russia."

"We're no outsiders, either."

"Our customs are ancient."

"There is a lot of Mordvinians, and Chuvashes."

Squealing, giggling, jostling, the girls invaded the orchard and thronged around the table, in a bright wreath of colour, to sing greetings to the groom's father:

*Oh, great kinsman, here's to you,*

*To Ilya, ay, to Vasilyevich.*

*At your first step, may you break a leg.*

*At your second step, the other leg,*

*At your third step, may you break your neck.*

"There's greetings for you!" cried Artamonov in amazement, turning to his son. Pyotr smiled guardedly, glancing sidewise at the girls and pulling at his ear.

"There's more coming—listen," said Barsky, and laughed aloud.

*To our kinsman we're too kind today,*

*To the robber of our maiden ranks.*

"Too kind?" Artamonov's fingers beat a tattoo on

the table top. He was clearly aroused, and confused.

The girls sang furiously on:

*May you fly against the harrow teeth, '  
Crash on rocks from down the mountain top,  
Ah, for fooling and deceiving us,  
Ah, for praising and for glorying  
Distant places, unknown to us.  
Distant hamlets, all desolate,  
Sown to sorrow and grief for us,  
Sown and watered with tears for us.*

"So that's it," cried Artamonov, touched to the quick. "Well, girls, I don't want to make you angry, but I must praise my home parts just the same. Our customs are milder than yours, and our people more civil. We even have a saying: 'The Svapa and Usozha flow into the Seym. Thank the good Lord, it's not the Oka!'"

"Wait! You don't know us yet," said Barsky, and it was hard to tell: was he boasting or threatening? "Well, tip the girls."

"How much shall I give them?"

"As much as you don't begrudge."

But when Artamonov gave the girls two silver rubles, Pomyalov said angrily:

"You're loose with your money. Showing off!"

"You're certainly hard to please," cried Ilya, angry too. Barsky guffawed uproariously, and Zhiteikin snickered.

The parting of the bride with her girlhood playmates ended at dawn. The guests departed, and most of the household was soon plunged in sleep. Artamonov sat in the orchard, with Pyotr and Nikita, looking about him at the trees, and up at the pink glow of the clouds. Stroking his beard, he said, in a low voice:

"They're a tart people. Not cordial. Pyotr, boy, you do just as your mother-in-law tells you. It's all women's foolishness, but it's got to be done! Where's Alexei? Gone to see the girls home? The girls like him, all right, but not the fellows. Barsky's youngster looks daggers at him....

Yes! You be civil with 'em, Nikita—you're good at that. Be putty for your father. When I make a crack, you fill it in."

He peeped into the huge wooden jug, and continued glumly:

"They guzzled it all down. They drink like horses. What are you thinking about, Pyotr?"

Fingering his silk sash, a gift from his betrothed, the son replied quietly:

"In the country life is simpler, easier."

"Hmph. What could be simpler—sleeping all day long."

"They're dragging the wedding."

"Have patience."

And at length the day came, a long and difficult day for Pyotr. Sitting beneath the icons, he felt that his brows were drawn together in a grim, forbidding frown. He knew this was not well, that it did not make him pleasing to his bride, but he could not help it. His brows seemed stitched together with a thread he could not snap, and he looked sullenly out from under them at the guests. He threw back his hair, and fresh hops fell from it, scattering over the table and over Natalya's veil. She, too, sat with lowered head, her eyelids drooping wearily. She was very pale, frightened as a child, and trembling with shame.

"Bitter!" roared the scarlet, hairy, baretoothed mugs, for the twentieth time.

Pyotr turned, wolf-fashion, without bending his neck, raised the veil, and pressed his dry lips clumsily to Natalya's cheek, sensing the satin coolness of her skin, the fearful tremor of her shoulders. He was sorry for Natalya, and he, too, was ashamed. The close ring of drunken guests was yelling:

"The fellow don't know how!"

"Ain for the lips!"

"Wouldn't I kiss her if it was me!"

A woman's drunken voice squealed:

"Just you try!"

"Bitter!" yelled Barsky.

Setting his teeth, Pyotr touched his lips to the moist, quivering lips of the girl. She seemed to be melting away, like a white cloud in the sun. They were both hungry, for they had been given no food since the preceding day. What with the excitement, the sharp smell of liquor, and two glasses of fizzy Don wine, Pyotr felt drunk, and feared his bride might notice his condition. Everything around him swayed and shifted, now merging in one varicoloured whole, now breaking up into rows of red bubbles that were ugly faces. The son looked to his father, in supplication and anger. But Ilya Artamonov, blazing, dishevelled, was staring at Baimakova, shouting straight into her rosy face:

"Kinswoman, I drink your mead to you. It's as sweet as its maker!"

She raised a round, white arm, and the sunlight flashed on her golden bracelet, set with stones of many colours, and gleamed in the pearls on her breast. Like the rest, she had been drinking. A languid smile shone in her grey eyes, and her parted lips quivered temptingly. They clinked glasses, and she drank and bowed to her kinsman. He tossed his shaggy head, crying rapturously:

"You have manners, kinswoman! Princely manners, so help me God!"

Pyotr realized vaguely that his father was not behaving well. Through the drunken yelling of the guests, he heard clearly Pomyalov's spiteful exclamations, Barskaya's rumbling reproaches, Zhiteikin's snickering laugh.

"It's not a wedding, it's a trial," he thought. And again he heard:

"See how he stares at Ulyana, the devil! My, oh my!"

"There's another wedding coming, only without the priest."

For a moment, these words would ring painfully in his ears; but they vanished at once when he felt the contact of Natalya's knee or elbow, sending a dizzy unease through all his limbs. He tried not to look at her, keeping his head

turned stubbornly away. But his eyes were not to be controlled. They shifted ever and again in her direction.

"How long does this keep on?" he whispered, and Natalya whispered back:

"I don't know."

"I'm ashamed."

"So am I," came the answer, and he was happy that she felt as he did.

Alexei was with the girls, who feasted in the orchard. Nikita sat indoors, beside a lanky priest with a wet beard and yellow, coppery eyes set in a pock-marked face. Through the open windows facing the yard and the street, the townspeople were looking in: dozens of heads, shifting to and fro against the blue of the sky, appearing and disappearing in constant succession; open mouths, whispering, hissing, shouting. The windows were like open sacks, from which a multitude of noisy heads might at any moment come rolling into the room, like so many watermelons. Nikita particularly noticed the face of Tikhon Vyalov, the ditch digger—redspotted, with high cheekbones, framed in thick, reddish wool. The eyes, which at first glance seemed colourless, flickered strangely, as though blinking; but it was the pupils that blinked, not the lashes which remained motionless. The lips—thin, sternly compressed, lightly shaded by a curly moustache—were also motionless. The ears lay unpleasantly close to the skull. Vyalov stood with his chest against the window sill. He did not shout or curse when others tried to push him away, but simply brushed them aside with light thrusts of the shoulder or elbow. His shoulders were steeply rounded, and his neck sunk between them, so that his head seemed to grow straight from his chest, and he, too, looked hunchbacked. In his face Nikita found something kindly and prepossessing.

A one-eyed fellow struck a sudden loud blow on the tambourine, and passed his fingers over its leather head. The tambourine whined and droned. Someone whistled shrilly. An accordion struck up. And there was the

bridesman, Styopa Barsky, plump and curly-headed, twirling and stamping in the middle of the room, shouting in time to the music:

*Hey, maidens, hey, dear enemies,  
Dancers, singers, merry playmates all,  
Who has pockets full of clinking gold but me?  
Come, then, come, contest the ring and gold with me!*

His father stood up, an enormous figure of a man, and roared:

"Styopka! Don't let down the town! Show the Kursk chickabiddies!"

Then Ilya Artamonov sprang to his feet, and tossed his shaggy head, his face flushed, his nose scarlet as a glowing ember. He shouted at Barsky:

"Who says chickabiddies! We'll see who knows how to dance! Alyosha!"

Radiant, smiling, Alexei stood for an instant watching the Dryomov dancer. Then, suddenly pale, he was off, whirling around the circle at incredible speed, and squealing like a girl,

"He don't know any words!" cried the Dryomov folk, and Artamonov roared furiously:

"Alyoshka! I'll kill you!"

His feet tapping without pause, Alexei thrust two fingers between his lips and emitted a piercing whistle, after which he chanted clearly:

*When Mokei was lord and master,  
He drove his servants fast and faster  
Now Mokei, gay Mokei,  
Waits upon table himself, they say!*

"Take that!" Artamonov roared in triumph.

"Aha!" exclaimed the priest significantly, and raised one finger, with a shake of the head.

"Alexei will outdance your fellow," Pyotr said to Natalya, and she answered timidly:

"He's light on his feet."

The fathers urged on their sons like fighting cocks. They stood shoulder to shoulder, both half drunk—the one enormous, clumsy as a sack of oats, with tears of drunken rapture trickling from the narrow red slits under his brows; the other tense as though on the point of leaping, his long arms twitching, his hands stroking his thighs, his eyes almost insane. Guessing at the movement of the jaws under his father's jerking beard, Pyotr thought to himself:

"He's grinding his teeth. He'll hit out at someone..."

"Crude dancing, Artamonov!" came Matryona Barskaya's rumbling voice. "No steps! Poor!"

Ilya Artamonov laughed into her face, dark and round as a frying pan. He laughed up her thick nose. Alexei had won. The Barsky boy was staggering towards the door. Ilya seized Baimakova roughly by the arm, commanding:

"Come on, kinswoman, it's your turn!"

She turned pale. With her free hand, she tried to push him away, exclaiming, in startled indignation:

"Are you mad? Don't you know it's wrong?"

The guests fell silent, grinning slyly. Pomyalov glanced at Barskaya. His words came out like hissing oil:

"That's all right! Dance, Ulyana, to please us! The Lord will forgive."

"The sin's mine!" cried Artamonov.

His intoxication seemed to lift. He advanced, frowning, as though into battle, as though not of his own will. Someone pushed Baimakova forward. The drunken woman lurched and stumbled. Then, throwing back her shoulders, tossing her head, she was off around the circle. Pyotr heard shocked whispers:

"The Lord preserve us! Her husband's not a year in the grave, and she marries off her daughter and dances at the wedding!"

He did not look at his wife, but felt that she was ashamed of her mother's conduct, and muttered:

"Father shouldn't be dancing."

"Neither should mother," she replied, her voice low and sad. She was standing on the bench, looking over the people's heads into the close circle. She suddenly swayed and clutched at Pyotr's shoulder.

"Careful!" he said caressingly, lifting a hand to her elbow to support her.

Through the open windows, over the heads of the onlookers, poured the reddish light of the setting sun; and in this light, like blind creatures, the man and the woman whirled and circled. People were shouting and laughing out of doors, in the orchard, the yard, the street; but silence was gradually setting in the stuffy room. The taut leather of the tambourine droned dully, the accordion shrilled and squealed, and these two whirled feverishly on, ringed in by the close circle of young men and girls. The young folk watched in silent gravity, as though this dance were a matter of extraordinary import. Most of the elders had gone out into the yard, only those remaining who were too dazed with drink to move.

Artamonov stamped his foot and stood still.

"You've got the better of me, Ulyana Ivanovna!"

The woman started. She, too, stood suddenly still, as before a stone wall. Bowing low to the circle, she said:

"Don't think ill of me."

And at once she left the room, fanning herself with her kerchief. Now Barskaya took the floor.

"Separate the bride and groom! Pyotr, you come with me. Groomsmen, take his arms!"

Thrusting aside the groomsmen, the father laid his heavy hands on his son's shoulders, saying:

"Go, and God grant you happiness!"

He embraced his son, then pushed him away. The groomsmen took Pyotr's arms. Barskaya led them off, spitting to right and left and muttering:

"Tfu, tfu! No illness, no sorrow, no envy, no dishonour, tfu! Fire and water know time and place, not for misfortune, but for happiness!"



When Pyotr followed her into Natalya's room, where a high, soft bed stood ready, the old woman sat down heavily on a chair in the middle of the room.

"Listen, and remember!" she began solemnly. "Here are two half rubles. Put them in your boots, at the heel. When Natalya comes, she'll kneel to take your boots off. Don't let her."

"What on earth is all that for?" asked Pyotr glumly.

"That's not for you to understand. Three times refuse, and the fourth time let her take them off, and then she'll kiss you three times, and you give her the half rubles, and say, 'This I give to thee, my slave, my fate!' Don't you forget! Well, then undress and lie down with your back to her, and she'll beg you to let her in for the night. But you keep still, only the third time she asks, hold out your hand to her—understand? Well, and then..."

Pyotr stared wonderingly into the broad, swarthy face of his preceptress. She sat there, licking her lips, her nostrils distending, mopping the sweat with her kerchief from her greasy neck and chin, pronouncing coarse, shameless words with masterful precision. In parting, she repeated:

"Put no faith in screams, put no faith in tears." Then she staggered out of the room, leaving the heady smell of drink behind her. Pyotr was seized by a frenzied anger. He pulled off his boots and hurled them away, undressed quickly, and sprang onto the bed, as though mounting a horse. He clenched his teeth, lest he sob aloud with the humiliation that seethed within him.

"Swamp devils!"

The down bed was hot. He slipped out and went to the window. When he threw it open, he was deafened by the drunken uproar in the orchard, by heavy laughter and girlish screams. Dark figures wandered in the blue dusk among the trees. Like a copper finger, the thin spire of the Church of St. Nicholas pierced the sky. The cross was missing. It had been taken down for gilding. Looking out over the roofs of the town, Pyotr saw the Oka, gleaming

mournfully in the yellow light of a shard of the melting moon, and, beyond the river, the black outlines of the boundless forests. He recalled another land—a spacious land, bright with fields of golden grain—and sighed. Footsteps and tittering laughter sounded on the stairs. He jumped back into bed. The door opened. There was a rustle of silken ribbons. Shoes creaked. Somebody sniffed tearfully. The hook clicked as the door was fastened. Pyotr cautiously raised his head. In the semidarkness just inside the door stood a white figure, slowly making the sign of the cross, bowing almost to the ground.

“She’s praying. I didn’t.”

But he had no desire to pray.

“Natalya Yevseyevna,” he said softly. “Don’t be afraid. I’m scared myself, and all worn out.”

With both hands, he smoothed back his hair. Pulling at his ear, he muttered:

“There’s no need for that business, taking off the boots and all. It’s just foolishness. My heart aches, and that woman talks foolishness. Don’t cry.”

Timidly, sidewise, she crossed the room to the window. Looking out, she said softly:

“They’re still celebrating.”

“Yes.”

For a long time they spoke thus, pointlessly, both tired and somehow afraid, lacking the resolution to approach one another. Towards dawn, the stairs creaked, and a hand fumbled against the wall. Natalya went to the door.

“If it’s Barskaya, don’t let her in,” Pyotr whispered.

“It’s mother,” said Natalya, lifting the hook. Pyotr sat up on the bed, his feet dangling to the floor. He was dissatisfied with himself, reflecting drearily:

“I’m no good. I didn’t have the nerve. She’ll laugh at me.”

The door opened, and Natalya said softly:

“Mother wants you.”

She leaned against the stove, almost invisible against the white tile. Pyotr went out. In the darkness outside the

door Baimakova whispered hotly, frightened and offended:

"What are you doing, Pyotr Ilyich? Do you want to bring shame on me and my daughter? It's almost morning, and they'll soon be here to wake you. I must show the people my daughter's shift, so they'll know she's honest!"

She had laid one hand on Pyotr's shoulder. With the other she kept jerking him, indignantly demanding:

"What is it? Are you weak, or cold? Answer! Don't frighten me!"

Pyotr said dully:

"I'm sorry for her. And scared."

He could not see the widow's face, but it seemed to him that she laughed curtly.

"You go ahead and do your work like a man! Pray to Saint Christopher. Go. Wait, let me kiss you."

Throwing her arms around him, she kissed him with sweet, sticky lips that breathed the warm odour of wine. She was gone before he could respond, and his loud kiss met the air. He returned to the room and locked the door behind him, then stretched out his arms determinedly. The girl moved forward and entered his embrace. Tremulously, she said:

"Mother's had too much wine."

It was not such words Pyotr had been expecting. Backing towards the bed, he muttered:

"Don't be afraid. I may not be handsome, but I'm kind."

She pressed closer and closer to him, whispering:

"I'm falling."

...They liked to feast, in Dryomov. The wedding dragged out for five days. They were at it from morning to midnight, thronging up and down the streets from house to house, reeling in a drunken haze. The Barskys offered the richest and most ostentatious feast of all. Alexei thrashed their boy for some insult to little Olga

Orlova, and Artamonov was very much surprised when the parents complained to him about it.

"Who ever heard of boys not fighting?"

He showered the girls with ribbons and sweets, and the lads with money, plied the fathers and mothers mercilessly with drink, and embraced all and sundry, crying:

"Hey, everybody! Ain't we livin' dommit!"

Artamonov conducted himself boisterously, and drank without measure, as though to quench a fire within him—drank, and did not get drunk. He became perceptibly thinner in these few days. Though he kept away from Ulyana Baimakova, his sons noticed that his eyes often turned to her, in a wrathful, demanding glance. Making a great boast of his strength, he tugged the pole against soldiers from the town garrison, and outwrestled a fireman and three bricklayers. Then Tikhon Vyalov, the ditch digger, came up to him, not proposing, but demanding:

"Now me."

Surprised by his tone, Artamonov looked the stocky ditch digger up and down.

"What are you—strong, or boastful?"

"I don't know," the man replied gravely.

Seizing each other's belt, they tugged and strained resultlessly for some time. Over Vyalov's shoulder, Ilya sunk shamelessly at the women. He was taller than the ditch digger, but slimmer, and somewhat better built. Vyalov thrust a shoulder against Ilya's chest, trying to lift his opponent and throw him to the ground behind him. But Ilya, at once aware, cried:

"That's no trick, brother! That's too simple!"

Suddenly, grunting, he himself threw Vyalov up and over his head, with such force that the ditch digger's legs were numbed by the fall. Sitting up on the grass, and brushing the sweat from his cheeks, Vyalov said shamefacedly:

"He's strong."

"We can see that," jeered the onlookers.

"He's hale," Vyalov repeated.

Ilya stretched out a hand to him.

"Get up!"

Ignoring the proffered hand, the ditch digger attempted to get up alone, but failed. Again he sat with outstretched legs, looking after the crowd with strange, melting eyes. Nikita came up to him, asking sympathetically:

"Does it hurt? Can I help?"

The ditch digger laughed drily.

"My bones ache. I'm stronger than your father, only not so quick. Well, let's follow on, Nikita Ilyich, simple soul!"

He took the hunchback's arm, and they followed the crowd together. Vyalov kept stamping heavily, perhaps in the hope of easing the pain in his legs.

Spent with weariness and lack of sleep, constantly on display, the young couple moved submissively up and down the streets with the bright, noisy, drunken crowd, or ate and drank at table, blushing at the shameless jokes addressed to them on every side. They tried very hard not to look at one another, or even to speak. Walking always arm-in-arm, sitting always side by side, they bore themselves like strangers. Matryona Barskaya was delighted with their conduct, and bragged to Ilya and Ulyana:

"Did I teach your son well? I should think so! Look, Ulyana, how I trained your daughter! And what can you say about your son-in-law? A regular peacock! This isn't me, he seems to say, and it's not my wife!"

In their own room, however, Pyotr and Natalya would cast off together with their clothing all the mannerisms imposed upon them, and dutifully accepted, when in public, and talk together of the day's experiences.

"Don't they drink, though, in your town!" exclaimed Pyotr wonderingly.

"Do they drink less in your parts?" asked his wife.

"Peasants can't drink like that!"

"You don't seem like peasants."

"We were manor folk—that's a sort of gentlefolks."

Sometimes they would sit at the window in silence, their arms around one another, breathing the delicious fragrance wafted in from the orchard.

"Why don't you say anything?" the wife would ask softly, and, softly, the husband would answer:

"I don't feel like ordinary talk."

He longed for talk that would be different, not ordinary; but Natalya could not fill his need. And when he spoke himself, describing the boundless breadth and expanse of the golden steppes, she would ask:

"No forests, no nothing? Oh, how fearful it must be!"

"Fear lives in the forest," Pyotr answered dully, "What fear can there be in the steppe? There, it's just the earth, and the sky, and me."

Once, as they sat by the window, looking out in silent pleasure at the starry night, they heard some movement in the orchard, near the bathhouse. Somebody was running, crashing through the raspberry bushes. Then came a low, angry exclamation:

"What are you doing, you devil?"

Natalya sprang up, frightened:

"It's mother!"

Pyotr leaned out of the window, his broad back blocking it entirely. By the bathhouse stood his father, pressing his mother-in-law against the wall and trying to throw her down. The woman struggled, striking out at his head and whispering breathlessly:

"Let me go, or I'll scream!"

Then, frantically, she cried:

"Dear heart, don't touch me! Have pity."

Pyotr closed the window noiselessly, caught his wife in his arms and sat her down on his knees.

"Don't look out."

She writhed in his embrace, crying:

"What's the matter? Who is it?"

"Father," Pyotr replied, holding her tight. "Don't you understand?"

"Oh, how can they," she whispered, in shame and fear. Her husband carried her to the bed, and told her quietly:

"It's not for us to judge our parents."

Natalya rocked back and forth, her head in her hands, moaning:

"The sin, the sin!"

"It's not our sin!" said Pyotr, and, recalling his father's words, "The gentry do worse," added. "And, besides, it's better that way—he won't come pestering you. The old folk, they take things simply. They don't call it sin to force a daughter-in-law. Don't cry."

Through her tears, his wife said:

"When they danced, that time, I thought.... If he forced her, what are we going to do?"

Wearied by her emotion, however, she soon fell asleep. Pyotr opened the window and looked out into the orchard. Not a living soul, only the sighing breeze, and the trees tossing in the fragrant darkness. Leaving the window open, he lay down beside his wife, reflecting, with open eyes, on what had occurred. It would be nice to live on a little farm somewhere, just he and Natalya....

Natalya woke early. It seemed to her that she had been awakened by pity for her mother, and sympathy with her hurt. Barefoot, in only her shift, she ran quickly down the stairs. The door to her mother's room was always locked for the night, yet now it stood ajar. This frightened her. Looking in, however, at the bed in the far corner, she saw a white mound under the sheet, and dark hair scattered over the pillow.

"She's asleep. How she must have cried and sorrowed!"

Something must be done to console her injured mother. Natalya went out into the orchard. The grass, dew-laden, tickled and chilled her feet. The sun had just come up over the forest, and she was blinded by its slanted rays, still barely warm. She pulled a burdock leaf, silver with dew, and applied it first to one cheek, then to

the other; then, refreshed, bent to gather red currant clusters into it. Her thoughts turned, without anger, to her father-in-law. He had a way of slapping her shoulder heavily, and asking, with a chuckle:

"Alive, are you? Well? That's right, live!"

It seemed he could find no other words for her. She was a little offended, too, by his kindly slaps—caresses fit for horses.

"Brute!" she thought, forcing herself to hostility against him.

Birds were twittering, and a silky rustling came from the leaves overhead. A shepherd blew his pipe, far off at the end of the town, and human voices floated lazily, through the clear, bright hush, from the bank of the Vataraksha, where the mill was going up. Something clicked. Natalya started and raised her head. On an apple tree, just above her, hung a siskin in a snare, struggling desperately to escape.

"Who set the snare? Nikita?"

A dry twig cracked somewhere in the orchard.

When she returned to the house and looked in at her mother's room, the widow was awake, lying on her back, with an arm under her head and her eyebrows raised in an expression of surprise.

"Who's there?" she cried, starting up in alarm. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I've picked you some currants to have with your tea."

On the table by the bed stood a big carafe that was used for kvass, almost empty. Its stopper lay on the floor. The tablecloth was stained with kvass. The mother's light, stern eyes were circled with a bluish shadow, but they were not swollen with tears, as Natalya had expected. They seemed darker, more deeply set; and her gaze, always somewhat haughty, was now strangely absent and aloof.

"The mosquitoes keep me awake. I'll have to start sleeping in the shed," the mother said, drawing the sheet



up around her neck. "I'm all over bites. What made you get up so early? And why'd you walk barefoot in the dew? Your shift is wet. You'll catch cold."

The mother spoke reluctantly, without tenderness, as though absorbed in thoughts of her own. The daughter's anxiety was gradually giving way to the eager, resentful curiosity of one woman towards another.

"I woke up early, and you came into my thoughts. I dreamed about you."

"And what were your thoughts?" the mother inquired, her eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"Just that you sleep all alone now, without me."

It seemed to Natalya that her mother's cheeks flushed, and that her smile, as she replied, "I'm not afraid," was not altogether genuine.

"You'd better go. Your darling's awake—don't you hear him tramping about?" said the mother closing her eyes.

Going slowly up the stairs, Natalya thought squeamishly, almost inimically:

"He spent the night with her. The kvass was for him. Her neck's all bruised—that's not mosquito bites, it's kisses. I won't tell Petya about it. She's going to sleep in the shed. And yet, she screamed."

"Where've you been?" asked Pyotr, looking closely at his wife. She dropped her eyes, feeling guilty, she did not know why.

"I picked some currants, and went in to see mother."

"Well, how is she?"

"She seems all right."

"So," said Pyotr, pulling at his ear. "So!"

He smiled wryly, and sighed, rubbing the reddish stubble on his chin.

"It looks like that fool woman Barskaya was right—put no faith in screams, put no faith in tears."

Then he asked, sternly:

"Did you see Nikita?"

"No."

"What do you mean, no? There he is now, snaring birds in the orchard."

"Oh, my," cried Natalya, frightened. "And I was out there just like this, in nothing but my shift!"

"There you are!"

"But when does he sleep?"

Pyotr, who was pulling on his boots, grunted loudly. His wife said, glancing at him sidewise, with a little smile:

"You know, for all he's a hunchback, he's nice—nicer than Alexei."

The husband grunted once more, but not so loud.

...At sunrise every morning, when the shepherd set out to gather his flock, drawing plaintive music from his long pipe, the sound of axes could already be heard beyond the river, and the townspeople, driving out their cows, would say to one another mockingly:

"Hark! They're at it again, before the day's begun."

"Greed—the mortal foe of peace."

Sometimes it seemed to Ilya Artamonov that he had overcome the lazy hostility of the town, for the Dryomov folk tipped their hats to him respectfully, and listened attentively to his stories about the princes Ratsky. Almost invariably, however, one or another of them would remark, not without pride:

"Our gentry here are simpler, and poorer, but they're stricter than yours!"

Of a holiday evening, in the shady orchard of Barsky's tavern on the bank of the Oka, he would say to the rich folk of Dryomov:

"My business will bring profit for all of you."

"God grant it," Pomyalov would reply, twisting his lips in a short, curish smile; and it would be impossible to tell: was he about to lick one's boot, or bite? His crumpled features were ill-framed in a thin, hempen beard. His leaden nose sniffed suspiciously at everything, and malice lurked in his acorn-coloured eyes.

"God grant it," he repeated. "Of course, we got on pretty well without you, but maybe we'll get on with you

just as well."

Artamonov frowned.

"You speak with double meaning, not like a friend."

Barsky shouted, guffawing:

"That's the kind he is!"

Where Barsky's face should have been, there were a few crimson hunks of meat, carelessly slapped together. His enormous head, his neck, cheeks, arms—all of him was thickly overgrown with coarse bear's wool. His ears were out of sight, and his eyes, seeming unwanted in all this flesh, were hidden behind padded fat.

"All my strength goes into fat," he would say, and roar with laughter, his wide open mouth revealing full rows of huge, blunt teeth.

The wagonmaker, Voroponov, would turn his colourless eyes on Artamonov, and his dry little voice would admonish:

"Business has to be done, but God's work mustn't be forgotten either. Is it not said, 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful.'"

His eyes, colorless and almost blank, seemed to hint that Voroponov guessed at hidden things, and might at any moment astound them all by some extraordinary pronouncement. Sometimes he spoke as though on the very point of such a revelation:

"Of course, even Christ partook of bread, so that Martha...."

"Hold on, hold on," that tanner Zhiteikin—a churchwarden—would put in. "Look out where you're going!"

Voroponov would fall silent, his drab ears twitching. Ilya asked the tanner:

"You, now—do you understand my business?"

"Why should I?" Zhiteikin returned, in genuine surprise. "It's your business, and it's your job to understand it, you queer fish! Yours for you, and mine for me."

Artamonov drank his thick beer, looking out through the trees at the muddy ribbon of the Oka, and, farther

left, at the green serpent curves of the winding Vataraksha, where it came crawling out of spruce groves and swamps to join the bigger river. Chips and shavings gleamed on the point, splotching the gold brocade of the sand. A russet glow came from the piled bricks. Among the trampled willow bushes, like an open coffin, stretched the long, beef-coloured building that was to be the mill. A warehouse seemed to blaze as the setting sun caught at the lustreless, still unpainted iron of its roof. The slanting rays made molten wax of the yellow frame-work of the two-storey dwelling house, with its taut golden rafters high against the sultry sky. As Alexei had aptly put it, the house, from the distance, looked like gusli.\* Alexei lived out on the point, at a good distance from the town boys and girls. He was hard to manage, hot-tempered and defiant. Pyotr was a heavier nature. There was something turbid about him; he did not yet realize how much could be done by boldness and resolution.

A shadow passed over Artamonov's face. He glanced at the townspeople from under his bushy brows, and smiled contemptuously. These were a cheap sort, weak in the will to do, and void of spirit.

By night, when the town lay fast asleep, Artamonov would steal, like a thief, along the bank of the river, by back ways, to the widow Baimakova's orchard. Mosquitoes hummed in the warm darkness, as though it were they that spread over the earth the pleasant odours of cucumbers, apples, and dill. The moon rolled among grey banks of cloud, and soft shadows caressed the river. Stepping over the fence, Artamonov stole softly through the orchard, to the yard. Now he entered the dark shed, and an anxious whisper sounded in the corner:

"Are you sure you weren't seen?"

Throwing off his clothes, he grumbled crossly:

"It makes me sick, hiding this way. Like a green boy!"

"Then you shouldn't keep a mistress."

\* A Russian variety of psaltery.—*Ed.*

"I wouldn't, either, only the Lord found me one."

"Oh, what are you saying, heretic! You and I are sinning against God."

"Well, well, let that be. Some other time. Ugh, Ulyana, but the people in this town...."

"Don't let them bother you," the woman whispered, and consoled him with long fierce caresses. When she had rested, she would tell him about the townsfolk: which were to be feared, which were clever, and which dishonest, and which had easy money.

"They know you need plenty of wood, so Pomyalov and Voroponov are planning to buy up all the timber round about, to make things hard for you."

"Too late. The prince has sold me his timber."

Around them and over them hung impenetrable darkness. They could not see even one another's eyes. They spoke in soundless whispers. The shed smelled of hay, and birch brooms; and a damp, pleasant coolness rose from the cellar below. The little town lay drenched in a heavy, leaden quiet. Now and then a rat would scamper through the straw, or a mouse squeak faintly; and every hour the cracked bell in St. Nicholas' belfry would send its dreary, quavering call into the night.

"Ah, the bigness of you," Artamonov murmured ardently, stroking her warm, soft body. "The power! Why didn't you bear more children?"

"There were two, besides Natalya. They were sickly, and died."

"Then your husband was no good."

"You wouldn't believe it," she whispered, "but until you came I didn't know what love was. Women would talk about it, but I never believed them. I thought they were lying, out of shame! I knew nothing but shame with my husband. Going to bed was like going to the block. I used to pray to God for him to fall asleep, and not touch me! He was a good man, peaceable, and clever, only God didn't give him the gift of love."

Her story aroused Artamonov, and at the same time

amazed him. Firmly caressing her high breasts, he grumbled:

"So that's the kind of things that happen. I never knew. I thought any man would be sweet to a woman."

He felt stronger, wiser, beside this woman, whom he knew by day as a quiet, even, prudent housewife, respected by the town for her intelligence and literacy. Once, touched by her girlish caresses, he said:

"I know what this costs you. We shouldn't have paired off the young ones—you and I should have married."

"Your boys are good fellows. No harm if they do find out about us. But if the town finds out...."

A shudder shook her whole frame.

"Don't you worry," whispered Ilya.

Another day, she asked curiously:

"Tell me: that man you killed—do you dream about him?"

Calmly smoothing his beard, Ilya replied:

"No. I sleep soundly. No dreams. And why should I dream about him? I didn't even see him. Somebody hit me, and I almost toppled over. I swung my bludgeon, and it hit someone on the head, and then I hit another, and the third ran away."

He sighed, and muttered resentfully:

"Fools run into you, and you have to answer for them to God."

He did not speak for a while. She asked:

"Are you asleep?"

"No."

"You'd better be starting. It's almost dawn. Where will you go—to the mill? Ah, but you'll wear yourself out, all on account of me."

"Never fear. I stood the grey days, and I'll stand the holidays," he boasted, dressing.

He would walk through the cool, pearly dusk of early morning—walk on his own land, his hands thrust under his coat behind him, raising the cloth like a rooster's tail.

Trampling the chips and shavings underfoot, he might reflect:

"I'll have to let Alyosha sow his wild oats, till he stops frothing. He's hard to manage, but he's a good lad."

Lying down on the sand, or on a pile of shavings, he would quickly fall asleep. Now dawn spread softly over the greenish sky. The boastful sun unfurled its rays, a peacock train, and then rose itself, golden, following it. The building hands, awakening, spied the big, prostrate form, and the warning passed on:

"He's here!"

Tikhon Vyalov, with his high cheekbones, an iron pick over his shoulder, stood looking down at Artamonov with flickering eyes, as though intending to step over him, but lacking in resolution.

The big man was not awakened by the bustle of the workers, by the shouts and hammering. He lay with his face to the sky, snoring away like a saw that needs sharpening. The ditch digger strode off, with many a backward glance, blinking like one who has been struck over the head. Alexei came out of the house, in a white linen shirt and blue trousers. He made for the river to bathe, walking lightly as on air, and carefully detouring his uncle, as though afraid that the faint rustle of shavings underfoot might awaken him. Nikita had driven off before dawn. Almost every day, he brought in a cartload or two of humus from the forest, to spread over the land he had cleared for his orchard. He had already planted birches, maples, rowans, and bird cherry, and was now preparing the ground for fruit trees, digging deep pits in the sand and filling them up with humus, river mud, and clay. On holidays Tikhon Vyalov would lend him a helping hand.

"Planting orchards is no sin, even on holy days," he would say.

Pyotr Artamonov paced the building site, pulling absently at his ear, observing the work. A saw ate lusciously into wood; planes shuffled wheezing, to and fro; axes tapped loud and clear; mortar splashed wetly onto

masonry, and a whetstone sobbed against a dull axe edge. Carpenters, lifting a beam, struck up "Dubinushka", and somewhere a young voice sang out lustily:

*Friend Zakhary visited Mary,  
Punched her mug to make her merry.*

"That's a coarse song," Pyotr observed to Vyalov. The ditch digger, knee-deep in sand, returned:

"It don't make any difference what you sing."

"What do you mean?"

"There's no soul in words."

"A queer fellow," thought Pyotr, turning away. He recalled that, when his father had offered Vyalov the job of overseer, this man had replied, his eyes fixed on the ground:

"No, I'm no good for that. I can't order people around. Take me on as yard-keeper."

Artamonov had cursed him roundly.

...Autumn came, cold and wet. Rust covered the orchards, and spotted the black iron of the forests. A damp wind whistled over the point, driving the pale, trampled shavings into the river. Every morning, carts drawn by shaggy horses would roll up to the warehouse. The carts were loaded with flax. Pyotr would examine the merchandise, watchful lest these bearded, gloomy peasants try to fool him with "sweaty" flax, dampened to increase its weight, or to pass off the ordinary grade for the fibre-flax. It was hard, dealing with the peasants. Fiery Alexei would bicker with them furiously. The father left for Moscow, and then Pyotr's mother-in-law set out too, to pray at a nunnery, or so she said. Of an evening, at tea or supper, Alexei would complain peevishly:

"It's no fun living here. I don't like the people."

This invariably angered Pyotr.

"You're no better than them! Picking quarrels right and left. You boast too much."

"I've something to boast of, that's why."

Tossing his curls, throwing back his shoulders, and



puffing up his chest, he would look, through screwed-up eyes, at his cousins and Natalya. She avoided him, and treated him coldly. She seemed to fear something about him.

After dinner, when her husband and Alexei went off to work again, she would go to Nikita's tiny, monkish room and sit down with her sewing in the armchair by the window. The hunchback had made this chair for her himself, carving it skilfully of birch. Entrusted with the office work, he sat at his desk from morning to night, writing and drawing up accounts; but when Natalya came in he would drop his work for a while, and talk to her of the princes, and how they lived, and the flowers that grew in their hothouses. His high, girlish voice was strained, yet caressing, and his blue eyes stared out through the window, avoiding the woman's face. Bending over her sewing, she would fall into a thoughtful silence, like a person alone with himself. Thus they would sit, for an hour, or sometimes two, hardly glancing at one another; only now and then, timidly, half involuntarily, Nikita would turn the caressing warmth of his blue eyes upon his sister-in-law, and his big, dog ears would redden perceptibly. Sometimes his momentary glance would cause her, too, to look up, smiling kindly at him. It was a strange smile. At times Nikita felt that it concealed a dim understanding of his emotion. At others, it seemed to express a sense of injury, and, simultaneously, to injure him; and he would drop his eyes guiltily.

Rain splashed and murmured outside the window, washing away the faded tints of summer. They heard Alexei shouting somewhere. A bear cub, recently chained in a corner of the yard, roared loudly. A dull clatter rose from the yard, where the women were scutching flax. Alexei came clattering in, soaking wet, spattered with mud, his hat pushed far back on his head—yet reminiscent, nonetheless, of a day in spring. Grinning, he reported that Tikhon Vyalov had chopped off a finger.

"He pretends it was an accident, but it's clear enough:

he's afraid of the draft. Me, I'd go like a shot, just to get away from here."

He scowled, and rumbled, like the bear cub:

"Stuck ourselves in a hole, miles from anywhere."

Then he extended a demanding hand.

"Give me some change. I'm going to town."

"What for?"

"None of your business."

As he marched out, he began a song:

*See the wench run through the clover,  
Bringing patties to her lover.*

"Ah, but he'll land in trouble some day," said Natalya. "My friends often see him with Olga Orlova, and she's only fourteen. Her mother's dead, and her father's a drunkard."

Nikita was disturbed by her manner. He seemed to hear too much melancholy, too much anxiety, even a hint of envy, in her words.

He looked silently out through the window. Pine boughs were swaying in the damp air outside, flinging the quicksilver raindrops from the tips of their green needles. He had planted those pines. All the trees around the house were of his planting.

Pyotr came in, gloomy and tired.

"Time for tea, Natalya."

"It's early."

"It's time, I say!" he shouted. When his wife had left the room, he sat down in her place. He, too, grumbled and complained:

"Father dumped the whole business on my shoulders. I spin like a wheel, and I don't know where I'm rolling. If I'm not running things right, he'll have it in for me."

Nikita spoke to him, in mild and cautious terms, about Alexei and the Orlova girl; but Pyotr only waved his hand, evidently not listening.

"I have no time to bother with girls! I don't even see my wife, except at night, when I'm half asleep. In the

daytime I'm blind as a bat. Your head's full of foolishness."

Pulling at his ear, he went on guardedly:

"It's no sort of business for us, this mill. We ought to go out in the steppes, and buy some land, and work it. There'd be less noise, and more results."

Ilya Artamonov returned from his trip in excellent spirits, looking years younger. He had clipped his beard, and his shoulders seemed broader than ever, his eyes brighter. He was like a plough reforged. Sitting back easily on the sofa, he said:

"Our enterprise must advance like an army on the march. There will be plenty of work for you, and your children, and your grandchildren. For three hundred years to come. We Artamonovs—we must bring new life to the country's business!"

He eyed his daughter-in-law searchingly, and shouted:

"Rounding out, Natalya? If it's a boy, I'll give you a fine present."

In the evening, as they were preparing for bed, Natalya said to her husband:

"Father's nice when he's gay."

Her husband answered coldly, with a sidelong glance:

"Of course he's nice—he promised you a present."

After two or three weeks, however, Artamonov's liveliness slumped, and he seemed preoccupied with some absorbing thought. Natalya asked Nikita:

"What's father angry at?"

"I don't know. He's hard to understand."

That same evening, at tea, Alexei said suddenly, very loud and clear:

"Father! Let me off to the army."

"Wh-what's that?" Ilya stammered out.

"I won't live here."

"Get out!" Artamonov ordered them all; but when Alexei went to the door with the rest, he shouted:

"Wait, Alyoshka!"

For a long time he stood looking at the boy, his hands

behind his back, his eyebrows twitching. Then he said:

"And I put such hopes in you!"

"I can't live here."

"Humbug! Your place is here. Your mother gave you to me, for mine. Go!"

Alexei took one halting step, but his uncle stopped him again, laying a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"I'm too easy with you. My father would have used his fists. Go."

Yet once more he called to the boy to wait, and added sternly:

"You're going to be a big man—understand? Don't let me hear any more whining."

Alone, he stood for a long time at the window, tugging at his beard, watching the wet, grey snow drift down to earth. When the night outside grew dark as a cellar, he set out for the town. Baimakova's gate was already locked. He tapped at the window, and Ulyana herself came to let him in. Frowning, she asked:

"Coming here at such an hour?"

Without pausing to reply, or even to take off his coat, he strode past her into the room. Flinging his hat into the corner, he dropped into a chair, and, his elbows on the table, his fingers in his beard, told her about Alexei.

"He was born on the side—my sister fooled around with the master. And there you are. Blood tells."

She tried the shutters, to see that they were well fastened, and blew out the candle. A blue icon lamp on a silver stand glowed faintly in the corner, under the icons.

"Get him a wife. That will tie him down," she said.

"Yes. That's got to be done. Only that isn't all. Pyotr—he has no spirit in him. It's just too bad. A man without spirit can't make nor break. He works as if it was still for the master, not for himself, as if he was still a serf. He don't feel his freedom—understand? Nikita—what's there to say about him? He's a cripple. He thinks of nothing but trees and flowers. I thought Alexei would get his teeth into the work."

Baimakova tried to reassure him.

"You're worrying too soon. Have patience. When the wheel starts turning faster, it'll pull them in."

They sat talking until midnight, side by side in the warm hush of the room, with the dim cloud of bluish light shimmering over the timid bud of flame in the icon corner. From complaints of the lack of business spirit in his own boys, Artamonov turned to the townspeople:

"Small-souled creatures."

"They dislike you because fortune favours you. We women love for that, but to a man, another man's good luck is just an eyesore."

Ulyana Baimakova knew how to soothe and console. Artamonov only grunted when she said:

"One thing I'm scared to death of—a baby."

"Business in Moscow's like a pot aboiling," he continued, rising, and embraced her. "Eh, if only you were a man...."

"Go, my dear. Good-bye!"

He kissed her and left.

...During Shrovetide, Yerdanskaya brought Alexei home from town in a sledge, beaten to loss of consciousness, his clothing ripped and torn. Yerdanskaya and Nikita rubbed his body with grated horseradish and vodka, but for a long time he only groaned, and did not speak. Artamonov strode about the room like a wild beast, rolling up his shirt sleeves and pulling them down again, gritting his teeth. When Alexei came to, he roared, waving his fists:

"Who was it? Talk up!"

Opening one swollen eye, dark with pain and anger, gasping for breath, and spitting blood, Alexei wheezed only:

"Finish me off."

Natalya sobbed aloud in fright. Artamonov stamped furiously, and yelled at her:

"Shut up! Get out of here!"

Alexei clutched his head, as though trying to pull it off, and moaned.

Then, throwing out his arms, he rolled over on his side and lay still, his bloodstained mouth wide open with his wheezing breath. A candle flickered on the table beside the bed, and shadows crawled over his battered body, making it seem to swell and blacken. The brothers stood, silent and depressed, at the foot of the bed, while the father paced the room, demanding of some invisible arbiter:

"Won't he pull through?"

But after eight days Alexei was on his feet again, though he still coughed soggily and spat blood. He took to steaming himself in the bathhouse, and drinking peppered vodka. A dark, sullen fire kindled in his eyes, and that made them still more attractive. He would not say who had beaten him, but Yerdanskaya found out, and reported: Stepan Barsky, two firemen, and Voroponov's Mordvinian yardkeeper. When Artamonov asked Alexei whether this was so, he replied:

"I don't know."

"You're lying!"

"I didn't see 'em. They threw something over my head, from behind—a coat, it must have been."

"You're hiding something," said Artamonov. Alexei looked straight at him, with an unwholesome light in his eyes, and said:

"I'm going to get well."

"You should eat more," Artamonov advised, and muttered into his beard: "They ought to be torched, for such a job—get their paws roasted."

He became more attentive towards Alexei, more roughly affectionate; and he worked with demonstrative energy, making no secret of his aim: to inspire the boys with his own passion for labour.

"Put your hand to everything. Don't stick up your nose at any job," he urged them, and himself did much that might have been left to others. In everything he under-

took, he displayed an animal adroitness, that enabled him to tell just where resistance was strongest, and how most easily to overcome it.

His daughter-in-law's pregnancy dragged out abnormally. When, finally, after two days of torment, Natalya gave birth to a girl, he was sorely vexed.

"What's the use of that?"

"Thank the good Lord for His mercy," Ulyana told him sternly. "Do you know whose day this is? Elena of the Flax!"

"No!"

He seized the church almanac and looked up the date, pleased as a child.

"Take me to her!"

Laying a pair of ruby earrings and five gold pieces on Natalya's breast, he cried:

"There you are! Well done, though it's not a boy!"

And, turning to Pyotr, he demanded:

"Well, old fish, are you glad? I was, when you were born!"

Pyotr was staring apprehensively at his wife's face—bloodless, tortured, barely recognizable. Her weary eyes had sunk into dark pits, whence they looked out at persons and things as though recalling long-forgotten memories. Slowly, she passed her tongue over her bitten lips.

"Why don't she say anything?" Pyotr asked his mother-in-law.

"She's yelled enough," returned Ulyana, and pushed him out of the room.

For two days and two nights he had listened to his wife's cries. At first he pitied her, and feared that she would die. Later, half stupefied by her screams and by the bustle which filled the household, he was too worn for fear or pity. He tried only to get away as far as possible, to some place where he would not hear. But the cries were not to be escaped, for they rang within his brain, evoking the most unusual thoughts. And wherever he went, he

came across Nikita, with an axe or a spade, cutting, chopping, digging, hurrying to and fro with the noiseless tread of a mole. The hunchback seemed to be running in circles. Perhaps that was why he turned up everywhere.

"Looks like she won't come through," Pyotr said to his brother. Thrusting his spade into the sand, the hunchback asked:

"What does the midwife say?"

"She says not to worry, it'll be all right. What makes you shiver so?"

"I've got a toothache."

Sitting on the porch with Nikita and Tikhon, the evening after the child was born, Pyotr said, with a thoughtful smile:

"The mother-in-law put the baby in my arms, and I was so glad I didn't even feel the weight. I almost threw her up to the ceiling. It's strange, a tiny thing like that, and so much suffering on account of it."

Tikhon Vyalov, meditatively rubbing his cheek, said, in his usual quiet tone:

"All human sufferings come from little things."

"What do you mean?" asked Nikita severely. The yardkeeper, yawning, replied indifferently:

"Things just are that way."

They were called into the house for supper.

The child was big and healthy, but after five months it died, poisoned by charcoal gas. The mother, also poisoned, was barely saved.

"Well, it can't be helped," Artamonov told Pyotr at the cemetery. "She'll bear you other children. And now we have a grave of our own here. That's a deep anchor. When a man has his own with him and his own below him—his own above ground and his own under ground—that's when he takes firm root!"

Pyotr nodded. He was watching his wife. Natalya stood, awkwardly bowed, her eyes fixed on the tiny mound at her feet, which Nikita was carefully smoothing with a spade. Brushing the tears from her cheeks with



feverish haste, as though afraid to burn her fingers against her red, swollen nose, she whispered:

"Oh Lord, oh Lord...."

Alexei rambled about among the crosses, reading inscriptions. He had grown thin, and looked older. Dark down had begun to grow on his cheeks and chin, making his non-peasant features seem scorched and smoke-blackened. His insolent eyes, sunk deep under their black brows, regarded all the world with dislike. He spoke dully, in a haughty manner, with what seemed deliberate indistinctness, and when people failed to make him out, would curse them shrilly.

"You heard me, all right!"

There was a scoffing, unpleasant note in his attitude towards his cousins, and he shouted at Natalya as though she were a servant. When Nikita said reproachfully:

"You shouldn't be so mean to Natasha," he returned:

"I'm a sick man."

"She's peaceable enough."

"Well, and she can keep her peace."

Alexei spoke often of his ill health, and almost always with pride, as of some virtue distinguishing him from ordinary mortals.

Walking home from the cemetery with his uncle, he said:

"We ought to have our own graveyard. It's a disgrace to lie with this lot, even when you're dead."

Artamonov replied, with a short laugh:

"We will. Everything of our own—church, and cemetery, and school, and hospital. Just give me time!"

Crossing the bridge across the Vataraksha, they passed a beggarlike figure of a man, in a shabby, rust-coloured smock, leaning against the rail. He looked like some petty official, ruined by drink. His flabby cheeks were overgrown with stiff grey stubble; his hairy, mumbling lips exposed black stumps of teeth, and a muddy light gleamed in his moist eyes. Artamonov turned his face away and spat. Noticing, however, that Alexei nodded

with unusual deference to this human trash, he asked: "What's the idea?"

"That's Orlov, the watchmaker."

"I can see myself it's Orlov!"

"He's a man with a head," Alexei persisted. "He's been persecuted."

Artamonov glanced sharply at his nephew, but said nothing.

The summer came, hot and dry. Beyond the Oka, forest fires were frequent. By day, the earth was shadowed by an opal cloud of acrid smoke; by night, the bald moon, turned an ugly red, hung among rayless stars that looked like copper nailheads, and the river, mirroring the muddy sky, seemed a chill, viscous stream of subterranean smoke.

After supper, one stifling evening, the Artamonovs sat at tea in the orchard, under maples. The trees had taken well, but their leafy crowns could give no shade in the evening murk. Crickets were chirping, beetles droning. The samovar hummed. Natalya silently poured tea. She had undone the upper buttons of her blouse, and her skin showed in the opening, warm and creamy. The hunchback sat with bent head, whittling twigs for bird cages. Pyotr, pulling at the lobe of his ear, said, very low:

"It can't do any good—provoking people, and father does it all the time."

Alexei kept coughing drily, turning his head in the direction of the town as though in expectation.

A bell clanged drearily.

"Alarm? Fire?" cried Alexei, and sprang up, lifting a hand to his head.

"What's wrong with you? It's the church bell, ringing the hour."

Alexei left the table. There was a silence, and then Nikita remarked softly:

"He's got fires on his brain."

"He's always cross," put in Natalya diffidently. "And to think how gay he used to be!"

Sternly, as became the elder, Pyotr reproached his wife and brother:

"You stare at him like morons, both of you. He can't stand being pitied. Let's go to sleep, Natalya."

They left. The hunchback followed them with his eyes. Then he, too, got up, and went to the summerhouse, where he had made up a bed of hay. He sat down on the threshold. The summerhouse stood on a grass-covered mound. Looking out over the fence from the doorway, he could see the houses of the town, a dark flock, shepherded by the church steeples and the firemen's watch-tower. Cups tinkled under the maples, where the servants were clearing the tea table. A group of weavers passed along the fence. One carried a dragnet, and another a clattering pail. A third one was striking sparks with flint and steel, trying to catch them on tinder in order to light his pipe. A dog growled, and Tikhon Vyalov's calm voice sounded through the quiet night:

"Who goes?"

A hush spread over the earth, strained and taut as a drumhead. Even the weavers' footsteps, crunching faintly in the sand, were echoed by it, painfully distinct. Nikita loved the stillness of such nights. The deeper the hush, the more intensely did his power of imagination centre round Natalya; the more clearly could he picture her dear eyes, always a little frightened or wondering. And it was so easy to think up all sorts of happy eventualities. Perhaps he would find a great treasure, and give it to Pyotr, and Pyotr would give him Natalya. Or perhaps robbers would attack, and he would perform such deeds of heroism that his father and brother would give him Natalya of their own free will, as a reward for what he had done. Or sickness might come, and carry off all the family but two: himself and Natalya; and then he would make her see that her happiness lay in him.

It was past midnight when he noticed a new cloud rising from the motionless shadows of the orchards, over the herded houses of the town, ascending slowly into the

dark-grey murk of the sky. A moment later, it was lit up redly from below, and he realized that it marked a conflagration. Running towards the house, he saw Alexei scrambling up a ladder to the warehouse roof.

"Fire!" Nikita shouted. His cousin replied, still climbing:

"I know. What of it?"

"Why, you were expecting one," said the hunchback suddenly, stopping short in the middle of the yard.

"And if I was, what of it? There's always fires in such dry weather."

"We ought to call the weavers."

But Tikhon had already called them, and they were running off towards the river, shouting noisily.

"Climb up here," said Alexei, who was now seated astride the ridge of the roof. The hunchback climbed up obediently, muttering:

"I hope Natalya won't get scared."

"Aren't you scared Pyotr might thrash another hump onto your back?"

"Why should he?" asked Nikita softly. And the answer came:

"Keep your eyes off his wife."

For a long time the hunchback could not answer. He felt as though he were slipping, sliding down the roof. In another moment, he would be dashed against the ground.

"What do you mean? You should think before you talk," he muttered.

"All right, all right! I'm not blind.... Don't worry," said Alexei, cheerfully as he had not spoken for a long time past. Shading his eyes with his hand, he watched the heavy, rocking tongues of flame that shattered the stillness, transforming it into a muffled roaring. With lively interest, he rattled on:

"It's the Barskys. They've got a good score barrels of tar in their yard. The fire won't spread to the neighbours—the orchards will stop it."

"I must run away," Nikita was thinking, as he looked out into the fire-torn darkness. In the red air stood trees that seemed forged out of iron; on the red earth bustled toylike human figures. He could even see the long, thin hooks they thrust into the fire.

"It's burning fine," said Alexei approvingly.

"I'll go to a monastery," thought the hunchback.

Pyotr's voice came up to them, grumbling crossly and sleepily in the yard, then Tikhon Vyalov's leisurely reply. Natalya stood in the window, crossing herself, like a portrait in a frame.

Nikita sat on the roof until nothing was left of the fire but a bed of golden, flickering embers around the black piles of the chimneys. Then he climbed down, and started out through the gate, but bumped into his father—soaking wet, smeared with soot, his cap gone and his coat in tatters.

"Where are you going?" yelled Artamonov with extraordinary fury, and pushed Nikita back into the yard. Catching sight of the white figure on the roof, he shouted at Alexei, more savagely still:

"What are you doing up there? Get down! You've got to take care of yourself, you fool."

Nikita went into the orchard, and sat down on the bench under his father's window. Soon he heard a door slam, and Artamonov's voice, in the room above him, demanded with smothered passion:

"Are you out to ruin yourself? And bring shame on my head? I'll show you...."

Alexei returned shrilly:

"You gave me the idea yourself."

"Shut up! You'd better thank God that rascal can't talk."

Nikita got up and retreated softly, but hastily, through the orchard to the summerhouse.

Next morning, at tea, the father said:

"It was arson. That drunkard, the watchmaker, did it. They beat him up, and it looks like he'll die. Barsky

ruined him, people say, and he had a grudge against Stepan, too. It's a dark business."

Alexei sat calmly drinking milk. Nikita's hands were shaking. He thrust them between his knees, and gripped them hard. The father, noticing his movement, asked:

"What's wrong with you?"

"I'm feeling sick."

"You all feel sick. I'm the only one that's well."

Angrily pushing away his unfinished tea, he left the table.

Artamonov's business was rapidly gathering people. Two versts from the mill, on heathery hillsides, among scattered spruces, cabins were built—small and squat, without yards or fences, veritable beehives when viewed from a distance. Near a shallow gully, once the bed of a river whose very name was now forgotten, Artamonov set up a barrack for workers who had no families. This was a long building, with a single-pitched roof and three chimneys, with tiny windows, designed to prevent the escape of warmth. The windows made the place look like a stable, and the workers called it "Stallions' Palace".

Ilya Artamonov became increasingly noisy and boastful; but he did not acquire the hauteur that comes with wealth. He was at home with the workers—feasted at their weddings, acted godfather to their children, and liked to sit around, of a holiday, talking with the older weavers. They gave him the idea of advising the peasants to sow flax on exhausted soil, and on the sites of forest fires. The results were excellent. The old weavers sang the praises of their genial employer, seeing in him a peasant who had gained the smiles of fortune; and they admonished the youth:

"Learn from him how business is done!"

Ilya Artamonov, on his part, told his sons:

"Peasants, working folk, have more sense than townsfolk. People in towns are weak in the bone, and their brains are battered. A townsman is greedy, but he's afraid to dare. His enterprise is shallow, and nothing he does will

last. Townspeople know no measure in anything. The peasant, he keeps inside the bounds of truth; he don't fling about from one thing to another. And truth to him is simple: God, for instance, and grain, and the tsar. He's simple through and through, the peasant. Hold on to him. You, Pyotr, you're stiff with the workers. You talk about nothing but business. That's no good. You need small talk, too, and jokes—cheerful talk is easier understood."

"I'm no good at joking," said Pyotr, pulling mechanically at his ear.

"Learn to be good at it. A minute's fun—an hour's run of energy. Alexei's no good with the men either. He shouts too much, and picks on every trifle."

"They're cheats and loafers," Alexei returned, with spirit.

Artamonov rebuked him sternly:

"What do you know about them?" But he smiled into his beard, and covered the smile with his hand so they would not notice it. He recalled how boldly and sensibly Alexei had borne himself in the argument with the townspeople over the cemetery. The Dryomov folk had refused to have mill hands buried in their cemetery, and in the end Artamonov had had to buy a big stretch of alder grove from Pomyalov and clear a graveyard of his own.

"A graveyard," meditated Tikhon Vyalov, as he and Nikita felled the slender, sickly alders. "We use the wrong word in the wrong place. We call it a yard, and it's our home for all eternity. Houses, and towns—those are the yards you pass through to eternity."

Nikita had found that Vyalov worked with an easy proficiency, evincing greater logic in his labour than in his obscure and always unexpected pronouncements. Like Artamonov, he would quickly find the point of least resistance in any task, husbanding his strength and getting things done by craft and skill. But there was a difference, clearly defined: Artamonov set about every task with zeal, while Vyalov seemed to work reluctantly, as though purely

out of kindness—like a man who knows that he is capable of better things. In speaking, too, his manner was the same: laconic, condescending, significant, with a shade of casual indifference, as though hinting:

"I know plenty more, besides. I haven't said the half!"

And to Nikita his every word seemed to carry vague hints, arousing a feeling of resentment towards this man, of fear, and at the same time of keen, uneasy curiosity.

"You know a lot," he said to Vyalov. The yard-keeper answered leisurely:

"That's what I live for. If I know, it's no misfortune because I know for myself. What I know is locked up in a miser's strongbox. Nobody sees it. You can rest easy about it."

Tikhon never questioned people about their thoughts. He would just stare at a person persistently, his bird-eyes flickering, and then, as though he had absorbed the other's thoughts, speak suddenly of things that he was never meant to know. Sometimes Nikita wished Vyalov would bite off his tongue, or chop it off, as he had his finger. Even that he had bungled, crippling the left hand instead of the right. Artamonov, and Pyotr, and all the rest thought Vyalov a fool; but he seemed no fool to Nikita, whose mingled feeling of curiosity and fear towards this strange, high-cheeked man grew steadily. The element of fear was particularly accentuated when Vyalov suddenly remarked, one day, as he and Nikita were walking home through the forest:

"You're still pining for her. Why don't you tell her, you goose? Perhaps she'd be nice to you. She seems kind."

The hunchback stopped short, his heart sinking in dismay, his feet heavy as lead. He mumbled confusedly:

"Tell what? Tell who?"

Vyalov only glanced at him, and made to stride on. Nikita clutched at the yard-keeper's sleeve, but Tikhon brushed his hand away disgustedly.

"What's the good of shamming?"

Dropping the birch sapling he carried on his shoulder,



Nikita cast a desperate look around him. He wanted to strike Tikhon's rugged face, wanted to make him hold his tongue. But Tikhon, looking through screwed-up eyes into the distance, spoke with his usual quiet composure:

"And if she isn't kind, she might pretend to be. Women—they're inquisitive. There isn't a one who wouldn't like to try another man, to see if there's anything sweeter than sugar. For us, it isn't much we need. Once, and again—and we're satisfied and well. And you just eat yourself. Try your luck: tell her. Maybe she'll be willing."

Nikita sensed in these words a note of friendly pity, such as he had never before encountered; and his throat contracted bitterly. Yet at the same time he felt as though Tikhon was stripping, denuding him.

"You're talking nonsense," he said.

Bells were ringing in the town, calling the people to Mass. Tikhon adjusted his load of saplings and moved on, jabbing at the ground with his iron spade and saying, in the same calm tones:

"Don't you fear me. I'm sorry for you. You're a nice fellow, and interesting. All you Artamonovs are terribly interesting. You're not like a hunchback inside at all, for all the hump on your back."

Nikita's fright dissolved in surging melancholy. His eyes dimmed, and he stumbled like one drunk. He felt like dropping to the ground to rest. Softly, he pleaded:

"Keep it to yourself, will you?"

"I told you—it's locked up, all safe."

"Forget about it. Don't tell her anything."

"I never talk to her. What should I talk to her about?"

They walked the rest of the way in silence. The hunchback's blue eyes grew bigger, rounder, sadder. He would stare over people's shoulders into nothingness, more silent and inconspicuous than ever. But Natalya noticed that something was wrong.

"What makes you so glum lately?" she asked. Nikita replied:

"Too much work"—and made off hurriedly. She felt

hurt, for this was not the first time she had sensed a change in her brother-in-law's former affection. It was but a dull life she led. In four years, she had borne two more girls, and now she was heavy again.

"Why do you keep having girls? What's the good of them?" her father-in-law had grumbled, when the second was born. He had made her no gift, and to Pyotr he had complained:

"I need grandsons, not sons-in-law. I didn't start my business for strangers."

His every word imbued the woman with a sense of guilt. Her husband, too, she felt, was displeased. Lying beside him at night, her eyes fixed on the distant stars beyond the window, she would stroke her belly, praying silently:

"Dear Lord, give me a son."

But there were times when she wanted to shout at her husband and father-in-law:

"I'll have girls on purpose, just to spite you!"

She would have liked to do something extraordinary, something that would surprise them all—something wonderful, to make them kinder to her, or something bad, to frighten them. But she could think of nothing concrete good or bad.

Rising at dawn, she would go down to the kitchen to help the cook prepare the morning tea. Then she would run upstairs to feed her children, then serve tea to her father-in-law, her husband, and her brothers-in-law, then feed the children again, then sew and mend for the family. After dinner, she would take the children to the orchard, and remain there until evening tea. Lively bobbin girls would peep into the orchard, and contend in praising the children's good looks. Natalya would smile, but give their praise no credit. She saw no beauty in the children.

Sometimes, among the trees, she would see Nikita—the only one of them all who used to speak to her kindly. But nowadays, when she asked him to sit with her awhile, he would answer guiltily:

"I'm sorry. I have no time."

Gradually, a bitter thought took shape in her mind. The hunchback's kindness, she felt, had been counterfeit. He was only her husband's watchdog, set to spy on her and Alexei. She was afraid of Alexei, because he attracted her. Should this handsome brother-in-law desire, she would be unable, she knew, to withstand him. But he did not desire. He hardly noticed her. This pricked her vanity, and aroused a feeling of enmity towards the lively, daring fellow.

At five o'clock they had tea, and at eight supper. Then Natalya would bathe the children, feed them, and put them to bed. Afterwards, she would pray lengthily, kneeling, and lie down beside her husband in the hope of conceiving a son. If her husband wanted her, he would grumble from the bed:

"That's enough. Come on."

She would cross herself hastily, cutting short her prayer, and lie down obediently beside him. Sometimes, very seldom, Pyotr would jest:

"Why do you pray so much? You can't get all you ask for anyway, or there wouldn't be anything left for the rest of the world."

At night, when wakened by a child's cry, after nursing and soothing the baby, she would go to the window and stand looking out at the orchard and the sky, thinking wordlessly about herself, her mother, her father-in-law, her husband—about all the hard day, so quickly past, had brought her. It was strange not to hear the accustomed voices, the songs of the working girls, now gay, now sad, and all the varied clatter and rustlings of the mill, merging in the loud hum of an enormous hive. The days were always filled by this persistent, hurried tumult. Its echoes floated through the rooms, murmured in the orchard foliage, brushed softly against the windowpanes. The sounds of labour, compelling attention, prevented thought.

But in the stillness of night, when all living things lay

silent and asleep, she would recall Nikita's dreadful tales of women captured by the Tatars, and of the lives of sainted hermits and martyrs. Sometimes she would recall tales of gay and happy life; but more often it was painful thoughts that recurred to memory.

Her father-in-law looked at her as if she were not there. That, at best. But sometimes, when he met her alone in the hall or in the rooms, his keen eyes would look her shamelessly up and down, from breast to knee, and he would snort disgustedly.

Her husband was stern and cold, and she felt, sometimes, when he looked at her, as though she were in his way, as though she blocked his view of something different that lay behind her. Often, when he had undressed, he would sit for a long time on the edge of the bed, one hand sunk into the feather mattress, the other pulling at his ear, or rubbing his beard against his cheek, as though his teeth ached. His plain face would pucker up in a querulous or angry frown, and Natalya would not dare approach the bed. He talked very little, and only of domestic affairs, recurring ever more seldom to his memories of peasant and manor life, so incomprehensible to Natalya. During the winter holidays, Christmas and Shrovetide, he would take her driving through the town. The sleigh would be drawn by a huge black stallion. It had coppery yellow, bloodshot eyes, and it tossed its head with angry vehemence, snorting loudly. Natalya was afraid of this beast, and her fear increased when Tikhon Vyalov declared:

"It's a horse for blue bloods. It won't be ruled by commoners."

Natalya's mother was a frequent visitor. The daughter envied her mother's freedom, the festive gleam that lit her eyes. This envy became the keener, the more painful, when Natalya saw how youthfully Artamonov jested with her mother, how complacently he stroked his beard, admiring his mistress, who posed proudly before him, swaying her hips, shamelessly vaunting her beauty. The

town had long since learned of Baimakova's intimacy with her kinsman, and condemned it rigorously. She was shunned by all. Natalya, too, lost her former friends, the daughters of the town's best families. They were forbidden to visit her—the daughter of a woman sunk in sin, the daughter-in-law of a grim and alien peasant, the wife of a moody and pridebloated husband. The little joys of girlhood now seemed to Natalya significant and vivid.

It was painful to see her mother, always so straightforward in the past, now stoop to cunning and prevarication. The widow, it appeared, was afraid of Pyotr, and tried to hide her fear by flattering words, by admiration of his efficiency. She must have been afraid of Alexei's mocking eyes too, for she would bandy friendly jokes with him, and whisper with him secretively, and she often made him presents. On his saint's day, she brought him a porcelain clock, adorned with grazing sheep and a woman wreathed in flowers—a beautiful thing, and artfully made. Everyone admired it.

"Someone left it with me for a debt," she explained. "Only three rubles. It doesn't go—it's too old. When Alyosha gets married, he'll have something to fix up his house with."

"I wouldn't mind fixing up mine," thought Natalya.

The mother would inquire about household affairs, instructing Natalya tediously:

"Don't put napkins out on weekdays. They get soiled too fast, with the men's beards and moustaches."

Though she had liked Nikita at first, she now pursed her lips when she saw him, and talked to him as people talk to clerks whom they suspect of dishonesty. She warned her daughter:

"See you don't get too friendly with him. Hunchbacks are sly."

More than once, Natalya thought of complaining to her mother that her husband did not trust her, and had set the hunchback to keep watch on her; but something always prevented her.

Worst of all, however, were the times when the mother, disturbed at Natalya's failure to bear sons, questioned her about her nightly dealings with her husband—questioned her shamelessly, openly, her humid eyes screwed up and smiling, her voice sunk to a velvety purr. This curiosity was very hard to bear, and Natalya would be only too pleased to hear her father-in-law call:

"Will you be driving home, kinswoman?"

"I'd rather walk."

"All right. I'll see you home."

Natalya's husband said thoughtfully:

"She's a clever woman, your mother, keeps Father well in hand. When she's around, he's not so hard on us. She ought to sell her house and move in here."

"I wouldn't like that," Natalya wanted to say; but she did not dare. More bitterly than ever, she envied her mother for being happy and beloved.

Sitting at a window that opened into the orchard, or out under the trees, with her sewing in her hands, she would hear fragments of talk from beyond the berry bushes, where Tikhon and Nikita were at work on something near the bathhouse. Through the drone of the mill came the yard-keeper's calm voice:

"When folks get the dumps, it comes from too many people. They all dump themselves together, the dummies, and there they are—in the dumps!"

"How true!" thought Natalya; but Nikita's pleasant voice remonstrated:

"You're all mixed up. What about games, and dances? There's no fun without people."

"That's true, too," reflected the woman, marvelling.

All the people she knew talked so confidently, with such firm knowledge—each his own. She could clearly see it: simple, solid words, fitted smoothly and closely together, fencing off for each speaker his own allotment of a firm and dependable truth. People were distinguished from one another by their words. They adorned themselves with words, jingled them like gold and silver watch

chains. Natalya had no such words. She had nothing in which to attire her thoughts. Elusive and misty as the autumn fog, her thoughts only burdened her, dulled her faculties. More and more often, she would reflect, in mortification and despair:

"I'm stupid, don't know a thing."

"Take a bear. He knows where honey lies. That's how he got his name,"\* Tikhon mumbled among the raspberry bushes.

"So it is," thought Natalya. Shuddering, she recalled how Alexei had killed her pet. Until it was thirteen months old, the bear had played around the yard, tame and affectionate as a dog. It would come into the kitchen and rear up on its hind legs, growling softly and blinking its funny little eyes, begging for bread—such a comical creature, but friendly and responsive to kindness. Everyone was fond of it. Nikita would comb its thick, shaggy wool, and take it to the river to bathe, and the bear grew so attached to him that when Nikita was not at home it would sniff the air anxiously, with upraised muzzle, and rush, snorting, across the yard to his office window. More than once, it smashed in the windowpanes, and even broke the sash. Natalya liked to feed it bread and molasses, and it soon learned to dip the bread into the molasses bowl itself. With joyful grunts, swaying and balancing on its shaggy hind legs, it would stuff the dripping bread into its pink, sharp-toothed mouth, and then lick the molasses from its sticky paw. Its good-natured little eyes beaming with happiness, it would rub its head against Natalya's knees, begging her to play. One could talk to this dear beast—it seemed to understand.

But one day Alexei gave it some vodka. The drunken bear began to roll and caper. It climbed onto the roof of the bathhouse and pulled the chimney to pieces, throwing

\* An untranslatable play of words. Tikhon interprets the Russian *medved* (bear) as if it were composed of two root words: *myod* (honey), and *vedat* (to know).—Tr.

the bricks to the ground. A crowd of workers assembled, guffawing at the creature's pranks. From that time forth, there was hardly a holiday when Alexei did not give the bear drink, for people's amusement. The beast grew so accustomed to tipsiness that it would chase after every worker who smelled of vodka, and gave Alexei no peace, rushing to him every time he passed through the yard. They chained it; but it smashed its kennel and went parading around the yard, tossing its head, dragging the log to which its chain was fastened. An attempt was made to catch it. It scratched up Tikhon's leg, knocked down a young worker named Morozov, and bruised Nikita's thigh with a heavy blow of the paw. Then Alexei ran up with a spear, and thrust it into the creature's belly. Natalya, watching from her window, saw the bear sink back on its haunches, its forepaws waving as though begging forgiveness of the people who were shouting so furiously around it. Someone handed Alexei a sharp axe, and, springing upwards, he struck the bear first across one paw, then across the other. With a loud roar, it fell onto its wounded paws. The blood poured out to right and left, forming dark red stains on the hard earth. Growling piteously, the bear laid down its head, as though inviting a new blow. Then Alexei took a firm stand, his feet spread wide apart, and brought the axe down on the base of the bear's skull, as though it were a block of wood. The brute's muzzle dropped into a pool of its own blood. The axe was sunk so deep into the bone that Alexei had to tug with all his might, driving his foot against the shaggy carcass, before he could pull it out. It was too bad, about the bear. But it was even worse that this gay, fearless, mischievous brother-in-law went about with some wench, and never so much as noticed her, Natalya.

Everyone praised Alexei for his courage and adroitness. The father shouted, clapping him on the shoulder:

"And you say you're sick! Malingerer!"

Nikita fled from the yard, and Natalya sobbed until her husband demanded, in vexed surprise:



"Suppose a man was killed in front of you? What would you do then?"

He shouted at her, as though she were a child:

"Shut up, you fool!"

She thought he was going to strike her. Winking back her tears, she recalled her first night with him, and how kind he had been, how timid—recalled that in all this time he had never struck her, as all husbands do their wives. She choked down her sobs, and said:

"I'm sorry. I was so fond of the bear."

"It's me you ought to be fond of, not the bear," he returned, more amicably.

The first time she complained to her mother of her husband's sternness, she recalled, the mother had said:

"Men are bees. We're their flowers. They come to us for honey. That's what you've got to understand, my dear, and learn to bear it. Men are the masters in everything. They have more cares than we. Churches, they build, and factories. Look what your father-in-law's built up where nothing was before."

Ever more furiously, Ilya Artamonov hastened to develop and consolidate his business. It was as though some foreboding whispered that his time was short. In May, shortly before St. Nicholas' day, a steam boiler arrived for the second block of the mill. The barge that brought it moored by the sandy bank of the Oka, at the point where it was lazily joined by the marshy waters of the green Vataraksha. There was a difficult job ahead: the boiler would have to be dragged some three hundred and fifty yards, over sandy soil. On St. Nicholas' day Artamonov gave his workers a fine holiday dinner, with vodka and beer in abundance. The tables were set in the yard. The women decked everything out in spruce and birch boughs and bunches of the first spring flowers, and themselves dressed up as brightly as any flowers. The master, with his family and a few invited guests, sat at table among the older weavers, joking boldly with the sharp-tongued bobbin girls, drinking deep, and skilfully

stimulating the feasters to merriment. Running a hand over his beard, already grey, he shouted boisterously:

"Eh, friends! Ain't we livin'!"

He was admired, and felt it. His intoxications grew still more with the very joy of being the man he was. He glowed and sparkled like this sunny day of spring; like all the earth, smart in the youthful green of grass and foliage and fragrant with the breath of birches and young pines, raising their golden cones to the pale blue sky. Spring was early, that year, and warm. Lilac and bird cherry were already blossoming. The whole world rejoiced and celebrated, and even in the hearts of men all that was best seemed to burst into bloom.

An ancient weaver got up: Boris Morozov, a sickly little old man, white and clean as a fresh-washed corpse, his tiny, waxen face tucked cosily away into a grey beard that had turned green with age. Leaning on the shoulder of his eldest son, a man of about sixty, he yelled lustily, waving a bony, fleshless hand:

"Look, I'm ninety years old, ninety and more, and how do you like it? I been a soldier—fought Pugachov, and mutinied myself, too, I did, in the plague year, in Moscow! I fought Bonaparte...."

"And who'd you hug?" Artamonov shouted, close to his ear. The weaver was deaf.

"Two wives, besides outsiders. Look: seven sons, two daughters, nineteen grandchildren, five great-grandchildren—all my work. There they are—all living with you. There they sit!"

"Give us some more!" shouted Ilya.

"You'll get 'em! Three tsars I've outlived, and a tsaritsa, too—now, how d'you like that? All the masters I worked for—they're all dead, and I'm alive! Miles of cloth, I've made. You're the real stuff, Ilya Vasilyevich. You're the one to live. A real master. You like the job, and the job likes you. There's no mean streak in you. You're a branch off our tree, so good luck to you! Success is your lawful wife, and no mistress that's kind for a while and

then dumps you! Go ahead! Your health, man! Your health, I say...."

Artamonov swept the old man up into his arms and kissed him, shouting emotionally:

"Thanks, infant! I'll make you my manager!"

Amid loud shouts and guffaws, the drunken old weaver, raised high above the table, brandished his skeleton fists and tittered shrilly:

"He's got his own way for everything, his own way."

Ulyana Baimakova brushed the tears of pleasure from her cheeks without concealment.

"So much happiness," her daughter said. Baimakova blew her nose before she could answer.

"That's the sort of man he is. God made him for happiness."

"Here's a lesson for you, youngsters," Artamonov shouted to his boys. "Learn how to get along with people. You watch, Pyotr!"

When the meal was over and the tables were cleared away, the women began to sing, while the men tried their sinews in wrestling and other contests of strength. Artamonov was everywhere, dancing and wrestling with the best. They made merry till dawn; and with the first rays of the sun a band of seventy workers, the master at their head, set out noisily for the river bank, like brigands on the raid, with drunken whoops and songs. On their shoulders they carried thick rollers, oaken levers, and heavy coils of rope. The little old weaver hobbled along over the sand behind them, mumbling to Nikita:

"He'll get his way! Him? Don't I know!"

They shifted it from the barge to the river bank—the stupid red monster, that looked like a headless bull. They cast their ropes around it, and, grunting in united effort, set it moving on the rollers, along boards laid across the sand. The boiler swayed as it advanced, and its foolish round mouth seemed to Nikita to gape in wonder at these people's merry strength. The father, drunk, hauled away with the rest, shouting tensely:

"Easy, there, go easy!"

He slapped the red side of the iron monster, urging it on:

"Roll, boiler, roll!"

They were only a hundred yards from the mill when the boiler swayed more violently than usual and slid unhurriedly away from the front roller, digging its obtuse mug into the sand. Nikita saw its round mouth blow grey dust over his father's feet. The men crowded angrily around the heavy carcass, trying to push the roller under. But they were tired, and the boiler stuck stubbornly in the sand, seeming to dig in ever deeper, for all that they could do. Artamonov laboured together with the rest, a lever in his hands, shouting:

"All together! All together—now!"

The boiler shifted reluctantly, and sank heavily back again. Nikita saw his father coming out of the crowd of workers, his gait strange and unfamiliar, his face, too, strange and unfamiliar. One hand was thrust under his beard, clutching at his throat. The other groped in the air, like a blind man's. The old weaver hobbled after him, crying:

"Eat some dirt, some dirt!"

Nikita ran to his father. Artamonov hiccuped and spat. A blob of blood fell at Nikita's feet. The father said dully: "Blood."

His face was grey. His eyes blinked with fright. His teeth chattered, and the whole of his big, efficient body seemed to shrink.

"Are you hurt?" asked Nikita, seizing him by the arm. The father staggered towards him and replied, very low:

"I think a vein's burst."

"Eat some dirt, I tell you."

"Leave me alone. Get away!"

Again Artamonov spat blood profusely. Perplexedly, he muttered:

"It keeps running. Where's Ulyana?"

The hunchback was about to run home, but his father

gripped his shoulder firmly. Artamonov stood with bowed head, shuffling his feet in the sand, as though listening to the crunching sound they made—barely audible through the angry shouts of the workers.

"What's the matter?" he asked, and started walking towards the house, with cautious steps, like one crossing over a deep river by a narrow plank. Baimakova was on the porch, saying good-bye to her daughter. Nikita noticed that when she caught sight of Artamonov, her handsome face twisted strangely, like a wheel, to the right and then to the left, and turned wan.

"Ice, quick!" she cried, when Artamonov sank clumsily to the porch steps, hiccupping and spitting blood with increasing frequency. As though in a dream, Nikita heard Tikhon mumbling:

"Ice is water. You can't make blood out of water."

"He ought to chew some dirt...."

"Tikhon, ride for the priest."

"Lift him up and bring him in." ordered Alexei. Nikita took his father by the elbow, but somebody stepped on his toes so hard that for a moment everything went dark. Then, his eyes began to see more keenly than ever, impressing on his brain with morbid eagerness all that the people were doing in his father's crowded room and in the yard. Tikhon was plunging about the yard, astride a big black horse he could not manage. The horse balked at the gate. It reared and circled, angrily tossing its head. The people scattered before it. Evidently, it was frightened by the conflagration kindled in the sky by the rising sun. Then, at last, it dashed out and galloped off; but at the sight of the boiler's huge red bulk it shied, threw Tikhon down, and turned back to the yard, snorting and waving its tail.

Somebody shouted:

"Boys! On the run!"

On the window-sill sat Alexei, twisting his dark, pointed beard. His sinister, non-peasant face was peaked, and grey as though covered with dust. Unblinking, he

stared across the room, over the heads of the people, at the bed on which Artamonov lay, mumbling in a strangely altered voice:

"So I was wrong. It's God's will. Boys, I leave Ulyana to you for your mother—do you hear? Ulya, you help them, in Christ's name. Ah! Send away the outsiders."

"Be still," moaned Baimakova plaintively, slipping bits of ice into his mouth. "There's no outsiders here."

Artamonov swallowed the ice and went on, with a hesitant sigh:

"If I sinned, it's not for you, boys, to judge. She's not to blame. Natalya, I was stern with you. Don't take it to heart. Pyotr, Alyosha, don't quarrel. Treat the workers well. They're good folk, the pick. Alyosha, you marry that girl of yours. That's all right!"

"Father, don't leave us," Pyotr pleaded, dropping to his knees; but Alexei nudged him, and whispered:

"Stop! I won't believe...."

Natalya was breaking up ice in a copper bowl, with a kitchen knife. The ice crunched, and clattered against the bowl. And with these sounds mingled the woman's whimpering sobs. Nikita saw her tears drip over the ice. A yellow sunbeam stole into the room, and, reflected from the mirror, formed a shapeless, quivering spot on the wall, trying to erase the red-clad, long-moustached Chinamen on the blue wallpaper, dark as the sky by night.

Nikita stood at Artamonov's feet, waiting for his father to remember him. Baimakova was combing Ilya's thick, curly hair, pausing now and again to wipe away with a napkin the blood that trickled endlessly from the corner of his mouth, and the beads of perspiration breaking out on his forehead and temples. She whispered something, looking into his dulling eyes—whispered fervently, as though in prayer. Laying one hand on her shoulder, the other on her knee, he mumbled, with heavy tongue, his last will:

"I know. May Christ save you. Bury me in our own

graveyard, not in town. I don't want to lie there. They can all...."

And again, in great, overwhelming distress, he whispered:

"Eh, but I was wrong. Oh, Lord.... All wrong."

The priest arrived, a tall, stoop-shouldered man with a Christlike beard and mournful eyes.

"Wait, Father," said Artamonov, and turned once more to his sons:

"Keep together, you three—don't divide the property! Don't quarrel. Enmity won't bring you anywhere. Pyotr, you're the eldest. You answer for everything—do you hear? Now go...."

"Nikita," Baimakova reminded him.

"Love Nikita. Where is he? Go.... Afterwards.... Natalya, too."

He died, from loss of blood, just after midday, when the sun still shone beneficently at its zenith. He lay with raised head, his waxen face frowning and full of care, his half-open eyes seeming to stare thoughtfully at his broad hands, folded submissively on his chest.

To Nikita it seemed that the whole household was not so much grieved and frightened as amazed by this death. He could sense this dull wonder in all but Baimakova, who sat speechless, tearless, beside the dead man—a frozen figure, deaf to the world, her hands lax on her knees, her eyes fixed immovably on the stony face above the snowy beard.

Pyotr held himself straight and stiff, and spoke too much and too loudly, when he entered the room where his father lay, and where Nikita and a fat nun, by turns, were intoning the plaints of the Psalter. Pyotr would look inquiringly into his father's face, cross himself, stand by the bed for two minutes or three, and tiptoe cautiously out of the room. Then his stocky figure would be seen in the yard and among the orchard trees, and he would seem to be in search of something.

Alexei was in a fever of activity, making arrangements

for the funeral. He would rush the carriage to town and back, then run to his father's room to ask Ulyana about the customs and traditions for the hural and the memorial feast.

"Wait," she would reply, and Alexei, hot and tired, would disappear. Natalya would come in, with timid sympathy, begging her mother to have some food or a cup of tea. She would listen quietly, and reply:

"Wait."

Nikita had never known, while Artamonov was alive, whether or not he loved his father. He had felt only fear, and—unaffected by this fear—admiration for the spirited activity of this man, who showed him no affection, and who, indeed, hardly noticed whether the hunchback was alive or dead. But now it seemed to Nikita that he, and only he, had genuinely, deeply loved his father. He was flooded with a dreary melancholy, experiencing gross and ruthless injury in the sudden death of this strong man; and his chest contracted so that he could hardly breathe. He sat on a chest in the corner, waiting for his turn to read the Psalter. The familiar words passed dully through his brain, while his eyes stared into the warm dusk of the room, at those living, swaying yellow blossoms—the wax candles. Long-moustached Chinamen clung like acrobats to the walls, balancing bales of tea that hung from yokes over their shoulders. Eighteen Chinamen, two in a row, on every strip of wallpaper. In one row they were marching upwards, towards the ceiling; in the next—downwards, towards the floor. An oily ray of moonlight fell on the wall, and here the Chinamen marched up and down more briskly.

Suddenly, through the monotonous flow of the Psalms, Nikita heard a low, earnest question:

"Is he—really—dead? Oh Lord?"

It was Ulyana, her voice imbued with such overwhelming sorrow that the nun paused in her reading to reply apologetically:

"He's dead, good woman, he's dead, by the will of God."



This was altogether unbearable. Nikita rose and noisily left the room, carrying in his heart a feeling of the deepest resentment against the nun.

On a bench near the gate sat Tikhon. He was breaking splinters from a bit of wood. One by one, he stuck the splinters into the sand and stamped them down with his foot until they disappeared. Nikita sat down beside him, watching without a word. Tikhon's work reminded him of the eerie town fool, Antonushka. This was a swarthy, shaggy-haired young fellow, with one leg twisted at the knee, and with the round eyes of an eagle owl. Antonushka would trace circles in the sand with a stick, and within these circles build little cages of twigs and splinters. His building done, he would immediately crush it underfoot and shuffle sand and dust over the remnants, singing nasally:

*Oh, Chi-rist is arisen, is arisen,  
The wagon lost a wheel, lost a wheel.  
Butirma, lullaby, bustarma,  
Lullaby, Chi-rist, lullaby.*

"So that's how it is, eh?" said Tikhon. He slapped his neck, killing a mosquito, wiped his palm against his knee, and glanced at the moon, caught on a willow bough over the river. Then his eyes turned to the meaty bulk of the boiler.

"The mosquitoes are early this year," he went on calmly. "Yes, mosquitoes live, and...."

Before he could finish, the hunchback, afraid, somehow, of what might follow, reminded him sternly:

"Yes, but you killed the mosquito."

He strode hastily away from the yardkeeper. A few minutes later, at a loss what to do with himself, he returned once more to his father's room and relieved the nun at her reading. Pouring out his sorrow in the words of the Psalms, he did not hear Natalya coming in. Suddenly, the soft rippling of her voice sounded behind him. When she was near, he always felt that he might say

or do something extraordinary—something frightful, perhaps. And even in this solemn hour he feared lest, against his will, such words break out. He bowed his head until it was shadowed by his hump, and lowered his voice, which had suddenly broken. And then he heard two voices, mingling tearfully with the chant of the ninth cathisma.

“Look, I’ve taken his cross to wear.”

“Mother, dearest, I’m all alone, too....”

Nikita intoned more loudly, to drown out these tearful whispers; but he could not help listening.

“The Lord wouldn’t have our sin....”

“In a strange nest, alone....”

“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” intoned Nikita and in the midst of this cry of fear and despair his memory suggested to him the melancholy proverb: “Life without love is sorrow; and when love comes—double sorrow.” Half-ashamed, he felt that Natalya’s sorrow held out to him a hope of happiness.

In the morning, Barsky drove out from town, with Yakov Zhiteikin, the mayor, a man with expressionless eyes, nicknamed “Half-Baked”—little and round and pasty, as though really made of raw dough. The visitors bowed before the deceased, glancing into the darkened face with a sort of fearful suspicion. Evidently they, too, were amazed at Artamonov’s death. Then Zhiteikin said to Pyotr, in his biting, acid voice:

“They say you think of burying your father in your own graveyard—is that so? That will be an insult to the town, Pyotr Ilyich, as if you don’t want to have any dealings with us, and live like friends—is that so?”

Gritting his teeth, Alexei whispered to his brother:

“Throw them out!”

“Kinswoman,” Barsky droned, attacking Ulyana. “That’s no way! You’re offending us.”

Zhiteikin started questioning Pyotr:

“Was it priest Gleb, maybe who gave you such advice?”

No, no. Change your mind about that. Your father was the biggest manufacturer in the uyezd, the founder of a new line of business, the pride of the town. The ispravnik, even he can't get over it, says you must be heathen!"

He rattled on unintermittently, disregarding Pyotr's attempts to put in a word; but when Pyotr finally succeeded in explaining that this was his father's will, Zhiteikin calmed down at once.

"In any case, we'll be at the funeral."

And it became clear to all that he had come with other purposes than that of which he spoke. He sidled towards the corner of the room, where Barsky had pressed Ulyana to the wall and was whispering something to her; but before Zhiteikin could join them, Ulyana cried out:

"You're a fool, kinsman! Get away!"

Her lips were trembling, her eyebrows twitching. Lifting her head proudly, she said to Pyotr:

"These two, and Pomyalov and Voroponov, want me to talk you, brothers, into selling them the mill. They offer me money for helping them."

"Get out ... gentlemen!" said Alexei, and pointed to the door.

Zhiteikin, hemming, hawing, simpering, elbowed Barsky to the door and out. Baimakova sank down on the chest and began to cry.

"They'd like to blot out his very memory."

Alexei, looking down into his father's face, declared with bitter solemnity:

"I wouldn't want to live and be that kind. I'd rather bust."

"A fine time for bargaining," grumbled Pyotr, and he too, glanced towards his father.

Coming up to Nikita, Natalya asked him softly:

"And you? Why don't you say anything?"

It was pleasant to be remembered; it was a joy to be remembered by Natalya, and he could not restrain a happy smile as he replied, softly too:

"Why ... you and me...."

But she had already turned away, absorbed in thought. Almost all the best people of the town attended Ilya Artamonov's funeral. The ispravnik came: lean and tall, with a shaven chin and grey sideburns. He limped majestically up the sandy road with Pyotr, and told him twice, in exactly the same words:

"The deceased was excellently recommended to me by His Grace, Prince Georgi Ratsky, and he lived up to that recommendation in every way."

But it was not long before he declared:

"Carrying the dead uphill is difficult!"

And he pushed his way, sidewise, out of the crowd and took his stand in the shade, under a pine, his shaven lips tightly compressed, looking out over the passing throng of townspeople and workers as though reviewing soldiers on parade.

It was a bright day. The sun shone down bountifully on the earth's bright green and yellow, and on the colourful procession moving slowly between two sandy hills and up the slope of a third. Here many a cross already stood, some sharply outlined against the clear blue sky, others sheltered beneath the spreading boughs of a twisted old pine. The sand was sparkling diamonds, crunching under the people's feet; and the dull chant of the priests swayed and trembled over their heads. Bringing up the rear, came the fool, Antonushka, skipping and stumbling. His round eyes, under hairless brows, were fixed on the ground. He kept stooping to pick up dry twigs from the roadside, thrusting them into the bosom of his shirt. He, too, was chanting shrilly:

*Oh, Chi-rist is arisen, is arisen,  
The wagon lost a wheel, lost a wheel....*

Pious souls often beat him for singing this song. This time the ispravnik shook a threatening finger, and shouted:

"Hush, fool!"

The townsfolk wasted no love on Antonushka, since,

being a Mordvinian or Chuvash, he could not very well be regarded as a sufferer for Christ. They feared him, however, believing him to herald misfortune; and when, at the funeral feast, he appeared in the Artamonovs' yard and capered among the tables, yelling meaninglessly "Kuyatyr, kuyatyr, the devil in the belfry, och, my, rain will come, wet will come, kayamas's in black tears!"—there were those who whispered:

"There, now! The Artamonovs won't have any luck!"

Pyotr heard these whispers. A little later, he noticed that Tikhon Vyalov had caught the fool in a corner of the yard. He heard the yardkeeper asking, quietly but insistently:

"What does that mean—kayamas? You don't know? Here. Get out! Go on, go on."

...A year slipped by, swift as the muddy autumn streams down the mountain sides. Nothing of importance occurred, except that Ulyana Baimakova's hair turned grey, and the sad lines of age appeared on her temples. Alexei changed very perceptibly. He became milder, gentler, yet at the same time developed an unpleasant haste of manner, seeming to lash people on by his gay jokes and stinging interjections. Pyotr was particularly troubled by his free and easy attitude towards the business. He seemed to be playing with the mill—just as he had once played with the bear, only to kill it afterwards. He had a strange weakness for articles such as adorn the life of the gentry. Besides the clock Baimakova had given him, other trinkets appeared in his room—useless, but good to look at. On the wall hung a picture: girls dancing in a ring, embroidered in beads. Alexei was thrifty. Why, then, did he spend money on trumpery? He began to dress differently, too, expensively, stylishly. He took great care of his dark, pointed beard, and shaved his cheeks, growing ever less reminiscent of a simple peasant. To Pyotr, there was something very alien and unclear about this cousin of his. He watched Alexei furtively, with growing mistrust.

Pyotr was cautious, wary, in his approach to the business, just as in his approach to people. He trained himself to an unhurried gait; and he would steal upon his work, screwing up his bearish eyes, as though expecting it to vanish away. Sometimes, weary of business cares, he would feel as though enveloped in a frigid cloud of strange, uneasy tedium. At such moments, the mill would seem to him a beast of stone, but alive. The beast was crouching, huddled close against the earth, casting shadows that were like wings, its tail a bristling smoke-stack. Its brute countenance was a thing of fear. By day, the windows glittered like icy teeth; of a winter evening, they were made of iron, red hot with fury. And it seemed that the mill's true purpose, its secret aim, lay not in the weaving of mile upon mile of linen, but in something else, something inimical to Pyotr Artamonov.

On the anniversary of the father's death, after the obit at the cemetery, the whole family gathered in Alexei's bright, pleasant room. Rather nervously, he began to speak:

"It was father's will that we shouldn't quarrel. And he was right. We're like prisoners in this place."

Nikita noticed that Natalya, who was sitting next to him, started and threw Alexei a wondering look. Alexei continued, very mildly:

"But if we're not to quarrel, that doesn't mean we should stand in one another's way. The business is for all of us together, but our life is our own for each of us. Isn't that so?"

"Go on," said Pyotr guardedly, staring at something above his cousin's head.

"You all know I've been living with the Orlova girl. I want to marry her now. Remember, Nikita—she was the only one to be sorry when you fell in the water?"

Nikita nodded. He had hardly ever sat so close to Natalya as today. It was so pleasant, that he did not want to move, or talk, or even listen to what the others were saying. And when something made Natalya start, and her

elbow brushed against him, he smiled looking under the table at her knees.

"She's fated for me, I think," said Alexei. "With her I can make life different. I don't want to bring her here to live. I'm afraid you wouldn't get along together."

Raising her grief-filled eyes, Ulyana Baimakova came to Alexei's assistance.

"I know her well. She's a rare hand with her needle, and literate. She supported her drunkard of a father ever since she was a little thing. Only—she likes to have her own way. I don't think Natalya could get on with her."

"I get on with everybody," put in Natalya, offended. Her husband glanced at her, and told his cousin:

"Yes, that's your affair."

Alexei asked Baimakova to sell him her house.

"What do you want it for?"

Pyotr supported him in this, telling her:

"Your place is with us."

"Well, I'll go tell Olga," said Alexei. When he was gone, Pyotr jogged Nikita's shoulder, demanding:

"Are you asleep? What are you thinking about?"

"Alexei's doing right."

"Think so? We'll see. And what do you think, mother?"

"Of course, he's right to marry her. Only who can tell how they'll get on together? She's queer. A sort of crank."

"Thanks for such kin," returned Pyotr, with a wry smile.

"Perhaps I used the wrong word," Ulyana went on slowly, as though staring into a dark place, where everything swayed and merged, evading her vision.

"She's foxy. Her father had lots of things, and she brought them to me to hide so he wouldn't sell them for drink. Alyosha would bring them over, by night, and then I'd pretend to give him presents. All these things here are hers. Her dowry. Some of them are valuable. On the whole, I'm not very fond of her—she's too self-willed."

Pyotr stood at the window, with his back to his

mother-in-law. Out in the garden, starlings were noisily imitating the sounds of the day. Tikhon's words came to mind:

"I don't like starlings. They look like devils."

A stupid man, that Tikhon. You couldn't help noticing him, just on account of his being so very stupid.

In the same low, reluctant tone, evidently absorbed in thoughts of other things, Baimakova told the story of Olga Orlova's mother, a landowner's wife—a shameless woman, who had gone to live with Orlov while her husband was still alive, and lived with him for five years.

"He was a craftsman. He made furniture, and repaired clocks, and carved figures out of wood. I have one of them at home—a naked woman. Olga thinks it's a portrait of her mother. They were both drinkers. And when her husband died, they married, and that same year she went bathing drunk, and got drowned."

"That's what you call love," said Natalya suddenly. At these unbecoming words, Ulyana threw her daughter a reproachful glance, while Pyotr replied, with a short laugh:

"We were talking about drunkenness, not love."

A silence fell. Watching Natalya, Nikita saw that she was stirred by her mother's story. Her fingers twitched, plucking at the fringe of the tablecloth. Her simple, kindly face was flushed, and wore an angry look he had not seen before.

After supper, sitting on a bench among the lilac bushes in the garden, just under Natalya's window, Nikita heard voices in the room above him. Pyotr said thoughtfully:

"Alexei is smart. He's clever."

And all at once Natalya cried, heart-rendingly:

"You're all clever. I'm the only fool. It was right, what he said—like prisoners! I'm the prisoner, in your house."

Nikita gasped in fear and pity. He clutched at the bench with both hands, for some unknown force was spurring him, urging him he knew not whither. And



above him, ever louder, sounded the voice of the woman he loved, arousing hot, surging hopes.

Natalya had been braiding her hair when her husband's words suddenly ignited a raging flame within her. She leaned against the wall, pressing back her hands, which itched to strike and rend. Between dry sobs, the words came tumbling out. She did not hear what she was saying, did not hear the angry exclamations of her astounded husband. She cried that she was an outsider among them, that nobody loved her, that she was a mere servant in the house.

"You don't love me. You never even talk to me about anything. You come down on me like a stone, and that's all! Why don't you love me? Am I your wife, or not? Is there anything bad about me, I'd like to know! Look at the way mother loved your father. Sometimes my heart would almost break with envy."

"Well, then, love me the same way," Pyotr proposed. He was sitting on the windowsill, peering at his wife's distorted features, in the dark corner of the room. He thought her words foolish; but he felt, with amazement, that her grief was legitimate—understood that it was not a stupid grief. And the worst thing about this grief was that it held out the threat of protracted ferment, of new cares and alarms, when he had so many cares as it was.

His wife's white, armless figure, in the flowing nightgown, swayed and quivered, threatening to melt away. Her voice rose and fell, now whispering, now screaming, as though she were on a swing, flying aloft and dropping low.

"Look how Alexei loves his girl. And he's easy to love, himself. He's always jolly, and dresses like the gentry. And you? Not a kind word for anyone. Never a laugh. Alexei and I could be such good friends, and I've never dared say a word to him, because you set your hunchback to keep watch over me, on purpose, that disgusting, foxy creature."

Nikita got up, and wandered off, stricken, with

hanging head, into the orchard. The trees caught at his shoulders, and he listlessly pushed the branches aside.

Pyotr, too, got up. He strode to his wife, seized her by the hair, and bent her head back, peering into her eyes.

"With Alexei?" he asked, his voice not loud, but heavy. He was so taken aback by what his wife had said that he could not be angry at her, could not feel the desire to strike her. With increasing clarity, he realized that his wife was speaking the truth, that her life was dull and uninteresting. He knew what dullness meant. But she had to be quieted somehow, and in order to quiet her he banged her head against the wall, demanding softly:

"What's that you said, you fool? With Alexei?"

"Let go—let go—I'll scream."

With his free hand, he gripped her throat and compressed it. His wife's face flushed, and she began to wheeze.

"Hussy," said Pyotr, thrusting her against the wall, and turned away. She swung forward and moved past him to the cradle, where the baby had been whimpering for some time. Pyotr had the feeling that she had walked over him. A dark-blue strip of sky swayed to and fro before his eyes, and the stars capered. Glancing sidewise, he saw his wife, sitting very near. He could have struck her in the face without even getting up. Her face was fixed, almost wooden, but tears ran slowly, lazily down her cheeks. Nursing her little girl, she stared into the corner, through a glassy film of tears, and did not notice that the child could not suckle comfortably. The nipple kept slipping from its lips, and it sucked at the air, whimpering helplessly. Pyotr shook himself, as though after a nightmare, and said:

"Can't you nurse the child properly?"

"A fly in the house," Natalya muttered. "A fly, without wings."

"After all, I'm alone too. There's no two Pyotr Artamonovs."

He felt hazily that this was not what he had wanted to

say—more, that there was something false in it. And to calm his wife and avert the danger hanging over him, he must give her truth, a truth simple and clear beyond dispute, so that she would understand it at once, and submit to it, and not bother him with foolish complaints and tears, with these womanish ways that she had never had before. Watching her careless, clumsy movements as she laid the child in the cradle, he went on:

"I have the business to take care of! A mill—that isn't sowing grain, or planting potatoes. It's a problem. And you? What have you got to worry about?"

At first he spoke sternly, impressively, seeking to approach this elusive truth; but it evaded him, and his tone grew almost plaintive.

"A mill is no simple thing," he repeated, feeling that his store of words was nearby exhausted, that he had nothing to say. His wife stood silently, rocking the cradle, with her back to him. He was rescued by the low, calm voice of Tikhon Vyalov, calling:

"Pyotr Ilyich! Hey, there!"

"What's the matter?" he asked, moving to the window.

"Come out here," said the yard-keeper imperatively.

"Boor!" grumbled Pyotr, and added, turning reproachfully to his wife: "There! No peace, even at night, and you stand here and cry."

Tikhon met him on the porch, hatless, with flickering eyes. Glancing around the bright, moonlit yard, he said, very low:

"Nikita Ilyich just tried to hang himself."

"What? What did you say?"

And Pyotr dropped heavily onto the porch step, as though the earth had sunk from under him.

"What are you sitting down for? Come along. He wants you..."

Pyotr did not get up, but asked, in a whisper:

"What made him do it, eh?"

"He's conscious now. I poured water on him till he came to. Let's be going..."

Tikhon pulled his employer up by the elbow and led him into the orchard.

"He did it in the bathhouse, in the dressing room. Slung a rope from a rafter in the garret, and...."

Pyotr stopped short, repeating:

"What made him do it? Was he heartsick for father, or what?"

The yard-keeper also stopped.

"He got so bad, he kissed her shifts."

"What shifts? What are you talking about?"

Shuffling his bare feet, Pyotr stared down at the yard-keeper's dog, which had come out of the bushes and was looking at him inquiringly, wagging its tail. He was afraid to go to his brother. He felt an emptiness within him, and did not know what he should say to Nikita.

"Eh, but you're blind," the yard-keeper grumbled. Pyotr waited silently for him to continue.

"Her shifts, Natalya Yevseyevna's. They were hanging out with the rest of the wash, to dry."

"But what did he.... Hold on!"

Pyotr kicked the dog away. He suddenly visualized his brother's squat, humped figure, kissing a woman's shift. It was comical, yet at the same time made him spit disgustedly. Then, all at once, he was struck, overwhelmed, by a stinging conjecture. He seized the yard-keeper by the shoulders and shook him furiously, demanding through clenched teeth:

"Did they kiss? Did you see them? Talk up!"

"I see everything. Natalya Yevseyevna don't even know."

"You're lying!"

"Why should I lie? I'm not expecting anything from you."

And Tikhon briefly related to his employer the story of his brother's misfortune. It was as though he were wielding an axe, cutting a window through the murk. Pyotr could feel that the yard-keeper was telling the truth. Indeed, he himself had had a dim suspicion about it, from

the look in his brother's blue eyes, his eagerness to be of use to Natalya, his petty, but constant solicitude for her.

"So-o," he whispered, and then thought aloud: "I was too busy to realize."

He pushed Tikhon forward.

"Come on."

He did not want to be the first to meet Nikita's eye. Coming in through the low bathhouse door, before he could make his brother out in the darkness, he called tremulously, from behind Tikhon's back:

"What got into you, Nikita?"

The hunchback did not answer. He was on the bench by the window, barely visible, the dim light falling on his legs and abdomen. After a while, Pyotr realized that Nikita was sitting up, with bent head, his humped back against the wall. His shirt was torn from neck to hem. Soaking wet, it clung to his body. His hair was also wet, and wet rays spread from a dark star on his cheek.

"What's that—blood? Did you fall?" Pyotr asked in a whisper.

"No. I bruised him a little, in my hurry," replied Tikhon, foolishly loud, and moved aside.

To approach was fearful. Pulling at his ear, Pyotr spoke deplorably, reproachfully, hearing his own words as though some stranger were saying them:

"For shame! You went against God, brother. That's no way."

"I know," returned Nikita hoarsely, his voice, too, the voice of a stranger. "I couldn't stand it. Let me go away, to a monastery. I'll take vows. Do you hear? With all my heart, I beg you...."

He broke into a wheezing cough, and said no more.

Touched, Pyotr once more began to reproach him, speaking softly and affectionately. At length, he said:

"As to Natalya, that was the devil tempting you, of course."

"Oh, Tikhon," wailed Nikita miserably. "Didn't I beg you, Tikhon, to hold your tongue! Keep it from her, at

least, in Christ's name! She'll mock at me, or maybe take offence. Have pity! I'll pray for you all the rest of my life. Don't tell her! Don't ever tell her. Ah, Tikhon, it's all your fault..."

He mumbled on, his head unnaturally erect and motionless. That, too, was fearful. The yard-keeper said:

"I'd have held my tongue all right, if it wasn't for this business. She won't hear anything from me."

More and more deeply touched, embarrassed at his own emotion, Pyotr promised firmly:

"I swear by the cross, she won't know anything."

"Thanks! And I'll be off to a monastery."

Nikita lapsed into silence, as though he had fallen asleep.

"Does it hurt?" his brother asked. Receiving no answer, he repeated:

"Your neck—does it hurt?"

"It's all right," said Nikita hoarsely. "You go now."

"Don't leave him," Pyotr whispered to the yard-keeper, backing past him to the door.

But when he came out into the orchard, and breathed deep of the warm, cloying odours of the sweating earth, his soft mood vanished in the onrush of uneasy thoughts. Moving down the path, he trod carefully, so that the gravel would not crunch underfoot. There must be utter stillness, or there could be no ordering these thoughts. Hostile, frightening in their abundance, they seemed to spring not from within, but to invade from without, from the night's gloom—flitting bats in the darkness. So swiftly did they follow one upon the other, that Pyotr could not seize them, could not embody them in words, but only glimpsed their intricate loops, knots, designs. They enmeshed him, Natalya, Alexei, Nikita, Tikhon—bound them all in a twisted ring that whirled too fast to be distinguished. And he was at its centre, all alone. In words, he thought very simply:

"I'll have to get Natalya's mother in the house good and soon, and have Alexei move out. A little kindness to

Natalya. 'That's what you call love.' Why, it wasn't love that made him hang himself, it was just his hump. A good thing he wants to take vows. There's nothing for him in the world. Yes, it's a good thing. Tikhon's a fool. He should have told me earlier."

But what had this to do with those thoughts, elusive, wordless, which so confused and frightened him, making him look fearfully into the thick, damp murk of the night? In the distance, a thin rivulet of a plaintive song wound, faintly luminous, over the mill workers' settlement. Mosquitoes droned. One thing Pyotr Artamonov felt clearly: he must overcome, must suppress this uneasiness and do it as quickly as possible. Unexpectedly, he found himself among the lilac bushes, under his bedroom window. For a long time he sat there, on the bench, his elbows on his knees, his face buried in his hands, staring down at the black earth underfoot. The earth stirred and seethed, as though about to sink away.

"It's amazing, how Nikita got the better of the sand. When he takes his vows, he'll work in the monastery gardens. He'll like that."

He did not notice his wife's approach, and jumped to his feet in alarm when her white figure rose up before him, as though sprung from the earth. But the familiar voice calmed him a little:

"In Christ's name, forgive my shouting."

"Ah, well, God will forgive. I shouted, too," he returned generously, glad that his wife had come, and that he need no longer search for gentle words to plaster up the breach made by their quarrel.

He sat down, and Natalya sat diffidently at his side. Yes, he must do something to comfort her. He said:

"I know, it's dull for you. There's no fun in our house. Where would it come from? Father got his fun out of work. The way he saw it, there's no such thing as just people. We're all workers, except for beggars and the gentry. We all live to work. And the work overshadows people."

He picked his words carefully, afraid of saying more than was fit; and, listening to himself, thought that he spoke like a man of weight, a business man, a real master. Yet he had the feeling that all these words were somehow superficial, that they glided over the surface of his thoughts without revealing them, unable to penetrate them. And it seemed to him that he sat at the edge of a gulf, and there was a someone who might send him hurtling down at any moment—someone who listened to what he said and whispered:

“That is not the truth.”

Most opportunely, his wife laid her head on his shoulder, whispering:

“After all, I’m to live with you all the rest of my life. Why can’t you understand?”

He promptly embraced her and pressed her close, listening to her hot whisper:

“It’s a sin not to understand. You take a girl, and she bears you children, and it’s as if you weren’t there—there’s no heart in you for me. It’s a sin, Petya. Have you anyone closer than me? Who’ll give you sympathy when you need it worst?”

He felt as though his wife had lifted him, turned him over in the air, filling his limbs with a pleasant lightness. Plunging into a refreshing coolness, he murmured with a feeling akin to gratitude:

“I promised him I’d keep still, but I can’t!”

And he repeated, hurriedly, all that the yard-keeper had told him about Nikita.

“He kissed your shifts, when they were drying in the yard—he’s gone so far! Didn’t you know? Didn’t you realize how it was with him?”

He felt his wife shudder violently.

“Sorry for him?” Pyotr wondered; but she answered hastily, indignantly:

“I never knew a thing! Ah, the secretive creature! It’s true, what they say—hunchbacks are crafty.”



"Disgusted? Or acting?" Artamonov asked himself. To his wife, he said:

"He was always gentle with you."

"Well, and what of it?" she returned defiantly. "Tulun's gentle, too."

"Well, but... Tulun's a dog."

"And he? You set him after me just like a dog, to keep watch over me, and guard me from Father and Alexei, I saw well enough! Oh, how disgusting, how hateful he's been to me."

Clearly, Natalya was insulted and indignant. That was evidenced by her shudders, by her jerking fingers, twisting and pulling at her nightgown. But to the man her indignation seemed exaggerated, and, mistrusting it, he dealt the final blow:

"He attempted to hang himself. Tikhon found him. He's laying in the bathhouse."

His wife went limp. She cried, in unmistakable terror:

"No!... What are you saying? Good Lord!"

"So she was lying," Pyotr thought. But she threw back her head, as though her forehead had been struck, and whispered, with angry tears:

"What next? Father's death has just shut people's mouths a little, and now the talk will start all over again—for what sins, oh Lord? One brother tries to hang himself, and another marries nobody knows who, his own mistress. Is that any way to do? Ah, Nikita Ilyich, how could you be so shameless? Many thanks for such kindness, you heartless thing!"

With a sigh of relief, the husband stroked his wife's shoulder.

"Don't worry. Nobody will know. Tikhon won't talk. He's friendly with him, and besides, he gets his living from us. Nikita wants to take vows."

"When?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, if only it's soon! How can I face him now?"

After a silence, Pyotr said:

"You might go to see him."

But she started back as though he had struck her, crying:

"No, no, don't ask me—I won't go! I can't! I'm scared...."

"Of what?" asked Pyotr quickly.

"Of suicides. I won't go, not for anything in the world... I'm scared."

"Well, come to sleep," said Artamonov, rising on his feet that held him firmly. "We've had enough trouble for one day."

Walking slowly at his wife's side, he felt that, together with its evil, this day had brought him something of worth; that he, Pyotr Artamonov, was a man such as, until this day, he had not known himself to be: a very clever man, and crafty. And he had just now artfully befooled a somebody who had been persistently fretting his soul with obscure thoughts.

"Of course, you're the closest to me," he told his wife. "Who could be closer? Just keep that in mind, that you're the closest. Then everything will be all right."

On the twelfth day following that night, dawn found Nikita Artamonov, with a staff in his hand and a leather sack on his back, striding along a crisp, sandy path, turned dark by the heavy dew—striding briskly, as though anxious to get away from memories of the parting with his family. They had all gathered, heavy with sleep, in the dining room, next to the kitchen. They sat stiffly, and talked stiffly, and it was so clear that none of them had a single heartfelt word to say to him. Pyotr was affectionate and almost gay, like a man who has just put through a profitable deal. Two or three times, he said:

"Well, now we'll have our own supplicator in the family, to pray forgiveness for our sins."

Natalya poured tea, indifferent and very preoccupied. Her small, mouse ears were noticeably red and had a crumpled look. She seemed moody, and frequently left the room. Her mother sat in thoughtful silence, now and then

wetting a finger with her tongue and smoothing down the grey hair at her temples. Only Alexei was moved, unusually for him, and kept shrugging his shoulders, asking:

"What made you do it, Nikita? So suddenly, eh? It's strange to me."

Beside him sat the little, sharp-nosed Orlova girl, her dark eyebrows raised, staring at everyone unceremoniously. Nikita did not like her eyes. They were too big for the rest of her face, and too sharp for a girl, and blinked too often.

It was trying to sit among these people, and the anxious thought kept recurring:

"Suppose Pyotr should tell everybody? I wish it was over."

Pyotr began the parting first. Coming up to Nikita, he embraced him and said, very loud, with a catch in his voice:

"Well, brother, farewell...."

But Baimakova stopped him.

"What are you doing? We must all sit down first, and not talk a while, and then, when we've prayed, we can say farewell."

All this was soon done, and Pyotr approached once more, saying:

"Forgive us. Let us know about the endowment, and we'll send it right off. Don't agree to heavy obedience. Farewell. Pray often for us."

Baimakova made the sign of the cross over him, and kissed his cheeks and forehead. For some reason or other, she began to cry. Alexei embraced him firmly, looked into his eyes, and said:

"Well, God help you. Everyone takes his own road. But just the same, I can't understand what made you decide so suddenly."

Natalya approached last of all; but she stopped a little distance away and bowed low, pressing her hand to her bosom and saying faintly:

"Farewell, Nikita Ilyich."

Her breasts were still high as a girl's though she had nursed three children.

Well, that was all. Ah, there was still Orlova. She thrust him a hot little hand, hard as a board. Near at hand, her face was even more unpleasant. She asked foolishly:

"Are you really going to be a monk?"

Out in the yard, a score or two of the older weavers had come to say good-bye. The deaf, ancient Boris Morozov yelled, nodding vigorously:

"Soldiers and monks—there's society's first servants, that's the truth!"

Nikita turned in at the cemetery to take leave of his father's grave. Kneeling before it, he did not pray, but fell into thought. What a turn life had taken! When the sun rose behind him, throwing on the dew-washed sod of the grave a broad, angular shadow, the shape of vicious Tulun's kennel, Nikita bowed his head to the ground and said:

"Forgive me, Father."

His voice fell harsh and dull through the delicate hush of morning. After a pause he repeated, louder:

"Forgive me, Father"—

And broke into tears, sobbing bitterly as a woman, at the intolerable loss of his one time clear and ringing voice.

When he had left the cemetery about a verst behind, Nikita suddenly noticed the yard-keeper, Tikhon, standing like a sentry among the roadside bushes, with a spade over his shoulder and an axe stuck in his belt.

"Off, are you?" Tikhon asked.

"I'm on my way. What are you doing out here?"

"I thought I'd dig up a rowan tree, to plant by my window."

They stood for a moment, looking silently at one another. Tikhon turned away his melting eyes.

"Walk on. I'll see you down the road a way."

They moved on in silence. Tikhon was the first to speak.

"Heavy dews we're having. It's a bad sign. Such dews mean drought and bad harvest."

"The Lord forbid."

Tikhon Vyalov mumbled some reply.

"What did you say?" Nikita asked, a little frightened, for from this man he always expected different words than from others, words that made the soul uneasy.

"I said, maybe He will forbid."

But Nikita was sure the ditch digger had said something else, which he did not wish to repeat.

"Why? Don't you believe in God's mercy?" he asked reproachfully.

"Why?" returned Tikhon calmly. "What we need now is rain. And these dews are bad for the mushrooms, too. With a good master, everything gets done at the proper time."

Nikita sighed and shook his head.

"That's not a fit way of thinking, Tikhon."

"It's fit enough. I don't do my thinking with my eyes."

Another fifty paces passed in silence. Nikita kept his eyes on the ground, watching his own broad shadow. Vyalov's fingers tapped the handle of his axe, keeping time with his steps.

"I'll come to see you, Nikita Ilyich, in a year or so—shall I?"

"If you like. You're inquisitive."

"That's true."

He stopped, and pulled off his hat.

"Well, then, fare you well, Nikita Ilyich!" he said, and rubbing his cheek, added thoughtfully:

"I like you, for your meek heart. Your father's gifts lay in the body, but you—yours lie in your heart, in your soul."

Nikita dropped his staff, shook himself to adjust the sack on his hump, and silently embraced the yard-keeper. Tikhon returned the embrace with a bearish hug, repeating loudly, insistently:

"So I'll be coming."

“Thanks.”

At the sharp turn where the road dived into the pine forest, Nikita looked back. Tikhon was standing in the middle of the road, leaning on his spade, his hat under his arm, as though determined to let no one pass. The morning breeze ruffled the hair on his ugly head.

From this distance, Tikhon somehow called to mind the fool, Antonushka. Nikita Artamonov hastened his step. His thoughts revolved around this enigmatic personality, and again and again he seemed to hear:

*Oh, Chi-rist is arisen, is arisen,  
The wagon lost a wheel, lost a wheel....*

**2** It was not until the ninth anniversary of their father's death that the building of the Artamonovs' church was completed, and they had it consecrated to the Prophet Elijah. The work dragged out over seven years. This sluggishness was due to Alexei.

"God can wait—what's his hurry?" he would rattle out impiously, and twice he diverted the brick prepared for the church: first to build the third block of the mill, and then to build a hospital.

The consecration ceremonies over, and an obit performed at the graves of their father and children, the Artamonovs lingered in the cemetery until the crowd had broken up. Then, tactfully ignoring Ulyana Baimakova, who remained in the family enclosure, on a bench under the birch trees, they set out slowly for home. There was no need for haste, as the dinner for the clergy, acquaintances, and employees had been set for three o'clock.

It was a cloudy day. The sky wore an almost autumnal frown, and a damp wind, promising rain, wheezed like a tired horse in the tossing crowns of the spruces. Dark human figures slid, swaying, down the reddish strip of sandy road towards the mill, whose three brick blocks, built along three radii of a common circle, seemed to grip the earth like crimson, clutching fingers.

With a wave of his cane, Alexei said:

"Father would have been glad to see how we're getting on!"

"He'd have been sorry when the tsar was killed," replied Pyotr, after a moment's thought. He did not like to agree with all his cousin said.

"Well, he wasn't fond of being sorry. And he used his own wits, not the tsar's."

Pulling his cap far down on his forehead, Alexei stopped and glanced back at the women. His wife, small and slender, in a dark, simple dress, stepped lightly over the trampled sand, wiping her eyeglasses with a handkerchief. She looked like a village schoolteacher beside tall, plump Natalya, who wore a black silk cloak with bugle beading on the shoulders and sleeves, and a dark purple kerchief that went very well with her thick, reddish hair.

"Your wife gets prettier and prettier."

Pyotr made no reply.

"Nikita didn't come for the anniversary this year either. Is he angry at us, or what?"

In damp weather Alexei had pains in his chest and leg, and he walked with a slight limp, leaning on his cane. He was anxious to shake off the dreary impression of the obit, and the gloom of this cloudy day; and, stubborn as always, persisted in his efforts to make his cousin talk.

"Your mother-in-law stayed behind to cry. She can't forget him. A fine old lady. I whispered to Tikhon to wait and see her home. She complains her breath comes short, and walking is a strain."

In a low voice, as though under compulsion, the elder Artamonov repeated:

"A strain."

"Are you asleep? What's a strain?"

"Tikhon ought to be discharged," Pyotr replied, looking away at the hillsides overgrown with bristling spruces.

"Why?" asked his cousin amazedly. "The man's honest, and industrious..."

"And a fool," added Pyotr.

The women came up. Olga told her husband, in a pleasant voice, surprisingly strong for her small frame:

"I've been trying to persuade Natasha to send Ilya to school. But she's afraid."

Natalya, pregnant, swayed from side to side with every step, waddling like a fattened duck. She spoke slowly and nasally, as befitted the elder:



"To my mind, these schools are a harmful fad. Elena writes such words in her letters, you can't tell what she's trying to say."

"School, school, for all of them," Alexei put in sternly, lifting his cap to wipe the perspiration from his forehead. A premature baldness, creeping up from temples to crown, formed two sharp angles, greatly lengthening his face.

Natalya argued, with an inquiring glance at her husband:

"Pomyalov's right. He says learning drives people wild."

"Yes," said Pyotr.

"There!" Natalya exclaimed, well pleased; but her husband added thoughtfully:

"Schooling is necessary."

His brother and Olga burst into laughter; and Natalya said reproachfully:

"How can you laugh? Remember where we're coming from!"

They took her arms, and walked on more quickly. But Pyotr slowed his step, saying:

"I'll wait for Mother."

That unpleasant fellow, Tikhon Vyalov, had upset him. Looking out over the mill from the cemetery, just before the obit, Pyotr had said to himself, aloud—not boasting, but simply expressing what he saw:

"The business has grown."

And at once he had heard, from behind his back, the calm voice of the former ditch digger:

"Business grows like mould in a cellar, of its own power."

Pyotr did not say a word, did not even turn his head. But the obvious, outrageous stupidity of the yard-keeper's words aroused his spleen. A man works; he gives hundreds their daily bread; day and night, he is absorbed in thoughts of his business; he forgets his very self in his cares for it. And all of a sudden some ignorant fool

declares that the business lives of its own power, not by its master's mind. And whenever you saw him, this creature would be mumbling something about the soul, and sin.

Artamonov sat down on an old pine stump by the road, and pulled at his ear. He recalled how, one day, he had complained to Olga:

"I never have the time to think about my soul."

She had put him a strange question:

"Why, does your soul live separately from you?"

At first he took these words for a woman's jest. But Olga's bird-like face was grave, and her dark eyes gleamed kindly from behind her spectacles:

"I don't understand," he said.

"And I don't understand it when people talk about the soul apart from the person, as if it was a foundling."

"I don't understand," Pyotr repeated, and lost all desire for conversation with this woman. She was very alien, almost incomprehensible; yet her simplicity attracted, though he feared this seeming simplicity might be a screen for craft.

As to Tikhon Vyalov, Pyotr had always disliked him. He was annoyed by the very sight of the man's spotty face and high cheekbones, his strange eyes, his ears, plastered close to his skull and half hidden in his reddish hair; by his sparse beard, and his gait, not rapid, but efficient, and the whole of his clumsy, thickset figure. Tikhon's composure, too, was annoying, and somehow enviable. Even his industry irritated. Tikhon worked like a machine, very rarely affording any pretext for reproof; but that, too, was vexing. And increasingly annoying was the realization that this man, growing with every passing year more inseparably a part of the household, seemed to feel himself an indispensable spoke in the Artamonov's wheel of life. Strangely, the children loved him, just as dogs did, and horses. Tulun, the old wolf-hound, surly because he was chained, would allow none but Tikhon to approach him; and Pyotr's elder son, unruly Ilya, obeyed the yard-keeper more readily than he would his father and mother.

To rid himself of the sight of Vyalov, Artamonov had offered him other work—as church watchman or forester. Tikhon had shaken his heavy head in refusal.

“I’m no good for that. If you’re tired of me, rest a while. Give me a month’s leave, and I’ll go visit Nikita Ilyich.”

That was just what he had said: “Rest a while.” This phrase, so stupid and insolent, coming together with a reminder of his brother, hidden somewhere far away beyond the swamps, in a poverty-stricken forest monastery, evoked an anxious suspicion in Pyotr’s mind. Besides the tale Tikhon had told about Nikita after the attempted suicide, there must be something else, something shameful, that he knew. He seemed to be awaiting new misfortunes, and his flickering eyes counselled:

“Keep your hands off. You need me.”

He had already paid three visits to the monastery. He would sling a pack on his back, take a staff in his hand, and set out unhurriedly, as though by walking the earth he did favour to it. Indeed, everything he did seemed to be done as a favour.

On his return, Tikhon would give but slow, obscure replies to their questions about Nikita. The thought would always arise that he was not telling all he knew.

“He’s well. Respected. Sends thanks for your messages and gifts.”

“What does he say?” Pyotr would ask, in an effort to elicit something more.

“What can a monk say?”

“Well, what?” Alexei would put in impatiently.

“He talks about God. He’s interested in the weather—says the rains don’t come when they should. Complains about the mosquitoes. They have lots of mosquitoes, out there. He asked about you.”

“What?”

“He’s sorry for you.”

“For us? Why?”

"Because you live on the run, and he's stopped still, well, and he's sorry for you, because you aren't easy."

Alexei would shout, guffawing:

"What nonsense!"

Tikhon's pupils would contract, and his eyes grow blank.

"Well, I don't know what he thinks. I'm telling you what he said. I'm a simple man."

"Yes, you're simple!" Alexei would tell him mockingly. "Like the fool, Anton."

A breeze blew up, enveloping Pyotr Artamonov in a fragrant warmth, and the day grew brighter. A blue chasm formed among the clouds, with the sun peeping from its boundless depths. Pyotr glanced at the sun, then, dazzled, fell still deeper into thought.

It was mortifying, in a way, that Nikita, after depositing a thousand rubles in the monastery and ensuring himself a lifelong annuity of a hundred and eighty, had resigned his share of the inheritance to his brothers.

"Who makes such present?" Pyotr had grumbled; but Alexei had been pleased.

"What does he need money for? To fatten those do-nothing monks? He decided right. We have a business, and children."

Natalya had been actually touched.

"So he hasn't forgot the injury he did us," she had said with satisfaction, brushing a solitary tear from her rosy cheek. "There's Elena's dowry."

This action of his brother's shadowed Pyotr's thoughts, for Nikita's departure for the monastery had been maliciously construed in the town, in an unfavourable light to the Artamonovs.

As to Alexei, Pyotr got along with him well enough, though he could see that his quick-witted cousin had picked the easiest part of the business: trips to the fair at Nizhni-Novgorod and, twice a year or so, visits to Moscow. Returning from such visits, Alexei would tell tremendous tales of the prosperity of the Moscow manufacturers.

"They live in style, no worse than the nobility."

"It's easy to live like a lord," Pyotr hinted; but the hint was lost on his cousin, who continued enthusiastically:

"When a merchant builds himself a house, it's a regular cathedral! They educate their children."

Though greatly aged, he had regained the liveliness of his early youth, and his hawk eyes were always bright.

"Why keep a frown on your face all the time?" he would ask his elder cousin. More, he would preach to him: "Business has to be done lightly. Business can't stand tedium."

Pyotr could see that Alexei had much in common with their father; but he found him harder and harder to understand.

"I'm a sick man," Alexei would still remind the family. Yet he took no care of his health: drank deeply, gambled heavily night after night, and was evidently loose with women. What was the focus of his life? Seemingly, neither he himself nor his home. Baimakova's house had long been badly in need of repair, but Alexei paid no attention to it. His children were born weak, and died before they were five. Only one had survived—Miron, an ugly, skinny youngster, three years older than Ilya. Both Alexei and his wife were infected with a ridiculous greed for useless things. Their rooms were crowded with an ill-assorted conglomeration of furniture bought from the gentry, and they both took pleasure in making gifts of it. They had given Natalya a queer sort of wardrobe, decorated with porcelain, and her mother—a big leather armchair and a splendid bed made of Karelian birch and decorated with bronze. Olga was a great hand at beaded pictures, yet her husband would bring her pictures of the same sort from his trips through the gubernia.

"You're crazy," said Pyotr, when his brother presented him with a huge desk, intricately carved and fitted out with innumerable drawers. But Alexei only stroked the desk and cried:

"It's a beauty. They don't make things like that any more. They know it, in Moscow."

"You'd do better to buy up silver. The nobility have lots of silver."

"Give me time—I'll buy everything! In Moscow...."

If Alexei were to be believed, Moscow was full of crazy folk, less occupied with business than with the effort to live—every one of them—like the gentry, for which purpose they bought up everything the nobility would sell, from country seats to teacups.

Visiting his cousin, Pyotr would always feel, with painful envy, that he was more at ease here than in his own home. It was hard to understand. Nor could he understand what it was he liked in Olga. Beside Natalya, she looked like a house maid; but she showed no silly fear of kerosene lamps, and did not believe that kerosene was made by students, out of the fat of suicides. Her mild voice was pleasant, and her eyes were fine, their kindly gleam unmarred by her spectacles. But she talked of people and affairs with a provoking childishness, as though regarding them from afar. This perplexed and irritated him.

"Don't you believe anyone's to blame for anything?" Pyotr would ask sarcastically, and she would reply:

"People are to blame, but I don't like to judge."

Pyotr did not believe her.

With her husband, she behaved as though she were older than he, and knew herself to be wiser. Alexei took no offence at this. He called her "aunt", and it was only seldom that he would exclaim, with a shade of vexation:

"That's enough, aunt—I'm tired! I'm a sick man, and it wouldn't do any harm to pamper me a little."

"You're pampered enough and plenty!"

She would smile to her husband, a smile that Pyotr would have liked to see on his own wife's lips. Natalya was a model wife, and a skilled housekeeper. She was unexcelled at pickling cucumbers and mushrooms and making preserves, and the servants in her house worked

like the wheels of a clock. Natalya loved her husband tirelessly, with a calm love, thick as cream. She was thrifty.

"How much have we got in the bank now?" she would ask, and add anxiously: "Are you sure it's a good bank, and won't bust?"

When she handled money, her comely face would grow stern. She would press her raspberry lips together, and an acrid, greasy light would appear in her eyes. Counting the filthy, varicoloured bits of paper, she would touch them carefully with her plump fingers, as though afraid the money would blow away like so many flies.

"You and Alexei—do you divide the profits right?" she would ask in bed, when she had sated Pyotr with caresses. "Are you sure he don't cheat you? He's smart! And they're greedy, he and his wife. They grab everything they can lay their hands on, just grab and grab!"

She thought herself surrounded by crooks, and declared:

"I can't trust anyone but Tikhon."

"Then you trust a fool," mumbled Pyotr wearily.

"He's a fool, but he has a conscience."

When Pyotr first took her to the fair at Nizhni-Novgorod, he asked her, wonder-struck at the gigantic scale of this all-Russian mart:

"How do you like it?"

"Very nice," she replied. "Plenty of everything, and all cheaper than at home."

And she began to enumerate the things they needed to buy:

"Half a hundredweight of soap, a case of candles, some loaf sugar, and a sack of granulated...."

In the circus, she covered her eyes when the acrobats appeared.

"Oh, the shameless creatures! Oh, they're half naked! Oh, I shouldn't look at them, with my baby coming. You shouldn't take me to such dreadful places—maybe it's a boy I'm heavy with!"

At such moments Pyotr Artamonov would feel that he was stifling in a boredom green and viscous as the slime in the river Vataraksha, where no fish would live but the fat, stupid tench.

Natalya still prayed as long and with as businesslike an air as ever. Her prayers done, she would sink into bed and zealously incite her husband to enjoy her soft, plump body. Her skin smelled of the pantry where she kept her jars of pickles, her smoked fish and hams. Pyotr felt repeatedly, and with increasing frequency, that his wife's zeal was excessive, that her caresses drained him.

"Let me alone. I'm tired," he would say.

"Go to sleep then, bless you," she would reply dutifully, and herself drop quickly into slumber, her eyebrows tilted as in surprise, her lips smiling, as though her closed eyes gazed at some wonderful vision, never seen before.

At those dreary moments when Pyotr realized with particular clarity his repugnance for Natalya, he would compel himself to recall the fearful day of the birth of their first son. After eighteen dragging hours of torment, his mother-in-law, frightened and tearful, had led him into a room dense with a strangely leaden atmosphere. His wife lay writhing on the crumpled bed, her eyes goggling and wild with searing pain, dishevelled, perspiring, barely recognizable. She greeted him with a wild cry:

"Petya, farewell, I'm dying. It will be a boy.... Petya, forgive...."

Her bitten lips were so swollen that they could barely move, and the words seemed to issue, not from her throat, but from her lowhung belly—monstrously distended, to the point of bursting. Her purple face was bloated. She panted like a tired dog, and, like a dog, thrust out her swollen, mangled tongue. She clutched at her hair, pulling and tearing it. Incessantly, she groaned and cried, as though trying to persuade or vanquish someone who would not or could not concede her wish:

"A bo-oy...."



It was a windy day. A bird cherry tossed and murmured outside the window, setting shadows dancing on the panes. Pyotr saw their antics, and heard the rustle of the leaves. Frantic, he cried:

"Pull the shade! Can't you see?"

And he fled in terror, followed by the woman's screams:

"A-a-a-a...."

After another hour and a half his mother-in-law, too happy and tired for speech, led him once more to his wife's bedside. Natalya looked up at him with the unearthly glory of martyrdom in her eyes, and said weakly, drunkenly:

"A boy. A son."

He bent over her and pressed his cheek to her shoulder, mumbling:

"Well, mother, I won't forget this while I'm alive, I can tell you that! Well, thanks!"

It was the first time he had called her "mother". All his fear, all his joy, went into that one word. Closing her eyes, she stroked his head with a weak, heavy hand.

"He's giant," said the big-nosed, pock-marked midwife, displaying the child as proudly as though she herself had born it. But Pyotr did not see his son. He could see nothing but the ghostly pale face of his wife, with dark pits instead of eyes.

"Will she die?"

"Fiddlesticks!" returned the pock-marked midwife briskly. "If people died of that, there'd be no midwives."

Now the giant was in his ninth year, a tall, healthy boy with a lofty forehead and a turned-up nose, his face lit by big, grave eyes of a clear, dark blue. Alexei's mother had had such eyes, and Nikita. Another son, Yakov, had been born a year after the first; but Ilya, by the time he was five, had made himself the most conspicuous person in the house. Pampered by all, he was obedient to none, and lived an independent life, getting himself with amazing consistency into the most uncomfortable and dangerous

situations. His mischief was almost always somewhat out of the ordinary run, and this evoked in his father a feeling akin to pride.

One day Pyotr found his son in the shed, trying to attach a barrow wheel to an old wooden trough.

"What's it going to be?"

"A steamer."

"It won't go."

"I'll make it go!" said the son, with his grandfather's spirit. Failing in his effort to convince the boy that his work would be wasted, Pyotr thought to himself:

"Persistent as his grandfather."

Ilya was inflexible in the pursuit of his designs; but try as he might, he was unable to build a steamer out of his trough and two barrow wheels. Then he drew charcoal wheels on the sides of the trough, dragged it to the river, embarked, and got stuck in the mud. Instead of being frightened, however, he simply shouted to some women who were rinsing clothes in the river:

"Hey, goodies! Pull me out, or I'll drown!"

Natalya spanked Ilya, and had the trough chopped up for firewood. From that day on Ilya noticed his mother no more than he did his two-year-old sister, Tanya. He was a busy little fellow, always working at something: whittling, chopping, smashing, mending. Watching him, his father thought:

"He'll be somebody. A builder."

Sometimes Ilya would ignore his father for days on end. Then, marching suddenly into the office, he would climb onto Pyotr's knees and demand:

"Tell me a story."

"I have no time."

"Neither have I."

Chuckling, the father would push aside his papers.

"Well, then. Once upon a time...."

"I know all about once upon a time. Tell me a funny story."

The father knew no funny stories.

"Better go to your grandmother."

"She's got a cold."

"Well, then, try your mother."

"She'll start washing me."

Artamonov laughed. His son was the only being who could make him laugh so easily and unaffectedly.

"Then I'll go to Tikhon," said Ilya, and made to slide down from his father's knees; but Pyotr stopped him.

"What does Tikhon tell you?"

"Everything."

"Well, but what?"

"He knows everything. He used to live at Balakhna. They build barges there, and boats."

When Ilya tumbled from somewhere and bruised his face, his mother thrashed him, shouting:

"Don't climb over roofs, or you'll be a cripple, a hunchback!"

Scarlet with rage, the boy would not cry, but threatened his mother:

"I'll die on you, if you hit me any more!"

She told the father about this threat. He chuckled.

"Don't spank him. Send him to me."

The boy came and stood in the doorway, his hands behind his back. Every other feeling drowned in curiosity and surging tenderness, Pyotr asked:

"Why are you rude to your mother?"

"I'm not a fool," the son replied angrily.

"You must be a fool, to be rude."

"She hits me. Tikhon says, only fools get beaten."

"Tikhon? Tikhon himself...."

But for some reason or other Pyotr hesitated to call the yard-keeper a fool. He paced up and down the room, studying the human being in the doorway, at a loss what to say.

"You hit your brother Yakov."

"He's a fool. And besides, it don't hurt him. He's fat."

"Well, and if he's fat, does that mean you have to hit him?"

"He's greedy."

Pyotr felt that he could not discipline his son, and that his son knew it. Perhaps it would have been simpler, and have done more good, to pull the boy's ears; but he just could not raise his hand to that shaggy head, so poignantly dear. The very thought of chastisement made him uncomfortable before the steady, expectant gaze of the beloved blue eyes. And the sun interfered, too. Somehow, it was always on sunny days that Ilya was most desperately mischievous. Speaking the usual words of admonishment, Pyotr recalled a time when he himself had had to hear out these same words, and they had failed to reach his heart, had made no mark in his memory, had evoked only boredom and, briefly, fear. But blows, even if well deserved, are not easily forgotten. That, too, Pyotr Artamonov knew well.

The second son, round, rosy-cheeked Yakov, in feature resembled his mother. Yakov often cried, seeming actually to enjoy the process. As a preliminary to the flow of tears he would sniff, and puff out his cheeks, and rub his eyes with his fists. He was cowardly. He ate much and greedily, and then, heavy with food, either slept or complained:

"Mother, I'm bored."

The elder daughter, Elena, was at home only during the summer. She had become a young lady, distant, alien.

At the age of seven, Ilya had begun to study with priest Gleb. Discovering, however, that the son of the mill clerk, Nikonov, was learning to read by a primer with pictures in it, called *Our Own Tongue*, instead of the Psalter, he had told his father:

"I'm not going to study any more. My tongue hurts."

Only after long and careful questioning had he explained:

"Pasha Nikonov's learning our own tongue, and I'm learning somebody else's."

But sometimes, as though checked by some inner barrier, this lively boy would sit for hours, all alone, under

a pine tree on the hill, throwing dry cones into the muddy green water of the Vataraksha.

"He's bored," the father would reflect. He too, after whirling for weeks and months in the deafening hum of affairs, would find himself suddenly plunged into a dense fog of hazy thoughts, a blind tangle of tedium, and he could not tell what was the more stupefying: his business cares, or the tedium induced by these essentially monotonous cares. Often, on such a day, he would begin to hate the people he encountered—one for a sidelong glance, another for an ill-chosen word. Thus it was, that cloudy day, that he almost hated Tikhon Vyalov.

Vyalov was approaching, with Pyotr's mother-in-law leaning on his arm. Pyotr heard him say:

"We Vyalovs are a big family."

"Then why don't you live with your relatives?" Pyotr demanded, approaching them and taking Baimakova's free arm. Tikhon fell silent and moved away. Sternly and insistently, Artamonov repeated his question. Then, narrowing his colourless eyes, the yard-keeper replied indifferently:

"Why, there's none of them left. They all got done in."

"What do you mean—done in? Who did them in?"

"Two of my brothers got sent to Sevastopol, and they were killed there. And the eldest got mixed up in the rebellion, when the peasants were mad over the emancipation. Their father was in a rebellion, too—he wouldn't have potatoes, when they made folks eat 'em by force. They were going to flog him, so he ran away, and the ice broke under him, and he got drowned. Then my mother had two more with another husband, Vyalov, the fisherman—me, and my brother Sergei."

"And where's your brother?" asked Ulyana, blinking her eyes, still heavy with weeping.

"He got killed."

"You sound like the prayers for the dead," said Artamonov crossly.

"Ulyana Ivanovna was asking me. She was a little upset, and so I...."

He did not finish. Bending, he lifted a dry twig from the road and threw it aside. For a minute or two they walked on without speaking.

"Who killed your brother?" Artamonov suddenly asked.

"Who could kill him? Men kill," said Vyalov calmly. Baimakova sighed, and added:

"Lightning, too."

...Midsummer brought difficult days. Beneath a yellow, smoky sky, an oppressive hush, a relentlessly grilling heat, hung over the earth. Fires swept the peat bogs and the forests. A dry, hot wind, rising with sudden and boisterous force, wildly whistling and hissing, would tear the withering leaves from the trees, scatter the rusty pine needles left from the year before, swirl up clouds of sand, and send them up, mixed with wood shavings, boon, and chicken feathers, jostle the people, trying to tear off their clothes, and finally hide away in the forests, where it made the fires blaze up still more fiercely.

There was much illness at the mill. Through the hum of the spindles, the murmur of the shuttles, Artamonov heard dry, hacking coughs. The faces beside the looms were downcast and bitter, the workers' movements languid. Output declined, and the quality of the cloth suffered perceptibly. There was a great increase in absenteeism, for the men began to drink more heavily, and the women had sick children to tend at home. Day after day the jolly carpenter, Serafim, a little old man with the rosy face of a child, worked over tiny coffins; nor was it seldom that he had to fit the pale spruce boards together for grown men and women whose earthly tasks were done.

"A holiday is what we need," Alexei insisted. "To cheer them up, and raise their spirits."

Setting off for the fair with his wife, he repeated his advice:

"Give them a holiday, and they'll liven up. Believe me, a good time is the cure for all ills!"

"Go about it," Pyotr told his wife. "And make it a good job—no stinting."

Natalya began to grumble. Angrily, he demanded: "What now?"

She blew her nose loudly and protestingly into the bottom of her apron, but replied:

"Very well."

They began with special prayers, which priest Gleb conducted with great solemnity. The priest had grown still thinner. His cracked voice, pronouncing the unaccustomed words, rose plaintively, as though his last, failing strength went into his plea. The ashy faces of the consumptive weavers frowned sternly, set in reverent immobility. Many of the women sobbed aloud. And when the priest raised his sad eyes to the smoky sky, the people, too, looked up imploringly through the smoke to the bald, tarnished sun, thinking, perhaps, that the meek priest saw someone in the heavens who knew him and would hear his prayer.

After the services, the women brought tables out into the settlement street, and all the mill hands sat down to brimming wooden bowls of noodle soup with fat mutton. Ten persons sat around each bowl; and on each table stood a pail of strong, homebrewed beer and a big, wicker-cased bottle of vodka. This quickly raised the spirits of the jaded, disheartened people. The suffocating hush hooding the earth stirred and retreated to the swamps and the burning forests. The settlement rang with merry voices, with the clatter of wooden spoons, the laughter of children, the scolding of mothers, the jests of the youth.

A heavy meal kept them at table for three hours or more. Then, when the drunk had been taken home, the young folk gathered around the neat little carpenter, Serafim, in his blue cotton shirt and trousers, faded with many washings. The carpenter's pink, sharp-nosed, drunken little face beamed rapturously, and his lively eyes sparkled, between winks, with a spirit that belied his age.

There was a sort of palpitating lightness about this jolly coffinmaker, a celestial joyousness, in full keeping with his name. He sat on a bench, with his gusli on his sharp knees, picking at the strings with fingers dark and knobby as horse-radish roots, and singing in the manner of blind beggars—deliberately doleful, nasal, twanging:

*Well, good folk, here's a new tale for your pleasure,  
For your wisdom to hear and to unriddle!*

He winked at the girls. His daughter Zinaida, a bobbin girl, stood majestically among them: good-looking, high-bosomed, insolent-eyed. He sang still higher, still more dismally:

*The sweet Lord Christ, he sits in the radiance,  
In the fragrance and coolness of heaven,  
'Neath a linden tree, so tall and gold-blossomed.  
There in state, on his throne of white bast fibre,  
He distributes shining gold and silver,  
He distributes bright jewels of rare beauty,  
Awarding rich men for their virtue,  
For that they, the rich, are so gentle,  
Kind to the poor and the unfortunate,  
Loving the poor folk as brothers,  
Feeding the hungry and the wretched.*

Again he winked at the girls, and suddenly shifted to dance time. With a shrill squeal, his daughter sprang forward, her hands behind her head, Gypsy fashion, her broad bosom quivering, and began to dance to the sounds of the strings and her father's ringing chant:

*And the silver that they take  
Makes their arms and legs to ache!  
And the bright gold of desire  
Sears their limbs in flame and fire!  
Pearls and sapphires that they prize  
Bring dull blindness to their eyes!*



The boys whistled shrilly, drowning out the strumming of the gusli and Serafim's merry song. Then the girls and women struck up, in swift dance time:

*Oh, the ships come sailing swiftly, o'er the sea,  
Bearing gifts for all the pretty girls we see!*

And Zinaida, dancing, rejoined piercingly:

*Young Pashka sends Palashka  
Yards of sackcloth for shirting;  
And Teryoshka sends Matryoshka  
Dainty earrings—birch-tree catkins.*

Ilya Artamonov sat on a pile of lumber with Pavel Nikonov, a skinny boy, with an oldish, baldish head that was always twisting uneasily on his long neck; with pasty, sickly features and avidly shifting, timid grey eyes. The little old man in blue seemed very nice to Ilya. He liked the music of the gusli, and Serafim's gay, funny voice. But all of a sudden that woman in the bright red blouse had to flare up and start whirling about, and spoil everything, evoking wild whistles and a tuneless, shrieking song. This woman became altogether hateful to his mind, when Nikinov said, very low:

"Zinaida's a wild one. She lives with everybody. With your father, too—I saw him squeezing her, myself."

"What for?" asked Ilya stupidly.

"You know well enough!"

Ilya dropped his eyes. He knew what girls were squeezed for, and was annoyed with himself for asking his friend about it.

"You're lying," he said disgustedly, and stopped listening to Nikonov's whispered comments. He disliked this downtrodden, cowardly boy for his sluggish ways and for his monotonous and uninteresting tales about the mill girls. But Nikonov was a connoisseur where pigeons were concerned, and Ilya was fond of pigeons. Also, he valued the privilege of protecting his weakly companion from the boys in the settlement. Moreover, Nikonov had a gift for

describing the things he saw, though he saw nothing but unpleasantness, and talked about it in just the tone of Ilya's younger brother, Yakov—as though in complaint against everyone in the world.

Ilya sat for a while without speaking, then got up and went home. Tea had been spread in the orchard, in the hot shade of the dust-grey trees. There was company at the big table. The quiet priest, Gleb, was there, and the mechanic, Koptev, swarthy and curlyheaded as a Gypsy, and the clerk, Nikonov, his face washed so clean that it had no expression left. Nikonov had a tiny, whiskered nose, and a bump on his forehead; and a smile oozed between nose and bump, lifting quivering folds of skin around his narrow slits of eyes.

Ilya sat down beside his father. He did not believe this cheerless man had any dealings with the shameless bobbin girl. The father stroked his shoulder with a heavy hand, but did not speak. They were all drooping with the heat, and streaming with perspiration. Speech had to be forced. Only Koptev's loud voice rang out as though on a winter night, frosty and crystal clear.

"Are we going to the settlement?" the mother asked.

"Yes. I'll go get my cap," said the father. He got up and walked towards the house. Ilya followed, a moment later, and caught up with him on the porch.

"What is it?" asked the father affectionately. And the son asked, looking straight into his eyes:

"Did you squeeze Zinaida? Or didn't you?"

It seemed to Ilya that his father looked frightened. That did not surprise him, for he regarded his father as a timid man, who was afraid of everyone, that being the reason why he spoke so little. Ilya often felt that his father was afraid even of him. Indeed, he was afraid at this very moment. And, to encourage the frightened man, the boy said:

"I don't believe it. I'm only asking."

The father pushed him into the entry and down the hall. Once in his room, with the door shut tight, he began

pacing up and down, from corner to corner, breathing heavily, as he usually did when angered.

"Come over here," said Artamonov senior, pausing by the desk. Artamonov junior obeyed.

"What was that you said?"

"It was Pavlushka who said it. I don't believe him."

"You don't believe him? I see."

Pyotr's anger evaporated as he stared down at his son's high forehead and grave, unsmiling face. He pulled at his ear, trying to make up his mind: was it good, or bad, that his son did not believe the silly chatter of just such a youngster as himself—did not believe it, and was evidently holding out this unbelief as consolation? He did not know what to say to his son, or how, and he was very reluctant to strike the boy. But something had to be done, and he decided that blows would be the simplest and most comprehensible measure. Heavily raising an unwilling hand, he thrust his fingers into his son's crisp hair and began to jerk them, muttering:

"Don't listen to fools' talk. Don't listen!"

Then he pushed the boy away, commanding:

"Go stay in your room. And ... stay there. Yes."

The son went to the door, his head tilted to the side and borne stiffly, as though it were an alien body. Watching him, the father consoled himself with the reflection:

"He's not crying. I didn't hurt him."

He tried to make himself angry.

"Think of that! He don't believe it! Well, I've showed him now."

But this could not smother his sense of pity and injury for his son, or his dissatisfaction with himself.

"It's the first time I've struck him," he thought, looking down disgustedly at his red, hairy hand. "Myself, I must have been thrashed a hundred times, before I was ten."

But this, too, failed to comfort. Artamonov glanced out through the window at the sun, which resembled a grease

spot on muddy water, and listened awhile to the drawing din that came from the settlement; then set out reluctantly to visit the festivities. On the way, he told Nikonov quietly:

"Your stepson tells my Ilya all sorts of foolishness."

"I'll give him a thrashing," the clerk replied, quite readily—in fact, with every appearance of pleasure.

"Teach him to watch his tongue," Pyotr added. Glancing sidewise into Nikonov's blank face, he thought relievedly:

"It's as simple as all that."

The settlement greeted the master with loud good cheer. Faces beamed in drunken smiles, and flattery was loud. Serafim, shod in new bast sandals, his white foot-wrappings held in place by red tapes, Mordvinian fashion, stamped and twirled before Artamonov, singing hosanna:

*Say, now, who comes here?*

*Why, our lord and pride!*

*With our mistress dear*

*Stepping at his side!*

Grey-bearded, long-haired, priestly-looking Ivan Morozov rumbled, in a deep bass:

"We're pleased with you. We're pleased."

Another old man, Mamayev, shouted ecstatically:

"The Artamonovs care for their folk like lords!"

And Nikonov remarked to Koptev, loud enough for all to hear:

"These are grateful folk. They know how to value their benefactors!"

"Mother, they're pushing me," complained Yakov, round as a ball in his pink silk blouse. His mother held him by the hand. Smiling graciously at the women, she told him:

"Look at the old man dance."

The blue carpenter spun and leaped indefatigably, chanting one facetious couplet after another:

*Ekh, and stamp, and stamp away!*  
*Ekh, stamp away faster!*  
*Leather boots weigh more than bast—*  
*A woman's sweeter than a lass!*

Praises were no novelty to Artamonov. He had every reason to doubt their sincerity. And yet, they softened him. Smiling with pleasure, he said:

"Well, thanks, thanks! We get on with one another, don't we?"

To himself, he thought:

"It's a shame Ilya's not here to see his father honoured."

He felt the need to do something kind, to help these people in some way. After a little thought, he declared, pulling at his ear:

"We'll have to double the size of the children's hospital."

Serafim threw up his hands and sprang away.

"Here that? Hurrah for the master!"

The people cheered, loudly, if unevenly. Natalya, surrounded by women, was deeply touched, and murmured nasally:

"Some of you go bring three more kegs of beer. Tikhon will give them to you. Go ahead."

This still further increased the women's rapture. Nikonov shook his head, exclaiming emotionally:

"A meeting fit for a bishop!"

"Mo-other, I'm hot," Yakov whined.

The joyful occasion was a little ruffled when the black-bearded stoker, Volkov, with his huge sloe eyes, came running up to Natalya. An emaciated child, half stupefied with the heat, its blue-white skin covered with sores, dangled helplessly over his left arm. Running up to Natalya, he began to shout hysterically:

"What shall I do? My wife died. Of the heat, she did! And left this behind. What shall I do?"

Strange, yellow tears dripped from the stoker's insane

eyes. The women tried to push him away from Natalya, clamouring, as though in apology:

"Don't you listen to him. He's out of his mind. His wife was a sinful woman. Consumptive. He's sick, too."

"Take the baby from him, somebody," said Artamonov gruffly, and immediately several pairs of arms were stretched towards the drooping child. But Volkov cursed them loudly and ran away.

On the whole, everything was fine, and bright, and gay, as a holiday should be. Noticing new faces among the workers, Artamonov thought, with a feeling akin to pride:

"Our numbers are growing. If Father could see it...."

Suddenly his wife said regretfully:

"You chose a bad time to punish Ilya. He don't see how the people love you."

Artamonov did not answer, but glanced furtively at Zinaida. She was sauntering about, with a dozen girls behind her, singing in a low-pitched, unpleasant voice:

*Sidling past me,  
Goggling at me,  
He's on the point, ah,  
Of loving me!*

"The hussy!" he thought. "And it's a rotten song, too."

He took out his watch, glanced at it, and, he could not have said why, lied to his wife:

"I'll go home for a minute. I'm expecting a message from Alexei."

He strode off rapidly, reflecting upon what he must say to his son. He prepared a number of phrases, very stern, and at the same time affectionate. But when he softly opened the door to Ilya's room, he forgot them all. The boy was kneeling on a chair, his elbows on the window sill, looking out at the crimson, smoky sky. The gathering darkness filled the little room with grey-brown dust. In a big cage hanging by the wall, a blackbird scraped its yellow beak, preparing to go to sleep.

"Well, still sitting here?"

Ilya started and turned his head. Unhurriedly, he got down from his chair.

"There! Listening to all sorts of rubbish."

The boy stood with his head bent, and the father understood that this was deliberate, to remind him of the punishment received.

"Why do you stoop? Hold your head up straight."

Ilya lifted his eyebrows, but would not look at his father. The blackbird began to hop about in its cage, whistling softly.

"He's angry," thought Artamonov. He sat down on Ilya's bed and said, poking the pillow with his finger: "You shouldn't listen to nonsense."

Ilya said:

"But how can I help, when they say...."

His grave, reasonable tone relieved the father. Pyotr went on, more mildly and with greater courage:

"So they do. But don't you heed them. Forget what they say. If you hear people talking filth, you just forget it."

"Do you forget?"

"Why, of course! If I remembered everything I heard, what do you think would have become of me?"

He spoke slowly, carefully picking his words for greater simplicity, and realizing clearly that these words were not really needed at all. Soon, tangled in the obscure wisdom of simple words, he sighed and said:

"Come over here to me."

Ilya cautiously approached. Taking the boy between his knees, the father laid his hand on the broad forehead and pressed it lightly upward. But Ilya would not raise his head, and the father took offence.

"What are you sulking about? Look at me."

Ilya looked straight into his eyes, but that only made matters worse, because he asked:

"Why did you hit me? I told you I didn't believe Pavlushka."

Artamonov senior did not answer at once. He realized, to his amazement, that by some miracle his son stood on a level with himself. The boy had risen to adult significance, or, perhaps, reduced the adult to his own level.

"He's too touchy for his age," Pyotr reflected. Getting up, he said hurriedly, eager to hasten his son's reconciliation:

"I didn't hurt you. Children have to be taught. If you knew how my father used to thrash me! And my mother, too. And the ostler, and the clerk, and the German footman. It's not so bad when your own folks thrash you, but an outsider—that's when it hurts. Your own flesh and blood strikes light, in love."

He paced up and down the room, six steps from door to window, hurrying to end this conversation—almost afraid lest his son put some new question.

"You'll hear and see all sorts of things you shouldn't, around the mill," he mumbled, keeping his eyes turned away from his son, who stood pressed against the foot of the bed. "I'll have to send you to the city, to school. Would you like that?"

"Yes."

"Well, then...."

He wanted to caress his son, but something stopped him. He could not recall: had his own father and mother ever caressed him after they had hurt his feelings?

"Well, you can go out and play. Only I wish you wouldn't run around with Pashka."

"Nobody likes him."

"There's nothing to like him for, such a sickly pup."

Downstairs again, in his own room, Artamonov stood at the open window, reflecting that his talk with his son had not come off too well.

"I've spoiled him. He's not afraid of me."

From the settlement came a confusion of sounds: the girls' squeals and songs, loud conversation, the wheezing of an accordion. Tikhon's voice came clearly from the gateway:



"What keeps you at home, child? A holiday on, and you sit here at home. Going to school? That's fine. Untaught is as well as unborn, so they say. Well, I'll be lonely here without you, child."

Artamonov wanted to shout:

"You're lying! I'll be the lonely one!" Maliciously, he thought: "The underhanded sneak! Fawning on the master's son."

When the boy left for the city, where priest Gleb's brother, a teacher, was to prepare him to enter school, Pyotr felt that his heart was empty, his house full of boredom. He had an uncomfortable sense of something out of order—the same feeling that came over him when the icon-lamp in his bedroom was not burning. Pyotr had grown so accustomed to the little blue flame that he would start awake, in the endless nights, if it went out.

Before leaving, Ilya behaved so badly as to seem deliberately trying to leave bad memories of himself behind. He was rude to his mother, reducing her to tears. He let all Yakov's birds out of their cages, and gave Nikonov the blackbird he had promised Yakov.

"What's got into you?" the father asked. But Ilya did not answer, only tilted his head to the side. And it seemed to Artamonov that his son was mocking at him, reminding him once more of what he would have liked to forget. It was strange, how much room this small being occupied in his heart.

"Did Father ever worry over me that way?"

Memory confidently replied that Pyotr had never found in his father a responsive and well-loved parent, but only a stern taskmaster, far more attentive to Alexei than to him.

"What's wrong, then? Am I kinder than Father?" Artamonov asked himself, and paused in perplexity. He could not say of his own self what he was: a kind man, or a bitter. These thoughts gave him no peace, coming up suddenly at inconvenient moments, besieging him while he

was at work. The business was growing energetically, turning hundreds of eyes upon the master, and demanding constant strained attention. Yet, whenever anything reminded him of Ilya, his business thoughts would snap like rotten warp, and it would require great effort to knot them together again. He tried to fill the void of Ilya's absence by increased attention to his younger son—and realized, with sullen disappointment, that Yakov could afford him no consolation.

"Daddy, buy me a goat," Yakov begged. He was always begging for something.

"Why a goat?"

"To ride on."

"That's a silly idea. Only witches ride on goats."

"Elena gave me a picture book, and there's a nice little boy in it, riding on a goat."

The father reflected:

"Ilya wouldn't have taken the picture on faith. He'd have stuck to me till I told him about the witches."

He did not like Yakov's way of pestering the boys in the mill settlement, and then complaining that they hurt him.

The elder son was also pugnacious, a fighter, but he had never once complained of anyone, though often bruised and knocked about by his playmates in the settlement. The younger son was cowardly and lazy. He was always sucking or chewing something. At times there was something about Yakov's actions that was hard to understand, something that seemed to promise little good. At tea, one day, as his mother was pouring him milk, her sleeve caught and overturned a glass of tea, and the hot water scalded her.

"I saw all the time you'd turn it over," Yakov bragged, grinning.

"You saw it, and you didn't say a word. That's no way," his father told him. "Now mother's scalded her legs."

Yakov chewed on, blinking and puffing, without a

word. A few days later, his father heard his voice in the yard, spluttering eagerly:

"I saw he was going to hit him. He sneaked along, and sneaked along, and came up from behind, and didn't he just give it to him!"

Looking out of the window, Artamonov saw his son gesticulating excitedly, in lively conversation with that nasty Pavlushka Nikonov. He called Yakov into the house and forbade him to associate with Nikonov. He was about to add something; but after a glance into the boy's eyes—violet whites, and strangely light pupils—he only sighed and pushed him away.

"Go, empty-eyes."

Yakov went as cautiously as though the floor were ice, his elbows pressed to his sides and his hands extended, in the posture of a person carrying some unwieldy, heavy burden.

"Clumsy. And stupid," the father decided.

About his tall, untalkative daughter, too, there was something of the same dull tedium he found in Yakov. She liked to lie around reading. She would eat a great deal of jam at tea, and at dinner would break her bread fastidiously, with daintily crooked fingers, and manipulate her spoon as though she thought there was a fly in the soup. Her lips, very red and full, were always pursed, and she often told her mother, in a tone quite unsuitable to a mere girl:

"That's not done now. It's out of style."

When her father asked:

"See here, my educated lady, why don't you ever look in at the mill, and learn how the linen is made for your shifts?"—she replied:

"Very well."

She got into a fine dress, took her parasol, a gift from her uncle Alexei, and followed her father submissively, taking elaborate care to prevent her dress from getting caught on anything. A few times she sneezed; but when the workers wished her good health, she only flushed and

nodded haughtily, without a word or a smile. Pyotr began to explain the processes, but, noticing that she was looking at the floor instead of the machines, he soon fell silent, hurt by his daughter's indifference to the business which required so much care. Still, as they came out of the loom shop, he asked:

"Well, how did you like it?"

"It was very dusty," she replied, examining her dress for damages.

"You didn't see much," said Pyotr, with a wry smile, and shouted at her disgustedly:

"What are you pulling your skirt up for? The yard is clean, and your skirt's short enough as it is."

Startled, she released her skirt, which she had been holding up between two fingers, and murmured apologetically:

"There's such a smell of oil."

This use of two fingers was particularly annoying, and Artamonov grumbled:

"You won't take much from life with two fingers!"

One rainy day, when she lay on a couch, absorbed in a book, he sat down beside her and asked what she was reading.

"About a doctor."

"I see. Something scientific."

But when he glanced into the book, he exclaimed indignantly:

"What do you mean by lying? It's verses. Don't try to tell me anyone writes science in verse!"

Hurriedly, confusedly, she told him some tale about how God gave Satan permission to tempt a certain doctor, a German, and how Satan sent a devil to get around the doctor. Artamonov pulled at his ear, trying conscientiously to grasp the purport of this tale; but the ridiculously instructive tone his daughter assumed was very vexing, making understanding difficult.

"This doctor—was he a drunkard?"

He could see that Elena was embarrassed by his

question. Paying no more attention to her explanations, he said angrily:

"It's all mixed up. Fairy tales. Doctors don't believe in devils. Where'd you get the book?"

"The mechanic gave it to me."

Recalling Elena's manner of staring thoughtfully, with grey cat eyes, into space, he felt called upon to warn her:

"Koptev is no match for you. Don't get too thick with him."

Yes, Elena and Yakov were duller, more humdrum than Ilya. That he saw ever more clearly. And gradually, and unnoticeably, in place of love for his son, there grew up within him a hatred for Pavel Nikonov. When he met the sickly little fellow, he would think to himself:

"All on account of such a rotten...."

He felt a physical repulsion for this boy. Nikonov walked with stooped shoulders, his head twisting uneasily at the top of his thin neck. Ever when the boy was running, he seemed to Artamonov to be sneaking along like some cowardly misdoer. He worked hard, polishing his stepfather's boots and brushing his clothes, chopping and fetching wood, carrying water, dragging pails of slops from the kitchen, rinsing his brother's diapers in the river. Busy as a sparrow, grimy and ragged, he greeted everyone with an insinuating, doggish smile. Whenever Artamonov came in sight, no matter how far away, the boy would begin to bow, bending his goose neck until his head dropped to his chest. It was almost a pleasure to Artamonov to see him soaking in the autumn rain, or chopping wood on a winter day—trying to warm his stiff fingers with his breath, and balancing, goose-like, on one leg, with the other raised for warmth, the holey, down-at-heel boot almost falling off. His whole body writhed when he coughed, and his blue-white little hands would clutch at his chest.

Learning that Nikonov kept two pairs of pigeons in the bathhouse attic, Artamonov ordered Tikhon to free the birds and to see that the boy stopped climbing to the attic.

"He might fall off the roof and hurt himself. He's such a weakly youngster."

Coming into the office one evening, he found this boy scraping the floor with a knife, and rubbing it with a wet rag, to remove spilt ink.

"Who spilt it?"

"Father."

"Are you sure it wasn't you?"

"I didn't do it! Honest to God!"

"Then what were you crying about?"

Down on his knees, his head bent as though awaiting a blow, Pavel made no reply. Throwing him a glance that made him shrink and cower, Artamonov declared with satisfaction:

"It serves you right."

Then, in a sudden flash of lucidity, he smiled into his beard at the childish, ridiculous dislike he had conceived against this insignificant creature.

"What foolishness I waste my time on!" he thought to himself indulgently, and threw to the floor a heavy copper five-kopek piece.

"There! Buy yourself some sweets."

The boy reached out to take the coin as cautiously as though he feared the copper would sting his gaunt, dirty fingers.

"Does your stepfather thrash you?"

"Yes."

"Well, there's no help for it. Everyone gets thrashed now and then," said Artamonov consolingly. A few days later, when Yakov made some complaint about Pavlushka, Artamonov senior, though he did not believe his son, told his clerk, purely by force of habit:

"Give your stepson a thrashing."

"I thrash him all right," Nikonov assured him respectfully.

When summer brought Ilya home for the vacation period, dressed in unfamiliar clothes, with his hair cut short and his forehead bigger than ever, Artamonov's

dislike for Pavel grew still more bitter; for his son stubbornly continued his friendship with this puny ragamuffin. Ilya himself had become poisonously polite, using the formal *vee*\* in addressing his father and mother. He walked about with his hands in his pockets, acting like a visitor in the house; he teased his brother into a state of tearful desperation, and annoyed his sister until she hurled her books at him. All in all, he behaved abominably.

"I told you so," Natalya complained to her husband. "And everyone says the same. Schooling leads to impudence."

Artamonov said nothing, but watched his son anxiously. It seemed to him that, though Ilya was constantly in mischief, there was no heart in it at all, only deliberate purpose. Pigeons appeared again, strutting and cooing on the ridge of the bathhouse roof. Ilya and Pavel would sit by the chimney for hours, engaged in lively chatter, when they were not busy flying their birds. Once, soon after Ilya's arrival, the father said:

"Well, tell me what it's like at school. I've told you lots of stories. Now it's your turn."

Very briefly and hurriedly, Ilya told him some dull tale about the tricks the boys played on their teachers.

"Why do you play such tricks on them?"

"They pester us," Ilya explained.

"I see. It don't sound good to me. Are your lessons hard?"

"No, they're easy."

"Is that the truth?"

"Look at my report card," Ilya returned, with a shrug. His eyes were fixed on the sky, high over the orchard. The father asked:

"What do you see out there?"

"A hawk."

\* *Vee*—personal pronoun, second person plural. It is used in more formal address, as compared with the familiar second person singular (*tee*).—*Tr.*

Artamonov sighed.

"Well, you'd better run out and play. It seems you're dull with me."

Remaining alone, he recalled that he, too, in childhood, had almost always felt either boredom or fear when his father spoke to him.

"They play tricks on their teachers. Such a thing never entered my head, when the parish clerk was teaching me my letters at the end of a strap. Life seems to be easier now, for children."

Before returning to school, Ilya asked—and this was his only request:

"Father, let Pavel keep his pigeons in the attic, out at the bathhouse."

Promising nothing, the father replied:

"You can't cure everybody's troubles."

"Then he may," the son concluded. "I'll go tell him. He'll be glad."

Artamonov senior was hurt because his son, so solicitous to gladden a wretched little nobody, had not cared or tried in any way to gladden his own father's life. And after Ilya's departure he felt himself possessed by an even more persistent dislike for the clerk's stepson. Things reached such a pass that whenever anything went wrong, at home, at the mill, or in town, the image of this ragged, dirty child would push, uninvited, to the very focus of Artamonov's annoyance, as though offering its weak limbs for him to hang on them all his bitter thoughts, all his ugly emotions. The boy grew like mould, like the shadows at evening. Flitting like a thievish imp, he came more and more often into view.

One mild day of Indian summer, Artamonov went out into the orchard. He was tired and angry. Evening was falling, and the weary autumn sun simmered, without heat, in a greenish sky which the wind had swept and the rains washed clean. Tikhon Vyalov was at work in a corner of the orchard, raking together the fallen leaves. Their soft, mournful whispering floated among the trees.



Beyond the orchard, the mill was droning, and grey smoke rose lazily, soiling the transparent air. To avoid seeing the yard-keeper, or having to speak to him, Artamonov turned to the opposite end of the orchard, where the bathhouse stood. The bathhouse door, he noticed, was ajar.

"That's fellow's in there."

Peeping furtively into the dressing room, he saw the little figure of his enemy, sprawled on a bench in the shadowed corner. His head tilted, his legs spread wide apart, the boy was absorbed in masturbation. For just one instant, Artamonov was glad; but then, remembering Yakov and Ilya, he spluttered, in fear and repulsion:

"What are you doing, you swine?"

Pavel's arm stiffened and flew out. His whole body curved up queerly from the bench. His lips parting in a low cry, he shrank back, a tense little ball, then threw himself towards the door, where the big man was standing. Artamonov, with deliberate pleasure, stopped him by a blow of the right foot against his chest. Something crunched. The boy moaned faintly and toppled sidewise to the floor.

There was a moment when it seemed to Artamonov that by this blow he had cast off from his soul a burden of filthy rags, a weight of which he was weary. But the next moment he glanced out into the orchard, listening, then closed the door and bent over Pavel, saying, very low:

"Well, get up. Let's go."

The boy lay with one arm thrown forward, and one hand pressed to the floor under his bent knee. One leg seemed far shorter than the other. He had the appearance of movement, as though crawling stealthily closer and closer to Pyotr. The outflung arm was unnaturally, fearsomely long. Artamonov staggered, catching at the door frame for support. He pulled off his cap, and with its lining wiped his forehead, suddenly broken out in copious perspiration.

"Get up. I won't tell anybody," he whispered; but he

already knew that he had killed the boy, already saw the little ribbon of dark blood oozing out on the floor from beneath his cheek.

"Dead," Pyotr thought. And the plain, short word brought deafening reverberations. He thrust his cap into his coat pocket and crossed himself, looking stupidly down at the pitifully twisted little figure. His brain throbbed fearfully in primitive thought.

"I'll say it was an accident. I hurt him with the door. Yes, the door. It's a heavy door."

He looked around, and sank heavily onto the bench in the shock of finding Tikhon behind him, with his broom in his hand. The yard-keeper's watery eyes were fixed on Nikonov. His fingers scraped his stony cheek, and he seemed deep in thought.

"There," Artamonov began loudly, gripping the edge of the bench with both hands. But Tikhon interrupted. Shaking his head, he said:

"A weak little fellow, and clumsy. How many times I told him, 'Don't go climbing up there!'"

"What's that?" asked Pyotr, frightened, but hopeful.

"'You'll break your neck,' I told him. You said the same thing, too, Pyotr Ilyich—remember? For any kind of play, you've got to be sly. Unconscious, is he?"

Squatting, the yard-keeper sought the pulse at Pavel's wrist and throat, and laid a finger on the boy's cheek. Then he wiped the finger on his apron, with a scraping sound, as though he were striking a match, and said:

"Looks like he's done for. A sickly little creature, he was. It didn't need much to finish him."

Tikhon's speech was calm, his movements slow, his whole aspect quite as usual; yet his employer waited suspiciously, expecting stern words of condemnation. Tikhon glanced up through the square hole in the ceiling, listened awhile to the cooing of the pigeons, and said, as simply and calmly as before:

"By the door, he always climbed. He'd get up on the bench, and put his foot on the door-knob, and from there

he'd get up to the top of the door, and then reach out to the hole and pull himself up by his arms. Only there wasn't much strength in his arms, and so he lost his grip and fell, and he must have hit his head against the corner of the door."

"I didn't see it happen," Pyotr said. The instinct of self-preservation prompted swift surmises.

"Is he lying? Pretending? Setting a trap for me, so I'll be in his hands? Or don't he really understand, the fool?"

The last seemed more likely. Tikhon was acting stupidly. With a shake of the head, as though butting out at someone, he sighed:

"Eh, a speck of dust! And why do that kind come into the world? I'll go tell his mother. The stepfather won't be any too sorry, I guess. To him, the boy was just an extra mouth."

Artamonov followed the yard-keeper's talk suspiciously, alert for any sign of sham; but Tikhon spoke, as always, in the tone of a man untouched by curiosity.

"Hark!" he said, and drew his brows together, listening. Somewhere outside, a woman was calling crossly:

"Pashka! Pashka-a-a!"

Tikhon rubbed his cheek.

"Pashka, indeed! Get your tears ready."

"He's just a fool," Artamonov decided, and went out into the orchard, pulling his cap from his pocket and carefully examining its broken peak.

For two or three weeks he lived unbalanced by a constant, surging sense of obscure fear, a daily menace of new and undefined calamity. Another moment, and the door would open, and Tikhon would push in, saying:

"Well, of course, I know all about it..."

Outwardly, however, all went well. Obedient to the habit of birth and burial, people accepted the boy's death as a simple matter of course. Nikonov tied a new black tie around his yellow neck, and his washed-out face assumed an expression of modest consequence, as though he had received some long deserved reward. The mother of the

murdered boy, a tall, gaunt, horse-faced woman, silent and tearless, was anxious to hasten her son's burial—or so it seemed to Artamonov. She kept smoothing the white ruffles at the head of the coffin, adjusting the paper band of saintly images on the blue forehead, pressing down with careful fingers the bright new copper kopeks that covered the eyes, crossing herself again and again, with strange rapidity. Her arm grew so tired, Pyotr noticed, that twice during the funeral services she was unable to lift it. She tried to cross herself, but her arm dropped as though the bone had snapped.

Yes, as far as that was concerned, everything went smoothly. The Nikonovs even thanked him, tediously and loquaciously, for his contribution to the funeral expenses, though, fearful of arousing Tikhon's suspicions by overgenerosity, he had given little. Artamonov still found it hard to believe the yard-keeper quite so obtuse as he had seemed that day at the bathhouse. This was the second time the bathhouse had pushed this man to the fore, wedging him ever more deeply into Pyotr's life. A strange thing, and shivery. It even occurred to Artamonov to have the bathhouse burned down, or broken up for firewood. It was getting old, anyway, and the boards were beginning to rot. A new one would have to be built, in a different part of the orchard.

Watching Tikhon attentively, he found no change in the yard-keeper's life. As always, his very existence seemed a reluctant concession, granted in kindness of heart, against his own will; as always, he was untalkative; surly as a policeman with the mill workers, who detested him, and particularly, disgustingly rude to the women. Only with Natalya did his manner change. To her he spoke as though she were not the wife of his employer, but some relative of his own: an aunt, perhaps, or an elder sister.

"What makes you so chummy with Tikhon?" Pyotr had asked repeatedly; and his wife always replied:

"I've got so used to him."

Had the yard-keeper had any friends, or visited

anywhere, Pyotr might have thought him a sectarian. Many such, of various types, had appeared in the last few years. But Tikhon had no friends, except for the carpenter, Serafim; and he liked to go to church, where he prayed devoutly, though he always opened his mouth unseemingly wide, as if about to yell. Sometimes the sight of Tikhon's flickering eyes made his employer's face cloud sombrely. It seemed to Artamonov that a threat lay hidden in their watery depths. He felt the desire to take the man by his collar and shake him well, to shout:

"Talk up!"

But Tikhon's pupils would contract and lose expression, and the stony composure of his features would deaden Pyotr's alarm. Anton the fool, while he lived, had often come to the yard-keeper's lodge, or sat on the bench by the gate with him of an evening. Tikhon had often tried to question the half-wit.

"Don't talk nonsense. You just think a while, and then tell me. Kuyatyr—who's that?"

"Kayamas," Anton would squeal rapturously. And he would begin his song:

*Oh, Chi-rist is arisen, is arisen...*

"Hold on!"

*The wagon lost a wheel, lost a wheel...*

"What are you after?" Artamonov had demanded, with an annoyance he himself could not have explained.

"The meaning of his inhuman words."

"But they're fool's words."

"Well, even a fool must have some sense of his own," Tikhon had said stupidly.

It was best not to talk to him, anyway. There came a stormy, sleepless night when Artamonov felt that he could no longer bear this dead weight on his soul. Waking his wife, he told her the story of the Nikonov boy. Natalya heard him out in silence, blinking sleepily, and remarked, with a yawn:

"I never remember dreams."

But suddenly she started up in alarm.

"Oh, I'm so afraid Yasha might start doing that!"

"Doing what?" her husband asked amazedly.

And when she had explained to him tangibly what she was afraid of, he reflected, pulling at his ear in mortification:

"It was no use telling her."

That night, through the murmurs and shrieks of the winter storm, besides a heightened sense of his own loneliness he thought up something that seemed to clarify and explain the murder he had committed. He had killed that vicious boy, a dangerous playmate for Ilya, out of love for his son, and fear for him. This thought eased him a little, providing intelligible foundation for the dark hatred he had borne for the Nikonov boy. But what he wanted was to rid himself entirely of this burden, to shift it onto other shoulders. He sent for priest Gleb, thinking to speak about this mortal guilt apart from the ordinary confession of more venial sins.

The lean, stoop-shouldered priest came in the evening and sat down quietly in a corner. It was always his way to thrust his lanky frame deep into some corner, the darker and the closer the better, as though he were hiding away from shame. The dark folds of his shabby cassock almost merged with the dark leather of the armchair, and only his face was dimly visible against the sombre background. Drops of melted snow sparkled glassily on his hair, over the temples. One bony hand, as usual, clasped his long, sparse beard.

Lacking the resolution to plunge straight to the point, Artamonov began to talk about how rapidly the people were degenerating; about their exasperating indolence, drunkenness, debauchery. The theme soon bored him, and he fell silent, pacing up and down the room. Then the priest's voice came flowing from the shadowy corner, and what he said was very much like a complaint.

"Nobody gives the common folk a thought, and

themselves, they aren't accustomed to take any thought for their spiritual needs. They don't know how. Educated people.... Well, it's not for me to judge. Anyway, there aren't many such among us. And, you know, they can't make themselves involved in our everyday life, in the life of the people. They seek much. it's true, but not what is essential. Mutiny attracts them, and that leads to persecution by the authorities. Somehow, nothing seems to go right with us. Only one voice resounds, ever louder, through the empty clamour, appealing to the conscience of mankind, striving imperiously to awaken it. That is the voice of a certain Count Tolstoy, a philosopher and man of letters. A most remarkable man; and his speech is daring to the point of insolence. But inasmuch ... you see, the Orthodox church is involved...."

He spoke for a long time about Tolstoy; and, although Artamonov did not entirely understand, the priest's hushed voice, rippling gently from the shadows, and his all but fabulous portrayal of this extraordinary man, turned the listener's thoughts away from self. Though not forgetting the purpose for which he had called the priest, Pyotr found himself gradually yielding to a feeling of pity for him. The poor folk in the town, he knew, thought Gleb a little touched, because the priest was a stranger to cupidity; because he was equally gentle with all; because he performed all the services well, and the funeral service with particular pathos. All this seemed only natural to Artamonov. Such was the office of the priesthood. What attracted him to Gleb was the universal dislike the priest encountered among the Dryomov clergy and the leading townsfolk. But a pastor of souls should be stern. It is his duty to find and utter words of a very special quality, words that pierce and cut; it is his duty to excite fear of sin, repulsion against sin. This power Gleb lacked, as Artamonov knew. And when he had listened for some time to the priest's hesitant talk, to the wavering words that seemed to be afraid of hurting someone's feelings, he suddenly declared:

"The reason I disturbed you, Father Gleb, was to let you know I won't be fasting this year."

"Why not?" the priest asked absently; and, receiving no reply, added: "You're accountable to your own conscience."

It seemed to Artamonov that Gleb uttered these words in the very tone of callous indifference that distinguished the yard-keeper, Tikhon. Being poor, the priest had no rubbers, and the snow he had brought in on his heavy, peasant boots had melted into puddles on the floor. He kept shuffling his feet through these puddles, talking on and on, deploring but not condemning:

"When you see what's going on, there's only one thing to console you: life's evil, as it increases, collects in one mass, as though to make it easier to overcome. It's always that way, I've observed: a little core of evil appears, and then, like the thread on a spindle, more and more evil collects around it. It's hard to overcome something scattered; but if it's united, it may be struck off at one blow by the sword of justice...."

These words remained in Artamonov's memory. In them, he found a certain consolation. Pavel—there was the core. Had not all Artamonov's ugly thoughts focussed around him, attracted as to a lodestone? And once more he thought that some share in his guilt might justly be accounted to his son. With a deep breath of relief, he invited the priest to tea.

The dining room was bright and cosy, its warm air fragrant with savoury smells of food. On the table stood the boiling samovar, puffing out little jets of steam in high good humour. Pyotr's mother-in-law, in her armchair, was singing pleasantly to her four-year-old granddaughter:

*The blessed mother of light  
Made her gifts as she found right:  
To Apostle Peter, haze  
Of the sultry summer days;*



*Saint Nicholas him she gave  
Rule of rolling tide and wave;  
For Elijah, prophet and seer,  
She bade forge a golden spear.*

"A pagan song," said the priest, with a propitiatory smile, as he drew up his chair.

In the bedroom, Pyotr's wife told her husband:

"Alexei is back. I saw him. He goes wilder over Moscow with every trip. I'm afraid...."

That summer, red spots had appeared on Natalya's white neck and smooth, rosy cheeks. They were tiny as needle pricks; but they annoyed her nonetheless, and twice a week, before going to bed, she would diligently rub a honey-coloured salve into the skin. She was busy with this at the moment, seated before the mirror, her bare elbows plying back and forth and the high mounds of her breasts swaying heavily under her shift. Pyotr lay in bed, his arms folded behind his head, his beard pointing up at the ceiling. Glancing sidewise at his wife, he decided that she resembled some sort of a machine, and that her salve smelled of boiled sturgeon. When Natalya got into bed, after earnestly whispered prayers, and, obedient to the habit of her healthy body, offered herself to her husband, he pretended to be asleep.

"A core," he thought. "Me, too—a spindle. Turning and twirling. And who does the spinning? Tikhon says: man spins, and the devil weaves sackcloth. Of all the idiotic fools!"

The business, which Alexei was energetically developing, spread ever farther along the sandy hills beyond the river. The hillsides lost their golden colouring. The silvery glint of mica began to disappear, the sparkling points of quartz to fade. The shifting sand was trampled firm. With every year, the spring brought greener and more luxuriant growths of weeds. Plantain sprang up along the trodden paths, and lop-eared burdock. The orchard trees sowed new growths around the mill. Rotting autumn

leaves fertilized the fattening sand. The mill grumbled ever louder, breathing an atmosphere of alarms and cares. There was a whirring of hundreds of spindles, a murmur of hundreds of looms, a breathless panting of machines from morn to night, a busy din of industry swirling unintermittently over the mill. It was pleasant to feel oneself the master of all this—surprisingly pleasant, evoking pride.

But there were times, more and more often, when a weariness came over Artamonov. He would begin to recall the countryside, where he had spent his childhood—the clear, quiet little river Ratj, the broad expanses, the peasants' simple life. And he would feel that he had been caught in an unseen, but unrelenting grip, which turned and twisted him at will; that the daylong din, flooding his brain, left no room for any thoughts save those connected with the business; that the curly smoke of the mill chimneys shadowed all the surrounding world with dreary despondency and tedium.

In such moods, the thought of the mill workers would be particularly disquieting. Their strength, it seemed to him, was steadily waning; they were losing their peasant endurance, becoming infected with a womanish irritability—touchy beyond all measure, and insolent in speech. New traits of thriftlessness and instability had appeared among them. In the old days, when Pyotr's father was alive, they had been more sociable, more at one. They had not drunk so much, nor been so brazenly dissolute. Now everything was tangled up. The workers had gained in spirit, and even, as it seemed, in understanding; but they took less care about their work, and less thought for one another. They all had an unpleasant, sneaky way of looking at people, as though taking their measure. The young people were particularly rowdyish and disrespectful. The mill very quickly killed all peasant traits in the youth.

Volkov, the stoker, had to be sent to the gubernia insane asylum. Yet it was only five years since he had

appeared at the mill, a fine-looking, vigorous man, with a lively wife, driven from the countryside by a fire that had razed their home. After one year, the wife had started playing loose, and Volkov had begun to beat her. The beatings had ended in consumption. And now they were both gone. Artamonov had observed many such cases of rapid decline. In five years, there had been four murders—two in drunken brawls, one in revenge, and one out of jealousy: an elderly weaver stabbing a bobbin girl. Violent quarrels, ending in serious injuries, were frequent.

Alexei seemed quite unaffected by all this. Generally, he was growing harder and harder to understand. There was something about him reminiscent of that neat little jester, carpenter Serafim, who worked with equal skill and pleasure making bows and whistles for the mill children, and nailing coffins for them. Alexei's hawk eyes were alight with assurance that all was going well and always would go well. He already had three little mounds in the cemetery. Only one son, Miron, held on firmly, tenaciously to life. Made clumsily and carelessly of long bones and cartilage, Miron seemed to creak and rattle in every joint. He had a habit of cracking his knuckles violently, producing a loud, crunching sound. At the age of thirteen, he already wore spectacles, which somewhat shortened the sweep of his long, beaked nose and shaded the unpleasant lightness of his eyes. He never went anywhere without a book in his hand, his finger thrust between the pages to mark his place, so that book and arm seemed grown together. He spoke to his father and mother like an equal—more, he argued with them, and they seemed to like it. As to Pyotr, clearly sensing his nephew's dislike, he paid him back in the same coin.

There was no sort of propriety at Alexei's. To Artamonov senior, the difference between his own life and his brother's seemed almost the same as between a monastery and a showbooth at the fair. Alexei and his wife had no friends among the townsfolk; but their crowded rooms—regular storehouses of battered old knickknacks

and furniture—would be thronged of a holiday with people of the most doubtful quality: the mill doctor, Yakovlev, with his gold teeth, a spiteful, mocking man; the loud-mouthed mechanic, Koptev, a drunkard and gambler; Miron's teacher, a student whom the police had debarred from further study, and his snub-nosed wife, who smoked and played the guitar. There were others, too, all sorts of human wreckage. They all reviled the clergy and officialdom with equal insolence, and each of them was clearly convinced of his own cleverness. These people were not genuine—Artamonov felt it in every fibre of his being. And he could not understand what use his cousin, half-owner of a big and important business, could have for them. Listening to their loud talk, he would recall the priest's complaint:

"They seek much, but not what is essential."

He did not ask himself: what, then, was essential? Where did the essence lie? He knew. It lay in the business.

His cousin's favourite appeared to be that noisy Gypsy, Koptev. The mechanic always looked drunk. There was a driving energy about him, and even, perhaps, a certain wisdom. More often than any of the others, he would exclaim:

"That's all nonsense, pure philosophy! Industry—that's the thing! Machinery!"

But Artamonov senior suspected in Koptev a heretical, destructive kernel.

"A dangerous fellow," he told his cousin. Alexei seemed very much surprised.

"Koptev? Nonsense! He's a wonder. Efficient, hard-working, clever! We need thousands like him!"

Chuckling, he added:

"If I had a daughter, I'd make him my son-in-law, and chain him to the job!"

Pyotr turned glumly away. When the company were not playing cards, he would sit alone, in his favourite armchair, soft and wide as a bed, pulling at his ear as he listened to the talk. He could not agree with any of these

people, and would have liked to argue with every one of them. And it was not only because they all disregarded him, the senior partner, that he felt such a desire to argue. There were other reasons, as well; though he could not have explained them, these other reasons, even to himself. But he was no talker. Only rarely, constrainedly, would he put in a word.

"Priest Gleb was telling me the other day about a certain count...."

And immediately Koptev barked at him:

"What's he to you, that count? To you, to you? The last sigh of peasant Russia."

Shouting thus, he poked a finger most disrespectfully in Pyotr's direction. All the others, listening, began, like Koptev, to resemble Gypsies, that homeless, wandering tribe.

"Moths," Pyotr reflected. "Parasites."

One day, he said:

"It's all wrong, that saying—that business is no bear, to run away to the forest. Business is a bear, and why should it run away? It's got hold of us, and it hugs us tight. Lord and master, that's what business is to a man."

"Hear, hear," barked Koptev: "Where could one hear such wisdom? From whom? Now we know the danger!"

And Alexei demanded sarcastically:

"Where do you get your ideas—from Tikhon?"

Pyotr was highly offended. At home, he told his wife:

"Keep your eyes on Elena. That Gypsy, Koptev, hangs round her, and Alexei's all for him. Elena's too good a catch for him. Look around for a husband for her."

"There's no fit husbands here," said Natalya thoughtfully. "We'll have to try the city. But it's really too early."

"See they don't catch you napping," Artamonov returned. He chuckled, and his wife tittered coyly.

When he managed to slip free for a while, to break away from the narrow ring of business cares, he would find himself once more engulfed in a thick fog of dislike for the people around him, of dissatisfaction with himself.

There was only one bright spot—his love for his son; but this love, too, was tarnished, shadowed by the boy Nikonov, or, perhaps, driven below the surface by the weight of bloodguilt. Watching Ilya, he sometimes felt the urge to tell him:

“See what I did, out of fear for you.”

His mind was not artful enough to hide that the fear for his son had come only an instant before the murder; but Pyotr knew that in this fear alone could he seek justification, however slight. Still, when Ilya was near, he avoided the very mention of Nikonov, lest he let slip some hint of the crime he would have liked to picture as a deed of valour.

Ilya, Pyotr saw, was developing rapidly, but in a strange direction. The boy was growing more restrained. He spoke more civilly to his mother, and had given up his teasing of Yakov, now also at school; he liked to romp with his younger sister, Tatyana, and went no further than mild irony with Elena. But in all he said and did there was something of estrangement, of preoccupation with other things. Pavel Nikonov had been replaced by Miron. The two cousins were almost always together, talking away indefatigably, with milling arms. They read and studied together, out in the summerhouse in the orchard. Ilya was hardly ever at home. Of a morning, he would appear briefly at tea, and then make off for his uncle's house in town, or disappear into the woods with Miron and swarthy, shaggy Goritsvetov—a small, pushing fellow, prickly as a brier bush, with a lounging gait and eyes so derisively cocked that they seemed crossed.

“What makes you run around with such a little sheeny?” Natalya asked her son disgustedly. Pyotr noticed that the boy's fine eyebrows twitched.

“Sheeny's an insulting word, Mother. You know perfectly well Alexander is priest Gleb's nephew, so he's Russian. And he leads the class, in school.”

The mother snorted contemptuously:

“Sheenies always push up to the front.”

"How do you know?" returned the son. "There's only four Jews in the whole town, and they're all poor, except the druggist."

"Yes, and forty little sheenies. And if you go to Vorgorod, they're all over the place and the same at the fair."

Ilya repeated, with vexing persistence:

"Sheeny's a bad word."

Then the mother clattered her spoon against her saucer and shouted at him, flushing:

"Are you trying to teach me? I know what I'm talking about! I've got eyes in my head. I can see the way he tries to get around every one, the little lickspittle, even Tikhon, and so I say, he's mealymouthed as a sheeny, and they're dangerous—that kind. I knew such a soft-spoken fellow, once...."

"That's enough!" put in Pyotr sternly. On the point of tears, she complained:

"What is this, Pyotr Ilyich? A person can't say a word!"

Ilya sat in frowning silence. His mother reminded him:

"I brought you into the world."

"Thanks," said Ilya, and pushed away his empty cup. The father glanced at him sidewise and chuckled shortly, pulling at his ear.

Pyotr knew, from his wife's tone, that she was afraid of her son, as she had once been afraid of kerosene lamps, and, more recently, of an intricate coffeepot Olga had given her, which she was sure would explode some day. He, too, experienced something akin to the mother's ludicrous fear of her son. The lad was hard to understand. All three of them were hard to understand. What did they find to amuse them in Tikhon, the yard-keeper? They would sit at the gate with him, of an evening, and Artamonov senior would hear the yard-keeper's voice raised in instruction:

"That's true. The less you carry, the lighter you go. But as for corners, don't you believe it. How can there be corners in the sky? There's no walls there."

The boys would laugh. Ilya's laughter was velvety and brief, Miron's—dry and caustic. Goritsvetov laughed less readily than the others; he would always break off determinedly, urging:

"Hold on! It's not funny at all!"

And again Tikhon's obscure wisdom would flow lazily forth:

"You, boys, should study more about human beings. What's a man, anyway? And what work is for which, and what's his destiny? That's what you need to ponder over. And then there's words. They have to be studied through and through. You, too, like to use some smooth word. Only, if you stop to think, there's no end to anything, ever!"

And Tikhon would repeat his old saying, so familiar to Pyotr:

"Man spins the thread, and the devil weaves sackcloth. That's how it goes, without end."

Again the youngsters would laugh, and Tikhon would laugh thickly with them. Then he would sigh:

"Eh, bright eyes! Wise, but undersize!"

In the evening shadows, the boys seemed smaller, more insignificant than by sunlight, while Tikhon seemed to swell and spread, and talked even more foolishly than in the daytime.

Ilya's conversations with Tikhon intensified Artamonov's dislike for the yard-keeper, and at the same time imbued him with vague unreasoning fear. He asked his son:

"What do you find in Tikhon?"

"He's an interesting person."

"What's interesting about him? His foolishness?"

Ilya replied quietly:

"Even foolishness needs to be understood."

The answer pleased Artamonov.

"That's true. The world is full of foolishness."

But a moment later he realized:

"Tikhon's very words!"



His son aroused in him hopes of a very special nature. When Ilya stood at the window, his hands thrust into his pockets, whistling softly as he watched the workers in the yard; when he moved unhurriedly through the loom shop, or turned his light step towards the settlement, the father would reflect with satisfaction:

"He'll be a keen master. And it won't be like me he'll come into the business—hitched up and driven off."

It was a little disappointing that the boy was so untalkative. When he did speak, it was in terse, studied words that aroused no desire to continue the conversation.

"He's a little dry," Artamonov reflected. But it was sufficient consolation to note how Ilya differed from the other boys—how favourably he compared with that noisy chatterbox, Goritsvetov; with languid, lazy Yakov, and with his cousin Miron. Rapidly losing the traits of youth, Miron talked bookishly, bore himself arrogantly, and, on the whole, resembled some bureaucratic official to whom the printed word contains precise specifics, not to be gainsaid, for all contingencies of life.

The vacation weeks went by with elusive speed, and the boys prepared to leave. Somehow, it worked out that Natalya loaded Yakov with parting advice, while the father spoke to Ilya, saying anything but what he would have liked to. For how could he say that life was dull for him, in the mosquito swarm of monotonous business cares? One does not speak to youngsters of such things.

Artamonov senior was so hungry for something different, for some experience outside the everyday course of life—inevitable as snow, rain, mud, heat, dust—that at length he found, or invented, what he sought. Travelling through a remote, wooded section of the uyezd, he was caught on the road by a June storm of rain and hail, with pealing thunder and blue flashes of bursting clouds. Water, indistinguishable in the sudden murk, streamed down the narrow forest road. The earth dissolved under the horses' hoofs, rising in liquid mud to the hubs of the carriage wheels. At eerie intervals, a cold blue flame hung

for an instant over the molten seething of the earth, and in its menacing light, through the glassy fringe of rain, the shuddering black trees sprang skywards out of the dripping darkness, on either side of the road. The invisible horses stopped short, snorting, the water squelching around their restless feet. Yakim, the fat coachman, a meek soul, spoke to them soothingly. The hail soon stopped, and its icy rattle died in the forest; but the rain came down thick and heavy, in millions of leaden drops, lashing the foliage and filling the darkness with an angry roaring.

"We'll have to go to the Popovs," said Yakim.

And so, as in a dream, Artamonov found himself, in dry clothes that cramped his limbs, sitting at table, too bashful to move, in a warm room sunk in pleasant semi-darkness. A nickel-plated samovar hummed on the table, and a tall, slender woman, in a dark dress that fell in ample folds, was pouring tea. Fine grey eyes lit her pale face, under a turban of reddish hair. Very simply and resignedly, her mild voice carrying no hint of complaint, she spoke of her husband's recent death and her intention of selling her property and moving to town, to set up a private school.

"That's your cousin's advice. He's an interesting man, so lively and original."

Pyotr grunted enviously as he looked around the room. Travelling through the gubernia with his father, in his youth, he had often been in the homes of the gentry; but he had found nothing particularly attractive in them. The people, the furnishings, had evoked only a sense of oppressive constraint. In this home, there was nothing oppressive. The atmosphere was one of kindliness and virtue. A big lamp under a frosted shade cast a milky light over the dishes and silver on the table. Its soft glow caressed the smooth, dark head of a little girl, bent over a sketchbook, with a green shade over her eyes. The little girl was drawing, with a fine-pointed pencil, humming something to herself, but so softly as not to interfere with

her mother's quiet speech. The room was not large, and it was full of furniture. Every article seemed to be an integral part of the room, and at the same time to live of itself, to express something all its own; and the same was true of the three bright paintings on the walls, one of which, just opposite Pyotr, depicted a white horse from some fairy tale, with proudly arched neck, and mane incredibly long—almost sweeping the ground. It was all amazingly cosy and peaceful, with the mistress' pleasant voice floating to his ears like a pensive song, as though from afar. In such surroundings one could live one's life through without alarms, and never do evil. With such a woman as wife, one could respect her, could speak with her of everything.

Beyond the coloured glass of the verandah door, bursts of bluish flame, no longer fearsome, convulsed the pitchy sky.

Artamonov left at daybreak, carrying with him as a treasured memory the impression of kindly peace and cosiness, and the almost incorporeal image of the quiet, grey-eyed woman who had created this cosiness. As his carriage rolled across the puddles, which reflected so impartially the gold of the sun and the splotchy black of the wind-torn clouds, he thought with envious melancholy:

"That's how some people live."

For some reason or other, he did not tell his wife about this new acquaintance, nor did he mention it to Alexei. That made it all the more embarrassing when, a few weeks later, coming into his cousin's parlour, he saw Popova beside Olga on the sofa. Alexei thrust him forward, saying:

"Meet my cousin, Vera Nikolayevna."

Smiling, she held out her hand.

"We're already acquainted."

"What's this?" cried Alexei. "Since when? Why didn't you tell me?"

Pyotr sensed the insinuation in his cousin's surprise,

and he felt a strange bristling at the roots of his beard. Pulling at his ear, he replied:

"I ... forgot."

Alexei shouted, pointing shamelessly at him:

"Look—he's blushing! What a clever answer, little boy! Who could forget such a lady, after seeing her once? Look—his ears itch—they're growing!"

Popova smiled, but her smile carried no offence.

They drank iced mead, from tall cutglass tumblers. The mead, a gift to Olga from this woman, was a golden, amber yellow, and pricked the tongue merrily. It put all sorts of clever words into Pyotr's mind, only he never had a chance to say them, because his cousin rattled away incessantly:

"No, Vera Nikolayevna, don't you be in any hurry to sell. Your place needs a buyer who's looking for peace and quiet. It's a place to find heart's ease. Our kind won't give you any sort of price. What have you got? No land, and hardly any forests, and what there is, is bad. And besides, who wants forests, in these parts, except the rabbits?"

Pyotr put in:

"You shouldn't sell."

"Why not?" asked Popova, absently sipping her mead. With a sigh, she added: "I have to."

Pyotr did not like the way Olga glanced at him, or the way her lips twitched, restraining a smile. He turned glumly back to his mead, without answering Popova.

Two days later, in the office, Alexei declared that he intended to lend Popova money on her furniture.

"Her place isn't worth anything, but the stuff she has..."

"Don't," said Pyotr, very determinedly.

"Why not? I know the price of this stuff."

"Don't."

"But why?" cried Alexei. "I'll go out there with an expert, and price everything."

Pyotr shook his head doggedly. He wanted very badly to dissuade his brother from this loan, but he could find

no arguments against it. Instead, he suddenly proposed:

"Let's go halves. Half from you, and half from me."

Alexei laughed, staring hard at him.

"Beginning to play the fool?"

"If I am, it's about time," said Pyotr Artamonov loudly.

"Look for yourself—it's the wrong party," his cousin warned him. "I've tried. She's a fish."

After two or three encounters with Popova, Artamonov learned to dream about her. He would imagine this woman beside him, and immediately there would open up before him a life of amazing ease and comfort, beautiful to the eye and for the heart, imbued with pleasant peace; a life in which there would be no need for daily contact with dozens of lazy inefficients, always dissatisfied, always shouting, complaining, always lying and cheating, surrounding him with an importunate flattery that was no less vexing than their ill-concealed and steadily growing hostility. It was easy to picture a life free of all this, a life far removed from the fat red spider that was the mill, with its ever spreading web. He could see himself as a sort of big tomcat, kept in sheltered peace, loved and petted by his mistress, and desiring nothing more. Nothing.

Just as the Nikonov boy had once formed a dark focus for all that was bitter and disagreeable, Popova now became a magnet attracting only light, agreeable thoughts and intentions. He refused to accompany his cousin to Popova's estate, with a crafty little old man in spectacles, who had been engaged to appraise her belongings. But when Alexei got back, the transaction completed, he said:

"Sell me the mortgage."

Alexei was unpleasantly surprised. He put endless questions: why, and wherefore—and finally declared:

"Listen here, it isn't worth my while! She won't be able to pay up, and her stuff is valuable—understand? You'll have to add something."

The bargain was struck. Grimacing, Alexei said:

"I wish you luck. It's a good job."

Pyotr, too, felt that he had done a good job. He had presented himself with a haven of rest.

"What about your wife? Shall I keep mum?" asked his cousin, winking.

"That's your lookout."

Alexei glanced at him searchingly, and said:

"Olga thinks you're in love with Popova."

"And that's my lookout."

"Don't bark at me. At our age, most men do some playing around."

Pyotr answered, rudely and angrily:

"You leave me alone."

Soon he began to notice that Olga's tone towards him, while friendlier than ever, had somehow acquired a hint of compassion that was not at all to his liking. Sitting in her parlour, one autumn evening, he asked:

"Has Alexei been talking nonsense to you about Popova?"

With a friendly touch of her light fingers on his hairy ones, she said:

"It won't go any further."

"It won't go anywhere at all," Artamonov returned, bringing a clenched fist down on his knee. "It will stay inside of me. It's not for you to understand. Don't you say anything to her."

It was not lust he felt towards Popova. In his dreams she appeared, not as a woman whom he desired, but as an indispensable appurtenance to the kindly comfort of her home, to the living of a good and proper life. When this woman moved to town, however, he began to see her often, at Alexei's and a moment came when he was overwhelmed. Dropping in one day, he found Olga indisposed. Popova stood at the bedside, the sleeves of her blouse rolled up, dipping a towel into a basin of water. She bent over the water, then straightened up—amazingly well-shaped, with small, girlish breasts—irresistibly attractive. Artamonov stopped in the doorway, staring silently

from under drawn brows at her white arms, her firm calves, her hips, suddenly faint with a surging desire that made him feel her arms around him. Forcing himself to nod in reply to her greeting, he entered the room and sat down by the window. Cheerlessly, he asked:

"What's wrong with you, Olga? You shouldn't take sick like that."

Never before had a woman affected him so shatteringly, so overpoweringly. It frightened him, bringing vague premonitions of risk and peril. He sent his carriage for the doctor, and himself left hurriedly on foot, taking the road to the mill.

It was late February. A thaw had set in, carrying promise of approaching storm and snow. A grey mist hung over the earth, hiding the sky and narrowing space around and over Artamonov to the dimensions of an overturned bowl. Damp, cold dust sifted slowly downwards, settling heavily on beard and moustache and making breathing difficult. Striding through the yielding snow, Artamonov felt himself crushed, annihilated, just as he had felt on the night of Nikita's attempted suicide and the day of the murder of Pavel Nikonov. The kinship in gravity between these two experiences was clear to him; and the third, consequently, seemed all the more perilous. It was obvious that he could never succeed in making this lady his mistress. And he already realized that his sudden flaring passion for Popova was breaking and sullyng something he held very dear, reducing this woman to the ranks of the ordinary. What a wife was, he knew only too well; nor had he any cause for thinking that a mistress might be in any way better than the woman whose vapid, obligatory caresses now almost failed to arouse him.

"What do you want?" he asked himself. "Lechery? You have a wife for that."

Always, at moments when something was threatening him, Artamonov felt a strained anxiety to pass the danger by as quickly as possible, to leave it behind, and never glance back at it. Facing menacing danger was like

standing on brittle spring ice, on a deep river, in the darkness of night. He had experienced this horror in adolescence, and his whole frame shrank at the memory.

A few days passed in dull, torpid misery. Then, early one morning, coming out into the yard after a sleepless night, he found the dog, Tulun, lying in a pool of blood. In the lingering darkness, the blood looked black as pitch. He touched the shaggy carcass with his foot. The dog lay in the snow, its teeth bared, and a bulging eye glared at the toe of his boot. Artamonov shuddered. Opening the low door to the yard-keeper's lodge, he asked, from the threshold:

"Who killed the dog?"

"I did," said Tikhon, who was drinking tea from a saucer balanced on his spread fingers.

"Why?"

"It's been biting folks again."

"Who was it this time?"

"Zinaida—Serafim's daughter."

After a moment's thoughtful silence, Pyotr said:

"It's a pity."

"Of course. I brought the dog up since it was a pup. Only it started growling at me too, lately. Well, even a man would go crazy, if you kept him chained."

"That's true," said Artamonov. He went out, closing the door very carefully behind him, and thinking to himself:

"Even he talks sense sometimes."

He stood in the yard for a while, listening to the rustle and hum of the mill. In a distant corner, a gleam of yellow marked the window of Serafim's lean-to, built against the stable wall. Artamonov went over to the window and looked in. A lamp stood on the table. Zinaida, in nothing but her shift, sat bowed over some sewing. When he entered the room, she asked, without lifting her head:

"What did you come back for?"

But then she glanced towards the door. Dropping her



work, she sprang to her feet and cried, with a smile:

"Oh, Lord! And I thought it was Father."

"I hear Tulun bit you."

"Didn't he, though," she said, as though it were something to boast of. Putting her foot up on a chair, she pulled up her shift. "Take a look!"

Artamonov stared at the white leg, bandaged just below the knee. Coming up close to the girl, he breathed:

"What were you up to in the yard so early?"

She glanced inquiringly at him, and chuckled in understanding. She put out the light with a vigorous puff down the lamp chimney, and said:

"We'll have to lock the door."

Half an hour later Pyotr Artamonov, pleasantly exhausted, was walking unhurriedly towards the mill, pulling at his ear and spitting now and again in amazed recollection of the bobbin girl's shameless caresses. Once or twice he chuckled, with the feeling that he had just fooled somebody, got the better of somebody, very cleverly.

He broke into the dissipations of the mill girls like a bear into an apiary. Their life exceeded all that he had heard about it, startling him, at first, by its brash nakedness of words and feelings, by its utter unrestraint, the defiant shamelessness with which all was laid open to view. It was of this shamelessness that their songs wept and sang. Love, they called it—Zinaida and her friends; and it had a bitter pungency more intoxicating than wine.

The mill clerks, Artamonov knew, called Serafim's little lean-to "the trap", and Zinaida "the pump". Serafim himself called his dwelling "the nunnery". Sitting on his bench by the stove, with his gusli hanging by an embroidered towel flung over one shoulder, he would toss his curly little head, contort his rosy features, and cry, winking at them all:

"Make merry, nuns! That's what they are—nuns, Pyotr Ilyich—don't you see? They're in obedience to the

merry devil, and I'm their prior, a sort of priest, tra-ta-ta! Give us a ruble, to make life jolly!"

He would thrust the money into his leg wrappings, and sing spiritedly, twanging the strings of his gusli:

*A lady, roasting in Hell's flame,  
Begged for fried ice—in God's name!  
But the Devil's stokers  
Cooled the poor fool with pokers.*

"You seem to know no end of jokes and songs," his employer would exclaim; and the old man would chatter on boastfully:

"A sieve! I'm like a sieve. Sift any junk you want to throuh me, and I'll sift out a song. That's the kind of man I am—a sieve!"

Once he said:

"It was the gentry who taught me. The Kutuzovs—they were fine gentry. And then there was Yapushkin, of the gentry too, and didn't he drink! He played poor, the fox—tramping around with a pack on his back, as if peddling all sorts of trash. And all the time, he kept writing things down, everything he saw and heard. Well, he wrote, and he wrote, and then he went to the tsar. 'Look,' he says, 'Your Majesty, what our peasants are thinking!' The tsar looked, and read all those writings, and he felt very bad. And soon he ordered freedom for the peasants, and he ordered a copper monument to Yapushkin. In Moscow, they were supposed to build it. And Yapushkin, they weren't to touch him, but send him alive to Suzdal, and give him all the liquor he wanted, and charge it to the treasury. Because, you see, Yapushkin wrote down all sorts of secrets about the people, only they went against the tsar, and they had to be kept mum. And out there in Suzdal, Yapushkin drank himself to death, and, of course, they stole his writings."

"That's all lies," remarked Artamonov.

"I never lied in my life, except to the girls. That's not my trade," the old man returned. It was always hard to

tell when he was joking, and when he was in earnest.

"It's people who know the truth, that lie," he chattered on. "Me, I can't lie, because I don't know the truth. Though, if you want to know, I can tell you one thing. I've seen plenty of truth, in my day, and my saying is: truth's like a woman—nice while it's young."

He may not have known the truth, but he did know an endless series of tales about the gentry, about their amusements and misfortunes, their cruelty and their wealth. And when he told these tales he would invariably add, with evident regret:

"Yes, but now they're done for. They've slipped out of focus, can't see their way. Off at a tangent!"

He described a circle around his head, then, quickly dropping his arm, described another circle near the floor.

"They played around too much," he concluded, winking, and sang:

*Once there were some gentlefolk,  
Lived in idle luxury,  
Till they'd squandered, right and left,  
All their father's property.*

Serafim told stories of bandits and witches, of peasant rebellions, of unfortunate love, of fiery serpents that came by night to inconsolable widows; and he spoke so interestingly that even his unruly daughter would be still, drinking in his tales as greedily as a child.

In Zinaida, Artamonov observed with distaste a comingling of furious debauchery with calculating practicality. More than once he recalled Pavel Nikonov's slander, now become prophecy.

"Why did I choose this one?" he would demand of himself. "There are prettier girls. Won't I look nice, when Ilya finds out about her!"

He noticed, too, that Zinaida and her friends seemed to regard their pastimes as a sort of unavoidable incumbency, much in the manner of soldiers on duty. At times it occurred to him that their very shamelessness was but an

effort to fool both themselves and others. He was soon repelled by Zinaida's greed for money, her importunate begging. This trait was far more noticeable in her than in Serafim, who spent all his money on sweet Teneriffe, which for some reason or other he called "turnip wine", and on his beloved marmalade, sweet buns, and garlicky sausage.

Artamonov liked this light-hearted old man, so amusing a companion and so skilful a worker. Everyone, indeed, liked Serafim. At the mill, they called him "the Consoler". There was more truth than mockery in the nickname, as Pyotr could see; and even the mockery was affectionate.

That made it all the harder to understand and to digest the friendship between Serafim and Tikhon. And Tikhon seemed deliberately trying to intensify his employer's dislike. This being the twentieth year of Vyalov's service with the Artamonovs, Natalya decided to mark his name day with particular solemnity.

"It isn't often you come across people like him," she told her husband. "Just think, in twenty years, he's never given us any trouble. Quiet, and steady, like the flame of a good wax candle."

As a special honour to the yard-keeper, Pyotr himself took him his gifts. Serafim dressed in his holiday best, was in the lodge. Tikhon stood behind him, with bent head, staring at his employer's toes.

"Here—the watch is from me, and the broadcloth from my wife. Yes, and here's some money."

"There's no need for money," Tikhon mumbled. After a pause, he added:

"Thanks."

He invited his employer to try the Teneriffe Serafim had brought him. The little carpenter immediately began to chatter:

"You know how to value us, Pyotr Ilyich, and we know how to value you. We look at it this way: a bear loves honey, and a smith forges iron. The gentry were the bears

to us, and you're the smith. We can see how big your business is, and how much work it takes."

Vyalov had been fingering the silver watch. His eyes still fixed on it, he said:

"Business ... is a railing ... for a man. It's what we hold on to, walking along the edge of the pit."

"There!" cried Serafim, pleased. "That's right! Or else we'd fall in, you see!"

"That's not true," declared Artamonov. "Because you're no business owners. You can't understand such things."

He sought stronger expressions, but failed to find them, though Tikhon's words had angered him at once. It was not the first time Tikhon had clad his stubborn, obscure thought in these terms; and with each repetition they annoyed his employer more. Pyotr sniffed and pulled at his ear, glaring at the yard-keeper's rough-hewn, much-greased head, still seeking in vain for words with which to crush him.

"There's different kinds of business, of course," Serafim put in conciliatingly. "Bad, and good...."

"The best knife won't feel good on your throat," muttered Tikhon.

His employer felt the desire to curse him roundly. Barely suppressing this impulse—for it was Tikhon's name day—he demanded sternly:

"What's wrong with you—always jabbering some silly nonsense about business? I just can't understand...."

Tikhon, staring under the table, agreed:

"Yes, it's hard to understand."

The carpenter spoke up again:

"You see, Pyotr Ilyich, he thinks there should only be harmless kinds of business."

"Hold on, Serafim. Let him talk for himself."

Then Tikhon, unmoving, his head bent so that his employer could see the drab bald spot, big as a hand, on his crown, sighed:

"Business is what the devil taught Cain."

"Hear him go!" cried Serafim, slapping his knee.

Artamonov got up, and told the yard-keeper angrily:

"You'd do better not to talk about what you can't understand. Yes."

He left the lodge, highly indignant, reflecting that Tikhon ought to be discharged. He would discharge him tomorrow. Well, not tomorrow. Next week. In the office, he found Popova waiting for him. She greeted him coldly, like a stranger. Sitting down, she thumped the floor with her parasol. She began to talk about the interest on her mortgage, which she was unable to pay at once.

"That doesn't matter," said Pyotr quietly, without looking at her. She went on:

"If you don't want to extend the term, you have the right to refuse." Having said this, in an offended tone, she thumped the floor again and left, with such unexpected rapidity that she was closing the door behind her by the time he looked up.

"She's angry," Artamonov thought. "I wonder what at?"

An hour later he was sitting in Olga's parlour, banging his cap against the sofa for emphasis, saying:

"You tell her—I don't want any interest, and I don't want her money, either. As if it was much! And she's not to worry, understand?"

Bending over her motley skeins of silk and boxes of beads, Olga replied thoughtfully:

"I understand, all right, but I don't think she will."

"Well, see that she does. What's your understanding to me?"

"Thanks," said Olga. Her spectacles flashed as she looked up with a glassy smile that he found very provoking.

"There's nothing to joke about," he said rudely. "I'm not expecting to root in her garden. I'm not after that. Don't you think it!"

"Ah, you men," said Olga, sighing, with a doubtful shake of her smooth head.

Pyotr cried:

"Believe me! I know what I'm talking about."

"Ah, but do you?"

Her sigh was sympathetic. Artamonov realized. Her eyes, behind the spectacles, were compassionate, almost tender. But that only ruffled his temper the more. He sat staring at the begonias on the window sill, with their graceful clusters of flowers among meaty leaves that looked like animal ears. He would have liked to tell her something clear enough to be conclusive, only the right words would not come. Finally, he said:

"What I'm sorry about is that place of hers. It's a wonderful place, yes, it is! She was born there."

"She was born in Ryazan."

"Well, she was used to living there. What's the difference? And it was out there my soul first fell asleep in peace."

"Woke up, you mean," said Olga.

"It's all the same, for the soul, whatever you call it—falling asleep, or waking up."

He talked on and on, himself not understanding any too well what he was saying. Olga listened, her chin on her hand. When he had talked himself out, she said:

"And now listen to me."

She told him that Natalya knew of his diversions with the bobbin girl; that she was hurt, that she wept and complained. But this did not touch Artamonov.

"Foxy," he said, with a wry smile. "She never so much as hinted to me that she knew. So she complained to you? Hm. And yet, she don't like you."

He thought a moment, and added:

"They call Zinaida 'the pump'. They're right! She's pumped all the muck out of me."

"That's foul talk," said Olga, grimacing, and sighed. "I remember, I once said to you that you treated your soul like a foundling. That's just exactly it, Pyotr. You're afraid of your own self, as if you were your enemy."

He took offence at this.

"You go too far. What do you think I am, a youngster? Why don't you stop a minute, and realize: here I sit talking to you, and my soul is wide open, and who else can I talk to like that? You can't do much talking with Natalya. Sometimes, I feel like slapping her. And here you.... Ugh, you women!"

He put on his cap and left, gripped suddenly by a speechless tedium. His mind turned to his wife. He had given her no thought for a long time past—had hardly noticed her, though every night, after whispering with God, she laid herself down with habitual affection at his side.

"She knows, and she pushes in just the same," he thought wrathfully. "The pig."

His wife was a familiar path, which Pyotr could have trodden blind without misstep. He had no desire to think about her. But he recalled that his mother-in-law, who was slowly dying in her armchair, with swollen frame and crimson, monstrously bloated features, had begun to regard him with increasing hostility. Tears flowed piteously from her eyes—once beautiful, now glazed and rheumy. Her distorted lips moved, but she could not speak: her tongue lolled, powerless, out of her mouth, and she had to push it back with her left hand, also halfdead.

"She has feelings. I'm sorry for her."

It required a greater exertion of will than he had expected to cut short his shameless doings with Zinaida. And as soon as that was over, new thoughts appeared to torment him, side by side with his memories of the bobbin girl. It was as though a second Pyotr Artamonov had been born, and lived side by side with the first, following him everywhere. He could feel this new double swelling, growing more tangible, becoming a hindrance in all that he, the real Pyotr Artamonov, was called upon to do and accomplish. Craftily seizing upon the fits of musing abstraction which at times came suddenly over him, it would insinuate bitter, mortifying thoughts:

"You work like a horse—what for? You've had



enough for a lifetime. It's time your son got to work. You love your son—so you murdered a harmless boy. A fine lady caught your eye—so you ran wild.”

And always, after such thoughts, life would seem duller, more colourless.

He somehow failed to notice just when it was that Ilya grew up. Nor was this the only event that passed him by, all but unperceived. The same was true of Natalya's efforts for their daughter Elena, whom she finally married off to a lively young fellow with a little black moustache, the son of a wealthy jeweller in the gubernia seat. The same was true of the death of his mother-in-law, who finally passed away one sultry June day, just before a storm. As they were laying her on the bed, thunder pealed, startlingly close.

“Shut the doors and windows!” cried Natalya, letting fall her mother's leg and clapping her hands to her ears. The swollen heel thudded dully on the floor.

Pyotr Artamonov actually thought, for a moment, that he did not recognize his son in the tall, well-built young man who walked into his office. Ilya wore a grey summer suit. His olive face had grown thinner, and a moustache was sprouting on his upper lip. Yakov, fat and broad, still wearing his school uniform, was more like himself. The sons greeted their father politely, and sat down.

“Well,” said the father, pacing up and down the office. “So your grandmother is dead.”

Ilya did not reply. He was lighting a cigarette. Yakov declared, in a strange new voice:

“It's a good thing it happened at vacation time, or I wouldn't have come.”

Artamonov let his younger son's inept remark pass without comment. His attention was concentrated on the elder. Ilya's features had changed considerably, gaining in strength and character. His hair, now darker than in childhood, shaded his forehead, making it seem less high; and his blue eyes had grown deeper. It was amusing, and embarrassing, somehow, to the father to recall that he had

once shaken this grave young man in the dignified suit by his hair. Indeed, it was hard to believe that it had really happened. As to Yakov, he had simply become taller, larger, remaining plump and round as ever, with the same opalescent eyes and childish mouth.

"You've grown, Ilya," said the father. "Well, get used to the business, and in three or four years you can take the helm."

Ilya looked up at his father. He was toying with his cigarette case, a wooden one, chipped at one corner.

"No. I'm going to study a while yet."

"Long?"

"Four or five years."

"Well, well! And what are you going to study?"

"History."

It displeased Artamonov that his son had begun to smoke. And that cigarette case was trash. He might have bought something better. Still more displeasing was Ilya's intention to continue his education, and the fact that he had brought it up at once, in his first few minutes at home.

Pointing out through the window at the roof of the mill, where little puffs of steam spurted from the opening of a narrow pipe, punctuating the rumbling din of labour, he said impressively but in a mild tone:

"There's history for you, puffing away out there. That's what you've got to study. Our job is weaving linen, and history—that's not our affair. I'm fifty. It's time I was relieved."

"Miron will relieve you, and Yakov. Miron's going to be an engineer," Ilya replied. He flicked the ash of his cigarette out through the window. The father said:

"Miron's my nephew, not my son. But we'll talk all that over later."

The boys got up and went out. The father looked after them, his eyes wide with surprise and injury. Had they nothing at all to say to him? They had sat in his office for five minutes. One had spoken like a fool, and then sat

yawning sleepily; the other had smoked the room up with tobacco, and upset him from the very start. There they were in the yard. He could hear Ilya's voice:

"Shall we go take a look at the river?"

"No. I'm tired after the road."

"The river will still be there tomorrow, and Natalya's grieving over mother's death, and worn out with the funeral arrangements."

Obedient to his habit of hastening to meet unpleasantness, in order to thrust it off, to get around it, as quickly as possible, Pyotr Artamonov gave his son only a week's respite. During this week, he noted that Ilya used the formal *vue* in speaking to the workers, and that in the evenings he would sit for hours on the bench by the gate, talking with Tikhon and Serafim. Once, standing at his window, Pyotr even overheard a fragment of their conversation. Tikhon's lifeless voice droned idiotically:

"So, so! Beggars—mendicants, they call them. Mend—I can't! Why can't they? It's true, Ilya Petrovich—if people would stop being greedy, there'd be enough of everything to go around!"

And Serafim crowed cheerfully:

"Yes, I know! Ages ago, I heard about it."

Yakov behaved more comprehensibly. He hung around the mill buildings, eyeing the girls, and climbed to the stable roof to look out over the river during the dinner hour, when the women went there to bathe.

"Just a bull calf," thought the father glumly. "I'll have to tell Serafim to look after him, and see he don't catch anything."

Tuesday was a grey, pensive, quiet day. For about an hour, early in the morning, a fine rain pattered lazily and stingily over the earth. Towards noon the sun peeped out, threw a reluctant glance at the mill and the juncture of the two rivers, and hid away again in the clouds, burying itself in their soft grey fluff as Natalya buried her rosy cheeks in her downy pillows at night.

Just before evening tea, Artamonov asked Yakov:

"Where's your brother?"

"I don't know. He was sitting on the hill a while ago, under the pine tree."

"Go, call him. No, don't. Tell me, how do you two get on together?"

It seemed to him that his younger son smiled, barely perceptibly, before answering:

"Well enough. We don't fight."

"And is that all? I want to know the truth."

Yakov dropped his eyes and thought for a moment.

"When it comes to ideas, we don't agree too well."

"What ideas?"

"Generally, about everything."

"Well, and what's your disagreement?"

"He always goes by books, and I simply use my head. What my head tells me."

"I see," said the father. How to gain further particulars, he did not know.

He threw a duck coat over his shoulders, and took his walking stick, topped with a silver bird's claw grasping a malachite ball—a gift from Alexei. Stopping outside the gate, he shaded his eyes with his hand and looked out towards the hill by the river. There was Ilya, in a white shirt, lying under the tree.

"And the sand is damp today. He might catch cold. He's too careless."

Unhurriedly, weighing candidly in his mind every word of what he must say to his son, the father approached the hill. The grey grass blades snapped crisply underfoot. Ilya lay face downwards, reading a thick book, tapping the pages now and then with the end of a pencil. At the sound of footsteps he twisted around to look, and, seeing his father, laid the pencil between the pages of his book and slammed it shut. Then he sat up, his back against the trunk of the tree, and looked with friendly eyes into his father's face. Artamonov senior, short of breath with his climb, sat down nearby, on an arched root, thinking:

"I won't talk business today. There's plenty of time. We'll just have a chat about other things."

But Ilya, hugging his knees, said quietly:

"So you see, Father, I've made up my mind to dedicate myself to science."

"Dedicate yourself," repeated the father. "As if it was the priesthood!"

He had meant to speak lightly, but the words came out in a sullen, almost angry tone. Vexed with himself, he brought his stick down violently on the sand. And then began something altogether incomprehensible, altogether undesired. Ilya's blue eyes darkened, and his clear-cut brows knit. Tossing back the hair that shaded his forehead, he said, with unfilial persistence:

"I'm not going to be a manufacturer. I haven't got it in me...."

"That's Tikhon's talk," put in the father scornfully.

Ignoring this interruption, the son went on to explain why he did not wish to be a manufacturer, or, in general, the master of any business. He spoke lengthily—perhaps a full ten minutes; and more than once, in the course of his speech, the father caught something that seemed to strike true, something pleasantly in harmony with his own vague, unformulated broodings. On the whole, however, it was clear to him that his son's talk was childish and unreasonable.

"Hold on," he said, poking his stick into the sand by his son's foot. "Hold on. That's not right. That's nonsense. You have to have someone on top who would give commands. The rank and file can't get anywhere without a command. Who's going to work if there's nothing to gain by it? That's what everybody says: 'What do I stand to gain?' We're all spun on that spindle. Look at all the sayings: 'To the marrow he'd be a saint, only his soul for gain doth pant.' Or this one: 'Even a saint prays for profit.' Or, 'Even a machine likes to be greased, for all it has no soul.'"

He was quite calm. Recalling pertinent sayings and

proverbs, he larded his speech liberally with their savoury wisdom. It was good to be speaking so composedly, not hesitating for words, but finding them without effort; and he was sure the conversation would end well. The son listened silently, sifting sand between his fingers, from hand to hand, freeing the reddish pine needles that were mingled with it and then blowing them from his palm. But suddenly he declared, as composedly as his father:

"All that means nothing to me. We can't guide ourselves by such precepts any longer."

Artamonov senior got up, leaning on his stick. His son did not offer to help him.

"So. Then what your father tells you isn't true?"

"There's another truth."

"That's a lie. There is no other."

Swinging his stick in the direction of the mill, the father said:

"Look—there's the truth! Your grandfather started it, and I put my whole life in it. And now it's your turn. It's as simple as that. What else do you expect? We worked. Why should you play? You want to live like a saint on other people's shoulders, eh? Not a bad idea! History! Forget about history. It isn't a girl. You can't marry it. What do you want with your damnfool history? What on earth good is it? I won't let you loaf."

Feeling that his tone had become too harsh, Pyotr Artamonov made an attempt to gloss things over.

"I understand. You want to live in Moscow—it's more fun there. Alexei, too...."

Ilya took up his book, blew the sand from its cover, and said:

"Give me permission to study."

"No!" the father shouted, driving his stick deep into the sand. "And don't ask for it again."

Then Ilya also got up. Staring into space over his father's shoulder, with eyes that had suddenly lost all colour, he said quietly:

"Well, then, I'll have to get along without permission."

"If you dare!..."

"No one can forbid a person to live as he sees fit," said Ilya, tossing his head.

"A person? You're my son, not a person. You—a person? Every rag you have on belongs to me."

This burst out involuntarily. It should not have been said. And the father went on more mildly, with a reproachful shake of the head:

"Is that how you repay my care? Ah, you young fool."

Ilya's cheeks were flushed, and his hands were shaking. He tried to hide them in his pockets, but they would not go in. And Artamonov, fearing lest his son go too far, lest he say something irreparable, hurried on himself:

"All for your sake, I took a human life ... maybe."

"Maybe" was added because Artamonov realized, as the words came out, that they should never have been said, in such circumstances, to this boy who obviously had no desire to understand a thing.

"Now he'll ask, whose life," he thought, and strode quickly away down the sandy hillside. But his son called after him, and the words were deafening:

"Not only one life. Look—there's a whole graveyard full of victims of the mill."

Artamonov stopped and looked back. Ilya stood with outstretched hand, pointing with his book at the crosses outlined against the dreary sky. The sand crunched under Artamonov's feet. He recalled the offensive talk about the mill and the graveyard he had already heard, just a few minutes before. Moreover, he was anxious to cover up his slip of the tongue, to efface it from his son's memory. And, lunging swiftly, bearishly up the hill, brandishing his stick, hoping to frighten his son, Artamonov senior yelled:

"What did you say, you dog?"

Ilya darted behind the tree.

"Stop! Compose yourself!"

The father swung his stick against the tree trunk. The stick split, and he flung the broken remnant to his son's

feet. It stuck quivering in the sand, its green top pointing slantwise back at him. He said grimly:

"I'll make you clean privies!"

And he hurried away, staggering, almost sliding down the hill. His mind was awlirl, stumbling among incoherent words of sorrow and of wrath, like a shuttle in a tangled warp.

"I'll throw him out. Need will bring him back. And then, privies. I'll have no nonsense!"—came fragmentary thoughts, lashing out from the dancing web; and at the same time there were other thoughts, hinting dimly that he had not done well, that he had gone too far, had made too much of his injury.

Coming out on the bank of the Oka, he sank down wearily on the sandy bluff and wiped the perspiration from his face. His eyes turned to the river. A little shoal of dace flashed in a shallow inlet, piercing the water like swift steel needles. A bream appeared, with pompously spread fins. It swam about for a while, then turned on its side, peering up at the dreary clouds with one red eye, and sent out a stream of bubbles, like white smoke in the water.

Artamonov shook a threatening finger at the bream, and said aloud:

"I'll teach you how to live!"

And at once he looked over his shoulder, for the words had rung false. The river's placid flow had begun to wash away his wrath, and the grey, warm hush brought reflections burdened with a numb bewilderment. Most bewildering of all was the sudden brevity with which the son whom he had loved, who for twenty years had been the object of his anxious and unremitting thoughts, had slipped out of his heart, leaving behind only a bitter ache. It was Artamonov's firm persuasion that, all these twenty years, he had been thinking daily, tirelessly, only of his son—had lived only in the hopes he laid in him, in the love he bore him, in the expectation of things extraordinary when the boy should grow to manhood.

"Like a match—flared up, and it's gone! But why?"



A faint glow flushed the grey sky. At one point a brighter spot appeared, like the greasy lustre of worn cloth. Then a chipped shard of moon peeped out. The air grew cool and damp, and a light mist rose over the river.

Coming home, Artamonov found his wife undressed, her left foot lifted to her round right knee, cutting her toenails with frowning effort. Glancing at her husband, she asked:

"Where did you send Ilya?"

"To the devil," he replied, beginning to undress.

"Still so cross," sighed Natalya. Her husband did not answer. He was breathing heavily, deliberately making as much noise as he could about his preparations for bed. A rain began to patter at the window-panes, and a damp rustling spread through the orchard.

"Ilya's gotten to be awfully high and mighty, all on account of his schooling."

"He's got a fool for a mother."

The mother sniffed. Crossing herself, she climbed into bed. Pyotr, still undressing, baited her with savage pleasure.

"What are you good for? Nothing. Your children don't respect you. What did you ever teach them? All you know how to do is eat and sleep. Yes, and smear your mug."

His wife murmured into the pillow:

"Who sent them to school? I told you...."

"Be still!"

He also fell silent, listening to the steady crescendo of the raindrops in the leaves of the bird cherry Nikita had planted.

"The hunchback picked himself an easy lot. No children, no business. Bees. Me, I wouldn't bother with bees, even. If anyone wants honey, he can go get it himself."

Natalya turned over on her back, as gingerly as though she were lying on ice, and laid a warm cheek against her husband's shoulder.

"Did you have a row with Ilya?"

Ashamed to describe the encounter on the hill, he mumbled:

"You don't have rows with children. You row them."

"He's gone away to the city."

"He'll come back. Bread don't grow on trees. He'll get a taste of life without money and he'll come back, never fear. Go to sleep and let me alone."

A moment later, he said:

"No more school for Yakov."

And still a moment later:

"Day after tomorrow, I'm going to the fair. D'you hear?"

"Yes."

"Why? What does it mean?" Artamonov thought. He closed his eyes, but still he saw before him the boy's face, the lofty forehead, the glittering eyes that had bored into him so insufferably. "Took his father down like discharging a hired man, the blackguard! Like refusing a beggar."

He could not get over the strange rapidity of the breach. It suggested that Ilya had long before made up his mind to break away. But what had prompted him to such a step? Recalling his son's harsh, condemning words, Artamonov reflected:

"It was Miron who put him up to it, the dirty dog. And all that stuff about business hurting man, that comes from Tikhon. Fool, fool! Where did he put his faith? And he went to school, too! What did he learn there? He pities the workers, but he has no pity for his own father. And off he runs, to coddle his righteousness in a corner by himself."

At this thought his sense of injury flared still higher.

"No, you don't! You won't get out of it!"

He recalled Nikita, escaped to a peaceful haven.

"They all load the work on me and run away."

But Artamonov caught himself at once. That was not true. Alexei had not run away. Alexei loved the business as their father had loved it. He was greedy, insatiably greedy, and everything came to him simply, easily. One

day, Pyotr recalled, when there had been a drunken brawl at the mill, he had said to Alexei:

"The people are going bad."

"That's noticeable," Alexei had agreed.

"They all seem bitter over something. They've all got the same look in their eyes."

With this, also, Alexei agreed. Chuckling, he said:

"That's true too. Sometimes it comes back to me: Tikhon had just the same look in his eyes, way back on your wedding day, watching Father wrestle with the soldiers. Then Tikhon pushed in to wrestle too. Remember?"

"Why drag Tikhon in? He's simply feeble-minded."

Then Alexei began to speak seriously:

"I've noticed you often talk about that—the people are going bad, the people are getting spoiled. But after all, that's no concern of ours. That's a job for the priests, and the teachers, and, well—who else? All sorts of doctors, officials. It's their job to see that the people don't get spoiled. That's the goods they have to sell, and you and me—we're the buyers. Everything in the world gets spoiled, in the course of time. You're getting old, for instance, and so am I. But you wouldn't tell a girl to give up living, just because some day she'll be a hag."

"He's smart," thought Artamonov senior. "Devilish smart."

He thought with envy of his cousin's vivacity, of his brisk chatter, strung with jests and sayings of a new and unfamiliar order. Then his mind reverted to Nikita. Their father had willed that the hunchback be their consoler, and, instead, he had got himself into a silly mess, all for a woman's face, and he was gone.

Artamonov senior turned over many things in his mind, that rainy night. And, seeping like smoke through his bitter meditations, thoughts of another sort came crowding in—alien thoughts, as though whispered by the darkly murmuring rain—thoughts that hindered self-justification.

"But what wrong did I do?" he asked someone; and though no answer came, he began to feel that, perhaps, the question was not amiss. As day was breaking, he suddenly made up his mind to visit his brother, in the monastery. There, perhaps, in a soul secluded from temptations and alarms, he might find consolation, even decision.

But as the post horses approached the monastery, after long jolting over country roads, Artamonov thought wearily:

"It's nice and simple, keeping in a corner. You just try and run around in the open! Pickles won't spoil in the cellar, but they rot fast enough in the sun."

He had not seen his brother for four years now, and their last meeting had been cold and tedious. The hunchback had seemed to Pyotr embarrassed and upset by his arrival. He had winced and shrunk, drawing into himself like a snail into its shell. In querulous tones, he had talked, not of God, not of himself or the family, but only of the needs of the monastery, of the pilgrims, and the poverty of the people. His words had come reluctantly, with visible effort. When Pyotr offered him money, he had replied, with quiet indifference:

"Give it to the prior. I don't need it."

It had been evident that all the monks looked up to Father Nikodim; and the prior, a huge, raw-boned, hairy man, deaf in one ear—he looked like a forest goblin dressed up in a cassock—had turned the uncanny light of his jet black eyes on Pyotr's face and said, with quite unnecessary loudness:

"Father Nikodim adorns our poor retreat."

The monastery stood on a low hill, in a close ring of pines, hidden from view by their heavy crowns. It greeted Artamonov with a dreary chiming of thin-voiced bells, calling to evening prayer. The lanky, stiff gate-keeper, looking like a barge pole needlessly topped by a small, childish head in a crumpled and faded skullcap, stammered, as he opened up:

"W-w-w-well...."

And with a sighing breath:

"C-c-come."

A grey-blue cloud hung motionless over the monastery, obliterating half the sky. The copper clamour of the bells could not disperse its oppressive atmosphere—grey, stuffy, viscous.

"It's too heavy for me," said the lay brother at the guest house apologetically, after a vain effort to pull the box of gifts for Nikita out of the carriage; and he banged the cover of the box with his swarthy little fist.

Pyotr, dusty and tired, walked slowly towards the orchard, where his brother's white cell nestled snugly among apple and cherry trees. He was thinking that he had been foolish to come here; that it would have been better to go to the fair. The rough forest road, criss-crossed by knobby roots, has shaken up and confused all his grievous thoughts, leaving in their stead a bitter ache, a longing for rest and forgetfulness.

"What I need is a good spree."

He found his brother sitting on a bench in a semicircle of young lindens, with perhaps half a score of pilgrims disposed before him. It was like a scene from some familiar print. Pyotr noticed a black-bearded merchant in a duck coat, with one foot tied up in rags and shod in a rubber overshoe; a fat old man who looked like a eunuch money-changer, and a long-haired young fellow in a soldier's greatcoat, with high cheekbones and fishy eyes. Also, Murzin—the Dryomov baker, a drunkard and rowdy. Standing up stiff as a post, like a thief before his judge, Murzin said hoarsely:

"That's true. It's a long way to God."

Nikita was not looking at the pilgrims. Tracing designs on the hard-trampled earth with the end of his white staff, he admonished them:

"And the lower a man falls, the higher above him is God, revolted by the stench of our corruption in sin."

"Consoling," thought Artamonov senior, and grinned.

"God sees that our faith is idle. What is mere faith to him, without deeds? Do we help our brothers? Do we love one another? And what do we ask in our prayers? Trifles, petty nothings. We must pray, but still...."

The hunchback raised his eyes. For a moment he said nothing, looking up at his brother searchingly. Slowly, as though it were a heavy weight, he lifted his staff, as if to strike. Then he got up, and, his head drooping weakly on his chest, made the sign of the cross over his listeners; but instead of a prayer, he said only:

"There, now—my brother's come to see me."

The fat, hairless old man turned to look at Pyotr, his coppery eyes strangely rounded. He crossed himself sweepingly, with deliberate emphasis.

"Go in peace," Nikita added.

They moved away, scattering like a herd driven from pasture. The old man helped the merchant with the bad foot, taking his arm; baker Murzin took the merchant's other arm.

"Well, hullo. Your blessing."

With his long arm, winglike in the black cassock sleeve, Father Nikodim brushed aside his brother's folded hands. Quietly, with no sign of pleasure, he said:

"I wasn't expecting you."

He pointed with his staff in the direction of his cell, then led the way towards it. He walked jerkily, throwing his crooked legs far to the side. One hand was pressed to his heart.

"You've aged," said Pyotr diffidently.

"That's our lot. My legs ache. It's damp here."

Nikita seemed more hunchbacked than ever. His right shoulder and the angle of his hump had pushed upward, bowing his body closer to the earth, making him shorter and broader. He looked like a spider with its head torn off, crawling blindly, crookedly along the path, over the crunching gravel. In the cramped space of his neat little cell, Father Nikodim looked somewhat bigger, but even more appalling. When he removed his cowl, his bald ivory

crown gleamed dully, like a polished skull. Grey hair hung in ragged strands at his temples, behind his ears, and around the back of his head. His face, too, was ivory coloured, with no flesh on the bones. The faded eyes gave no light, and their gaze seemed concentrated on the tip of his big, flaccid nose. Below, two dark thin bands, his shrivelled lips, moved soundlessly. His mouth was bigger than before—a deep pit cutting his face in two. Particularly gruesome was the mouldy growth of grey hairs on his upper lip.

Very low, as though reluctant to interrupt some sound to which he hearkened, and slowly, as though recalling each word with difficulty, the monk said to the lay brother who attended him, a chubby-faced young fellow much like a steam bath attendant:

“The samovar. Bread. Honey.”

“How low you speak.”

“My teeth are gone.”

The monk sat down at the table, in a white-painted wooden armchair.

“All well?”

“Well enough.”

“Tikhon still alive?”

“He’s all right. What harm could he take?”

“It’s a long time since he’s been to see me.”

There was a silence. When Nikita moved, his cassock rustled, with a scuttling, cockroachy sound that still further intensified Pyotr’s restless discomfort.

“I brought some stuff for you. Have them bring the box. There’s some wine, too. Is wine allowed?”

With a sigh, his brother answered:

“It isn’t strict here. It’s hard. We even have drunkards now, since so many people started coming. They drink. What can you do? The world breathes, and its breath is poison. Monks, too, are human.”

“I hear there’s lots of people seek you out.”

“That’s because they don’t understand,” said the monk. “Yes, they come. They poke around. Righteous-

ness, they're after—a righteous soul, to tell them how to live. They lived, somehow, and now they can't. It's more than they can endure."

Feeling a rising uneasiness at these words of the monk's, Artamonov senior grumbled:

"Tomfoolery. They endured serfdom, yet they can't endure freedom! What they need is a tighter rein."

Nikita did not answer.

"Under the gentry, people didn't waste their time gadding around."

The hunchback glanced at him, and dropped his eyes.

And so they talked, searching heavily for words, with long pauses between desultory remarks, until the towheaded lay brother brought the samovar, fragrant linden honey, and steaming, fresh-baked bread. Then they sat watching him with grave attention as he fussed clumsily on the floor, prying up the lid of the box. Pyotr set on the table a tin of fresh caviar and two bottles.

"Port," said Nikita, glancing at one of the labels. "The prior likes that wine. A clever man. He understands many things."

"Well, as for me, I understand very little," Pyotr admitted defiantly.

"You understand too, as much as need be; and what's the use of more? It isn't wholesome, understanding more than you ought."

The monk sighed faintly. Pyotr sensed a bitterness in his words. His cassock gleamed greasily in the gathering shadows; for the cell was but poorly lit by the tiny flame under the icons in the corner and the cheap lamp, made of yellow glass, that stood on the table. Noting the chary avidity with which his brother sucked up his Madeira, Pyotr reflected ironically:

"He knows his wines."

After every glass Nikita would pinch off a bit of soft bread between his fleshless, strangely white fingertips, dip it in honey, and chew it up unhurriedly, wagging his sparse, plucked-looking grey beard. He showed no sign of



intoxication; but his muddy eyes grew lighter, though still fixed on the tip of his nose. Pyotr drank sparingly, reluctant to seem sottish to his brother. As he drank, he thought:

"He's not asking about Natalya. He didn't ask last time, either. He's ashamed. No questions about anyone. We're of the world, and he's a saint. People come to seek him out."

He jerked his head angrily, and his beard brushed noisily against his vest. Pulling at his ear, he said:

"You've hid yourself nicely here. It's good here."

"It used to be good. Now it's going bad. Too many pilgrims. All these receptions...."

"Receptions?" Pyotr smiled ironically. "It sounds like a dentist's office."

"I want to get transferred farther away, somewhere," said the monk, carefully pouring wine.

"Where you'll have more peace," Pyotr added, and grinned again. The monk sucked up his wine, passed his limp, dark tongue over his lips, and said, with a shake of his ivory crown:

"More and more people are losing their peace of mind. You can see the number growing. They try to hide, to get away from cares."

"I don't see that," Pyotr returned, knowing very well that he was lying. "You're the one that's hiding," was what he wanted to say.

"And worries follow on their heels like shadows."

Words of reproach were crowding to Pyotr's lips. He wanted to dispute his brother's words, even to shout at him angrily. In a voice embittered by thoughts of his son, he said:

"They look for worries themselves. It's their own choice brings them troubles. Do your job, and don't try to be smart, and you'll live peacefully enough!"

But his brother, absorbed in thoughts of his own, did not seem to hear. He gave his angular frame a sudden shake, as though awakening from sleep; and his cassock

slithered floorward in murky cascades. His lips twisted, he began to speak very distinctly, in what seemed a bitterness no less than Pyotr's:

"They come to me asking for edification. And what do I know? What can I teach them? I have no wisdom. The prior made it all up. Myself, I don't know anything. Like a man wrongly condemned—sentenced to exhort and edify. For what crime?"

"He's hinting," thought Artamonov senior. "He means to complain."

He realized that Nikita had reason for complaining of his fate. He had expected such complaints, even in earlier visits. And, pulling at his ear, he forestalled his brother, declaring impressively:

"Many complain against fate, only no good comes of that."

"True; content is rare," said the hunchback. His eyes were turned to the corner, where the light burned under the icons.

"And for you, it was Father's behest—peace to his soul—that you should console, be our consoler."

Nikita's lips stretched in an ironic smile. He gathered his grey beard into his fist, and with it rubbed the smile away. His voice went on, dropping words into the shadows, words that jolted Pyotr, that aroused his curiosity and at the same time evoked a wary anticipation of danger.

"They try their best, here, to make me believe I'm wise, and to make the world believe it. That's for the profit of the monastery, of course, to attract pilgrims. But for me, the task is hard. It's a demanding calling! How can I console? Endure, I say. But I can see—they're all sick of enduring. Live in hope, I say. Only—in hope of what? God? They find no comfort in God. There's a baker comes around...."

"Murzin, you mean. He's from our town. A drunkard," said Artamonov senior, anxious to avert, to ward off he knew not what.

"He's got to a point where he thinks he can set himself up to judge God. God isn't the master any more, to him. Bold, overweening—there's lots of that kind, nowadays. Then there's another man, with no beard. Did you notice him? A spiteful man, an enemy to the whole world. They come and question me. What can I tell them? All they come for is to kill my peace of mind."

The monk was speaking with increasing animation. Recalling previous visits to the monastery, Pyotr noted that today Nikita did not blink so apologetically as before. During those visits, Pyotr had been soothed by the hunchback's evident sense of guilt; for the guilty have no right to complain. Yet now he was complaining, declaring himself wrongly condemned. And the elder Artamonov was afraid that his brother might say to him:

"It was you condemned me!"

Frowning, he toyed with his watch chain, seeking words in which to couch his self-defence.

"Yes," the hunchback continued; and he seemed to derive a secret pleasure from the very things of which he complained. "People are getting out of hand, more and more. Presumptuous thoughts come to their minds. Not long ago, there was a scholar who stayed a couple of weeks with us. Still a young man, he was, only beside himself, somehow. Frightened. The prior kept instructing me, 'Give him strength,' he said, 'through your simplicity. Tell him this,' he said, 'and tell him that.' But I've a bad memory for other people's thoughts. He badgered me for hours on end—the scholar, I mean. He talked and talked, and I couldn't even understand the words he used, let alone his ideas. 'It's wrong,' he said, 'to acknowledge the Devil as the master of our flesh. That would be worshipping two Gods, outraging the body of Christ, that we partake of in the Eucharist. "Partake, then, of the flesh of Christ, of the fount of immortality."' He blasphemed. 'I don't care,' he said, 'even if we have a God with horns, so long as there's only one God, because otherwise it's impossible to go on living.' He wore me out, and I forgot

all Father Feodor's instructions, and yelled at him, 'Your flesh is change, and your spirit is destruction.' The prior reproached me, afterwards. 'What's wrong with you?' he said. 'What kind of heretical mummary was that?' Yes, that's how it is."

To Pyotr, the story seemed funny; it relieved him to some extent, by presenting his brother in such a pitiable light.

"It's hard to talk about God," he mumbled.

"It's hard," Father Nikodim agreed, and asked, with oily bitterness: "Remember what Father used to say? 'We're plain working people. It's too high-flown for us, that wisdom.'"

"I remember."

"Yes. Father Feodor says, 'Read books!' And I read, but I might just as well be listening to the wind in the trees, away off in the woods somewhere. The books don't fit our times. The ideas you meet up with nowadays—the books don't give you any answer to them. Sectarians everywhere. People argue as if they were telling dreams. Like drunkards the morning after. Take that Murzin...."

The monk drank some port, and chewed some bread. He pressed a bit of soft bread into a little ball, and rolled it about on the table as he talked on:

"Father Feodor says, all the trouble comes from the mind. The Devil sicks it on like a mean-tempered dog. He provokes, and the dog barks without reason. Maybe that's true but it goes against the grain to believe it. There's a doctor here. A cheerful man, with no pretensions. He looks at it differently: the mind is a child, and it takes everything for a toy. Everything interests it. It wants to find out how things work, and how they're made, and what they have inside. And so, of course, it breaks things...."

"I should say that sort of talk is dangerous," Pyotr remarked. Again his brother's words were sowing uneasiness, jostling and rocking him—startling, frightening in

their unexpectedness and poignancy. Again he felt the desire to crush Nikita, to humiliate him.

"He's drunk," he told himself, trying to regain his calm.

The cell became stuffy. Sourish odours rose from the charcoal smouldering in the samovar, and from the oil in the flickering icon lamp. They dulled Pyotr's thoughts. Against the tiny black square of the window, the leaves of some plant were outlined, motionless, like iron tracery. And his spidery brother talked on, softly, persistently, spinning his web of words.

"All ideas are dangerous. Especially simple ones. Take Tikhon."

"He's a half-wit."

"Oh, no, he isn't! His wits are all there. A rigorous mind. I was afraid to talk to him, even at first. I wanted to, but I didn't have the nerve. And then, when Father died, Tikhon won me. You see, you didn't love Father the way I did. You and Alexei—you didn't feel the injustice of his death, but Tikhon did. It wasn't the nun I was angry at that day, for her stupidity. It was God. And Tikhon saw that right away. 'Yes,' he said, 'mosquitoes live, and a man....'"

"You're raving!" Pyotr put in sternly. "You've had too much to drink. What nun are you talking about?"

But Nikita went on persistently:

"Tikhon says, if God is master of the world, then the rains ought to come at the proper time, when they're good for the crops and the people. And if you take fires, they don't all come from man. It's the lightning sets the forests burning. And why did Cain have to sin, to bring us death? What does God need deformity for? Hunchbacks, for instance—what does he need them for?"

"Aha, so that's it," thought Pyotr, smiling into his beard. He was relieved to hear his brother complaining against God. It was well that the monk did not complain against his family.

"Cain—that I can't understand. With that, Tikhon

chained me hand and foot. And so it began with me, from the day Father died. I thought, when I took the vows, it would stop. But it didn't. The same thoughts keep on."

"You never talked about such things before."

"You can't tell everything at once. And for that matter, I'd have kept still all my life, maybe; only the pilgrims give me no peace. They plague my conscience. And then, it's dangerous. Suppose Tikhon's ideas come popping out in the middle of my homilies? Say what you will, he's a clever man, though, maybe, I don't like him. He thinks about you, too. There, he says, a man worked all his life for his children, and his children are strangers to him."

"What sort of nonsense is that?" demanded Pyotr angrily. "What can he know about it?"

"He knows. Business, he says, is a mockery."

"I've heard that.... He ought to be thrown out, the fool—only he knows too much about us, about our family affairs."

This was said to remind Nikita of that dismal night when Tikhon had prevented his suicide; but Pyotr himself was thinking of the Nikonov boy. The monk did not catch the hint. Raising his glass, he bathed his tongue in wine, then licked his lips. Dully, he spoke on:

"Someone hurt Tikhon once, too, and so he's broken away from everybody, like a bankrupt...."

This was a subject from which the talk must be diverted.

"Well, and what's the upshot? Don't you believe in God any more?" Pyotr asked. Strange: he had meant his tone to be caustic, but, somehow, it was not.

"It's hard to tell who does believe, nowadays," replied the monk, after a pause. "Everybody's busy thinking, but there's not much sign of faith. You don't need to think, if you believe. That scholar who talked about a God with horns...."

"Drop it," Pyotr advised, glancing over his shoulder. "It all comes from boredom, from nothing to do. What people need is good, strong iron yokes."

"No, you can't believe in two," said Father Nikodim insistently.

Again a bell was ringing, its measured strokes beating against the murky window-pane. Pyotr asked:

"Are you going to prayers?"

"I don't go. My legs hurt so, I can't stand."

"Do you pray for us here?"

The monk did not reply.

"Well, it's time I got to bed. The trip here tired me out."

Again Nikita made no reply. Bracing himself on the arms of his chair, he lifted his angular body carefully, and called:

"Mitya, Mitya."

Then, sinking down again, he said apologetically:

"I'm sorry—I forgot. My attendant's gone to sleep at the guest house. I sent him away because I wanted to talk freely, and they're all informers here, talebearers."

Wordily, unnecessarily, he explained the way to the guest house. Coming out into the darkness, where a fine, cold rain was falling, Pyotr reflected:

"He didn't want me to go. He felt like talking."

And suddenly, with the familiar panic fear, Pyotr felt once more that he was walking along the edge of a deep chasm, into which he might fall at any moment. He hastened his step, walking with outstretched hands, groping through the drizzle that made the night so dark, his eyes fixed on the spot of greasy yellow in the distance, where a lantern marked the guest house.

"No," he thought hastily, as he stumbled on. "It's not the thing for me. I'll leave tomorrow. I don't need it. After all, what's wrong? Ilya will come back! I've got to keep a firm hold on life. Look at Alexei, how he's pushing on. He's liable to push me out of things, some fine day."

The thought of Alexei was forced, to keep Nikita and Tikhon out of mind. But when Pyotr lay down on his hard cot in the monastery guest house, he was overtaken once more by oppressive thoughts about the monk and the

yard-keeper. What sort of a man was this Tikhon? His shadow fell on everything around him. His words were echoed in Ilya's childish talk, and his thoughts had thrown a spell over Nikita.

"Consoler!" he thought of Nikita. "Take Serafini, a simple carpenter—he knows how to console."

Sleep would not come. Mosquitoes were biting. People were talking in the next room. There were three voices, and it occurred to Pyotr that they must be baker Murzin, the merchant with the bad leg, and the man who looked like a eunuch.

"Drinking, most likely."

At long intervals, the monastery watchman banged his rattle. Then, suddenly, hastily, as though overdue, the bells began to ring for the matins. While they were ringing, Pyotr fell asleep.

Morning brought his brother, looking the same as in the orchard the day before, with the same alien glance—sidewise, and upwards. Artamonov senior hastily washed and dressed, and told the lay brother to order him a horse to the nearest post station.

"Why so soon?" asked the monk, with no great surprise. "I thought you'd stay awhile."

"Business presses."

They sat down to tea. It was a long time before Pyotr could think of anything to say to his brother. Finally, remembering, he asked:

"So you're thinking of leaving here?"

"I'd like to. They don't want to let me go."

"What's got into them?"

"It pays to have me here. I'm useful."

"I see. And where do you intend to go?"

"Perhaps I'll wander about."

"With your sick legs?"

"Even the legless get around somehow."

"That's so. They do," Pyotr agreed.

There was a silence. Then Nikita said:

"Give Tikhon my regards."



"And who else?"

"Everybody."

"I will. Why don't you ask me how Alexei's getting along?"

"What's there to ask? I know he knows how to live. I may be leaving pretty soon."

"You can't go in the wintertime."

"Why not? People get around in the winter too."

"That's so. They do," Pyotr agreed again. He offered his brother money.

"All right. It will go to repair the flour mill. Won't you look in to see the prior?"

"There's no time. The horse is waiting."

The brothers embraced in parting. It was inconvenient, embracing Nikita. He did not bless his brother. His right hand got entangled in his cassock sleeve, and it occurred to Pyotr that this was deliberate. His hump pressing against Pyotr's belly, Nikita requested tonelessly:

"If I said anything I shouldn't have, yesterday, forgive it."

"Forget it. We're brothers."

"You think, and think, through the nights...."

"Yes, yes. Well, good-bye."

As the monastery gates dropped behind, Pyotr looked back. His brother's figure was outlined like a rock against the white wall of the guest house.

"Good-bye," he muttered, and pulled off his cap. His bare head was soon soaked by the drizzling rain. The road lay through a pine forest. It was very quiet. Only the pine needles tinkled glassily as the raindrops struck them. On the driver's seat, a monk bobbed heavily up and down. The horse was chestnut coloured, with no hair on its ears.

"What people find to talk about!" Pyotr was thinking. "God sends the rain at the wrong time. It all comes from spite, from envy, from deformity. It's the fruit of laziness, of having nothing to worry about. A man without cares is like a dog without a master."

Pyotr glanced behind him, shivering. This particular rain, he felt, really was coming down at the wrong time. Again his gloomy thoughts enveloped him as in a heavy cloud. To rid himself of them, he drank vodka at every post station.

Towards evening, when the smoky city came into sight ahead, a puffing train cut across the road. The locomotive whistled, spat steam, and, plunging into a semicircular pit mouth, disappeared beneath the surface of the earth.

**3** Looking back on his wild days at the fair, Pyotr Artamonov always experienced a spine-prickling bewilderment, closely bordering on fear. He could not believe that all these things revived by memory had really happened; that he, too, had seethed in this huge stone cauldron, brimming over with crashing clamour, with raucous music, songs, and cries, with drunken ecstasy and the soul-shattering, anguished shrieks of frantic men and women—all stirred and seasoned by a big, curly-headed man in a frock-coat and top hat, with bulging owl eyes staring from a blue, clean-shaven face. The man smacked his thick lips. Embracing Artamonov, jostling him, he yelled:

“Be still, you, fool! The baptism of Russia, understand? The yearly baptism, on the Volga and the Oka!”

He looked like a cook, and he was dressed like one of those men with torches who are hired to accompany the wealthy to their graves. Pyotr had a dim memory of fighting with this man. And afterwards they drank cognac, mixing ice cream into it, and the man sobbed aloud and said:

“Hear the cry of the Russian soul! My father was a priest, and I’m a scoundrel!”

His voice was deep, blaring, yet mellow. He deluged them all with a murky torrent of fantastic speech, and his words moved the soul irresistibly.

“The putrefaction of the flesh!” he roared. “Battling the devil! Throw him his dirty tribute, the swine! Quell the revolt of your body, Petya! If you don’t sin, you can’t repent, and if you don’t repent, you can’t be saved. Bathe your soul! Don’t we go to the steam bath, to wash our bodies? And what about the soul? The soul cries to be

bathed. Make room for the Russian soul, the singing soul, holy, magnificent!"

Pyotr, too, wept, deeply moved, and mumbled:

"It's an orphan, our soul, a foundling, that's true! Forgotten. Neglected."

And all the people shouted:

"Right! True!"

A bald, red-bearded man, plump and nimble, with a flaming face and purple ears, twirled about like a top, squealing frenziedly, womanishly:

"Styopa—it's true! I adore you. I love you to death. Three things, I love to death—you, and pickles, and the truth. The truth about the soul!"

And he also wept, singing:

*By death is death defied....*

Pyotr chimed in, with the words of Anton the fool:

*The wagon lost a wheel, lost a wheel.*

He, too, thought he loved the swarthy Styopa, and drank in his cries with rapt attention. And though, at times, the strange words somewhat frightened him, there were more that moved him deep and sweetly, as if throwing wide a doorway from the dark and noisy chaos into a realm of radiant peace. Best of all was the phrase, "singing soul". There was something very true in it, and very plaintive, fitting into a remembered scene: one of the dirty Dryomov streets, on a sultry weekday; a tall grey-bearded old man, gaunt as death itself, wearily turning the handle of a barrel-organ, while a little girl of twelve or so, in a crumpled blue dress, her face uplifted, with shut eyes, sang painfully, in a voice cracked with weariness:

*And life holds nought in store of joy*

*or wo-nder...*

*And what I seek is free-edom and*

*slu-umber...*

The memory of the little girl made Artamonov mumble to the man with the purple ears:

"The singing soul! He's got it right!"

"Who, Styopa?" the red beard clamoured. "Styopa knows everything! He has the master keys to all our souls!"

Growing more and more excited, he squealed:

"Styopa, friend of humanity, let loose! Lawyer Paradisov, lead us on to the den of iniquity. Anything goes!"

The friend of humanity was the shepherd and leading spirit of a company of manufacturers on the spree. Wherever he appeared with his drunken flock, music crashed and songs resounded—now melancholy, wringing the soul until the tears came flowing, now boisterous, with furious dancing. But all that remained in Pyotr's aural memory was the dull booming of the big drum and the shrill tones of an irrepressible little pipe. When slow, sad songs were being sung, the brick walls of the taverns seemed to contract, closing in upon Pyotr until he gasped for breath. When the chorus swung into some spirited tune, and the dancers, in their gaudy costumes, leaped and whirled, it was as though a wind swayed the walls and pushed them outwards. Buffeted from mood to mood, flung violently from rejoicing to maudlin melancholy, Artamonov was seized, at moments, by such searing ecstasy that he longed to do something extraordinary, stupendous—to kill someone, perhaps—and then fall to his knees before the people, crying, for all to hear:

"Judge me! Condemn me to a dreadful retribution!"

They were at the "Wheel", an insane tavern with a revolving floor that carried tables, customers, waiters round and round in a slow, but never-ending motion. The place was crammed with people as a taut pillow is with feathers, and brimming over with noise. Only the corners were stationary. As the floor turned, they flashed by in dizzying succession, revealing, in one, a mad pack of brass-horned music makers; in another, the chorus, a

motley crowd of women with wreaths of flowers on their heads; in a third, the shelves of plates and bottles behind the counter, reflecting the glare of the hanging lamps. The fourth corner was cut off obliquely by the doorway, where more and more people kept pushing in. Stepping over the edge of the revolving circle, they would stagger and fall, tossing their arms and shouting with laughter as they were carried away.

The friend of humanity, swarthy Styopa, explained to Artamonov:

"Silly, yes, but it's smart! The floor's held up by timbers, like a saucer on your spread fingers. The timbers branch up from a post, and lower down on the post there's two shafts sticking out horizontally, with a pair of horses harnessed to each of them. The horses go round, and the floor revolves. Simple? But it has its meaning. Remember, Petya—everything has a meaning of its own, alas!"

He pointed upwards, at the ceiling, and a greenish stone glittered, like a wolf's eye, on his finger. A broad-chested, dog-headed merchant pulled at Artamonov's sleeve, peering into his face with the glassy eyes of a corpse. In the loud tones of the deaf, he demanded:

"What will Dunya say, eh? Who are you?"

Without waiting for an answer, he turned to someone else, demanding:

"Who are you? What will I tell Dunya? Eh?"

He threw himself back in his chair and muttered:

"Ugh, the devil!"—

Then shouted furiously:

"Let's go some other place!"

Then he was the driver, sitting up in front in a carriage drawn by a pair of greys, announcing thunderously to all passers in the street:

"We're off to Paula's! Come along!"

It was raining. There were five of them in the carriage. One, sprawled at Artamonov's feet, kept mumbling:

"He fooled me, and I fooled him. He did me and I did him."

On a square, at the foot of a hill that looked like a big round loaf of bread, the carriage toppled over. Pyotr bruised his head and elbow in the fall. Sitting up on the wet turf, he watched the red-bearded man with the purple ears crawling up the hillside towards the mosque, and roaring:

"Get away! I want to be baptized into a Tatar! I want to be a Mahomet! Let me go!"

Swarthy Styopa seized him by the legs, pulled him down the hill, and led him away somewhere. Persians, Tatars, Bukharans came thronging up from the shops and the Caravanserai. An old man in a yellow coat and a green turban shook his staff at Pyotr.

"Russ, shaitan!"

A copper-faced policemen lifted Pyotr to his feet, saying:

"No brawling, now."

Cabs drove up, and the drunken merchants were put in and driven off. The friend of humanity rode ahead, standing, shouting something through his fist as if it were a megaphone. The rain stopped, but the sky remained black and menacing as it never is in waking life. Lightning flashed over the huge building of the Caravanserai, driving fiery chinks through the wall of darkness. Fear gripped the heart when the horses' hoofs tattooed hollowly on the wooden bridge across the Betancour canal. Artamonov had no doubt that the bridge would collapse, and they would all be drowned in the still, pitch-black water.

In his fragmentary, nightmare memories of these scenes, Artamonov sought and found himself, among the drink-crazed people, as an almost entire stranger. He—this stranger—drank frantically, and lived in avid expectation that right away, in just another moment, something altogether extraordinary would begin, the most important, the most wonderful thing in life, and he would either sink

in to boundless depths of dejection, or soar to equally boundless heights of joy, forever and ever.

Most fantastic of all was the dazzling memory of the woman, Paula Menotti. He was in a big, bare room, with no hangings on the walls. A third of the room was occupied by a table, loaded with bottles, coloured wine glasses, vases of flowers and fruit, and silver pails of caviar and iced champagne. Ten or twelve men, red-headed, bald-headed, grey-headed, sat at the table, fidgeting impatiently. There were several empty chairs, one of them adorned with flowers.

Swarthy Styopa stood in the middle of the room, holding up his gold-headed stick like a candle, shouting:

"Hey, pigs, can't you wait to guzzle?"

Somebody said dully:

"Stop barking."

"Shut up!" yelled the friend of humanity. "I'm in charge here!"

And somehow, suddenly, the room grew darker. Dull drum beats sounded outside, and Styopa strode to the door and threw it open. A fat man came in, with a drum on his belly. He walked at a staggering goose step, banging away at his drum with all his might:

"Bo-om, bo-om, oom...."

Five other men appeared, equally dignified. Bent almost double, straining like draught horses, they pulled a piano into the room, by towels tied around its legs. On the gleaming black of the piano lid lay a naked woman, dazzlingly white, fearful in the shamelessness of her nudity. She lay on her back, her head rested on her arms. Her dark hair was loose, merging with the lacquered blackness of the lid, melting into it. The closer she was moved, the more clearly were the curves of her body outlined, and the more persistently was every eye attracted to the patches of hair in her armpits and on her belly.

The little copper wheels whined. The floor creaked. The drum boomed loudly. The men harnessed to this ponderous chariot stopped and straightened up. Ar-



tamonov expected everyone to laugh. That would have made things easier to understand. But all the men at the table rose to their feet and stood silently watching as the woman lazily raised herself, detached herself from the piano lid. It was as though she had only just awakened from sleep, and beneath her lay a fragment of the night, condensed to the hardness of stone. It was like a fairy tale. Standing, the woman threw her long, thick hair back over her shoulders, and stamped her feet, disturbing the black gleam to its very depths. They could hear the strings hum as her feet struck the lid.

Two more came in: a grey-haired, spectacled old lady and a man in a tail-coat. The old lady sat down, baring her own yellow teeth simultaneously with the black and ivory of the keyboard. The man in a tail-coat raised a violin to his shoulder, screwed up one reddish eye as though taking aim, and cut across the strings with his bow, projecting the thin, piping voice of the violin into the bass drone of the piano. The naked woman straightened up sinuously. She tossed her head, and her hair fell forward, over her brazen breasts, and hid them. Swaying, she began to sing, slowly and nasally, her low voice aloof and dreamy.

They all sat in silence, with upturned faces, watching her, and all wore the same expression. Their eyes looked blind. The woman sang reluctantly, as though half asleep. Her vivid lips shaped words that no one understood; her eyes, covered with an oily film, stared fixedly over the heads of the company. Artamonov had never thought that a woman's body could be so finely shaped, so appallingly beautiful. She passed her palms over breasts and hips, constantly tossing her head, until her hair seemed to be growing, until the whole of her seemed to be growing, expanding, obliterating everything from sight—until she alone was visible, as though nothing but she existed. Not for an instant, Artamonov remembered clearly, did she arouse in him the desire to possess her. She evoked only fear, an oppressive constriction in his chest. She emanated

the horror of sorcery. But he realized that if this woman called, he would follow her, would do for her anything she might desire. Glancing at the others, he was still more strongly convinced of this.

"Every one of them would do it."

His intoxication was subsiding, and he felt the desire to turn quietly and leave this place—a desire that grew into determination when someone whispered loudly:

"Charusa. Nature's trap. Do you get it? Charusa."

Charusa. Artamonov knew what that meant: a luscious sward in the midst of a swampy forest: a sward where the grass was particularly beautiful, particularly green and silky; but all who set foot on it would be sucked down into the bottomless morass. And yet he remained, watching the woman, paralyzed by the irresistible, conquering power of her nakedness. And when her heavy, oily glance fell on him, he would shift his shoulders uneasily and twist his neck, turning his face away. Then he would see the others: hideous, half-drunk, goggling at her in a sort of stupid amazement. Just so had the Dryomov townspeople stared, one day, when a house painter fell from the roof of the church and died.

Swarthy, curlyheaded Styopa sat on the window sill, his thick lips parted, rubbing his forehead with a trembling hand. He looked as though in another moment he must fall, dashing his head against the floor. One of his cuffs hung loose. For some reason or other, he suddenly tore it off and threw it into the corner.

The woman's movements became faster, more convulsive. She writhed and twisted as though trying to jump down from the piano, but held back by some force. Her smothered cries became more nasal, their tone more shrewish. It was horrible to watch the sinuous movements of her legs, the sharp jerking of her head, the thick hair sweeping winglike over her shoulders and falling on her breast and back like an animal skin.

Suddenly the music broke off, and the woman sprang to the floor. Swarthy Styopa wrapped her hastily in a

golden-yellow robe, and pulled her out of the room. The company broke into shouts and squeals, clapping furiously, jostling one another. Waiters, white as shrouded corpses, hurried in and out. Glasses tinkled. Everyone began to drink, thirstily, as on a sultry day. They ate and drank coarsely, indecently. It was almost nauseating to see their bent heads over the table, like so many pig snouts over the feeding trough.

A crowd of Gypsies appeared. Their songs and dancing annoyed the company, and cucumbers and napkins flew at them until they disappeared. In their place, Styopa herded in a noisy swarm of women. One of these, short and plump, in a red dress, perched on Pyotr's knees and raised a glass of champagne to his lips. Clinking her own glass loudly against his, she cried:

"Drink to Mitya, redhead!"

She was light as a moth, and her name was Pashuta. She played the guitar very nicely, singing touchingly:

*I dreamt of bright morning, all crystal and azure...*

and when her clear voice broke pathetically on the line:

*I dreamt of my long-lost, my innocent girl-hood—*

Artamonov patted her head in friendly, fatherly fashion, trying to comfort her.

"Don't you cry. You're young yet. You've nothing to fear."

At night, embracing her, he closed his eyes tight, so that he might recall the other—Paula Menotti.

In his rare moments of sobriety he realized, with great amazement, that this dissipated Pashuta was costing him ridiculous sums of money; and he thought to himself:

"The little moth!"

It was astonishing, how skilfully these women at the fair got money out of people's pockets, and how senselessly they spent this money, earned at the cost of nights of drunken debauchery. He was told that the dog-faced man, a big fur dealer, spent tens of thousands on Paula

Menotti; that he paid her three thousand for every nude appearance. The one with the purple ears thrust hundred-ruble bills into the candle flame to light his cigars, and pushed heavy rolls of money into women's bosoms.

"Here, Dutchy, I've got plenty."

He called all women "Dutchy". As to Artamonov, he was beginning to see in every woman the brazen shamelessness of thick-haired Paula; to feel that every woman, sly or foolish, reticent or bold, regarded him inimically. Even in his wife, as he recalled her now, he noted traces of repressed hostility.

"Moths," he reflected, reviewing the colourful bevy of young and beautiful women that rose so vividly in memory.

He could not understand what it all meant. How could it be so? People worked, fettered to their business, dead to the world, with the sole aim of accumulating money, as much money as they possibly could—and then they burnt the money, threw it by the handful at the feet of dissolute women. And they were all men of weight, with positions in life, husbands and fathers, owners of great mills and factories.

"Father'd have played the same sort of tricks, most likely," he concluded. Yes, that was hardly to be doubted. Himself he regarded, not as a participant in this sort of life, in these revels and carousals, but as a chance, involuntary onlooker. Only—these thoughts were more intoxicating than wine, and nothing but wine could kill them. For three weeks he lived in a nightmare of drunkenness, which ended only with Alexei's arrival.

Artamonov senior lay on the floor, on a flimsy, stonehard mattress. Beside him stood a pail of ice, some bottles of kvass, and a plate of sauerkraut, generously seasoned with grated horse-radish. On the couch, her mouth open, her eyebrows lifted like Natalya's, lay Pashuta. One white leg, blue-veined, with toenails like gleaming fish scales, dangled over the side of the couch.

Outside the window, straining its thousands of insatiate gullets, roared the great all-Russia mart.

Through the drunken buzzing in his head and the throbbing ache of his poisoned body. Artamonov was looking morosely back over the events and amusements of the night just past, when suddenly, as though materializing out of the wall, Alexei made his appearance. His stick tapped loudly on the floor as he limped across the room. Looking down at Pyotr, he rattled off:

"Keeled over? On your back? I searched for you all day yesterday, and all last night, and by morning I got into it myself."

He summoned a waiter immediately, and ordered lemonade, cognac, and ice. Swooping down on the couch, he slapped Pashuta's shoulder.

"Get up, young lady!"

The young lady grumbled, without opening her eyes:

"Go to hell. Let me alone."

"Ah, but it's you that's going to hell," Alexei returned, quite amicably. He seized her by the shoulders and sat her up, then gave her a shake and pointed to the door.

"Let her alone," said Pyotr. His cousin laughed and answered reassuringly:

"That's all right. She'll come when we send for her."

"You devils," said the woman, but she pulled on her clothes resignedly.

Alexei issued orders like a veritable doctor:

"Get up, Pyotr. Take off your shirt, and rub yourself with ice."

Pashuta picked her crumpled hat up from the floor, and put it on her tousled head. Glancing into the mirror over the couch, however, she said:

"What a beautiful queen!"

And, yawning sleepily, tossed the hat away.

"Well, good-bye, Mitya! Remember, I'm at Simansky's lodging house, room 13."

Pyotr felt sorry for her. Without moving from his mattress, he told his cousin:

"Give her something."

"How much?"

"Well ... fifty."

"That's too much."

Alexei thrust some money into the woman's hand, saw her out, and closed the door tight behind her.

"You're stingy," said Pyotr tartly. "She spent more than that on that hat, yesterday."

Alexei sat down in an armchair, his hands folded on the head of his stick, his chin on his hands. In a dry, authoritative tone, he asked:

"What do you think you're doing?"

"Drinking," replied the elder cheerfully. He got up and, snorting, began to rub himself with ice.

"Drink yourself dead, only don't lose your head! And what do you do?"

"Well, and what?"

Alexei came up close, staring at Pyotr as though he were a stranger, and demanded tensely:

"So you don't remember? There's a complaint against you. You punched a lawyer in the jaw, and threw a policeman in the canal, and...."

He enumerated so many transgressions that Ar-tamonov senior thought:

"He's lying. Trying to scare me."

And he asked:

"What lawyer? Don't talk rot."

"I'm not talking rot. That swarthy-looking fellow—I forget his name."

"We did have some fights," said Pyotr, sobering down. But his brother continued, still more severely:

"And why did you curse and swear at respectable people? And the family, too!"

"Me?"

"Yes, you! You cursed your wife, and Tikhon, and me, and you blubbered about some youngster, and yelled, 'Abraham, Isaac, the ram!' What does that mean?"

Fear seared Pyotr's brain. He dropped into a chair.

"I don't know. I was drunk."

"That's no explanation," returned Alexei, almost shouting now, and jerking up and down in his chair like a man astride a lame horse. "There's something else behind it. What a person thinks sober, he says drunk—that's what's behind it! A tavern's no place to yell about family affairs. What do you mean—Abraham, sacrifice, all that filth? Can't you see you're compromising the business, spotting my name, too? Where do you think you are—in a steam bath, to lay yourself open that way? It was a good thing Loktev was there, a friend of mine, and he had the sense to fill you with cognac till you dropped, and telegraphed me to come. It was he who told me about it. At first they all laughed, he says, but then they started listening: 'What's the man yelling about?'"

"They all yelled," Pyotr mumbled despondently. His cousin's words were renewing his intoxication. But Alexei went on, his voice dropping almost to a whisper:

"They all yelled about one thing, and you yelled about everything! You can thank your stars Loktev had the sense to send the drinks around till everyone toppled over. Maybe they'll forget about it. But you know yourself, in our business, it's like politics. Today Loktev's a friend, and tomorrow he may be our worst enemy."

Pyotr sat with his head pressed hard against the wall behind him. He did not speak. Saturated with the furious din of the streets, the wall was quivering; and it seemed to him that this vibration must quell the drunken chaos in his mind, must drive away his fear. He remembered nothing of what his cousin had enumerated. And it was very galling to hear his cousin speak in the tone of a judge, of a senior. It was fearful to think what else he might have to say.

"What's wrong with you?" Alexei demanded, still jerking up and down. "You said you were going to see Nikita."

"I did go to see him."

"So did I. When we telegraphed, and they answered

that you weren't there, of course, I went right away. Everyone was worried. After all, the world is no safe place. You might have been killed somewhere."

"Something was festering inside of me," Pyotr confessed, very low and apologetically.

"So you had to drag it out in public? Can't you understand you're compromising the business? What sort of sacrifice were you talking about? What are you—a Persian, fooling around with boys? What boys?"

Lifting his hands to his face, as though to smooth his hair and beard, Pyotr replied through his fingers:

"Ilya.... It was all on account of him."

Slowly, hesitantly, as though groping in the darkness for his way, he began to tell Alexei about his quarrel with Ilya. He did not have to speak long. His cousin exclaimed, in loud relief:

"Phew! Well, then, that's all right! And Loktev took it the ugly, Asiatic way. So it was Ilya? Well, you'll have to excuse me, but you aren't wise. The merchantry needs to learn everything, to reach into all spheres, and instead of that, you...."

He spoke long and eloquently, maintaining that the sons of the merchantry should become engineers, officials, army officers. A deafening uproar poured in through the window, of carriages driving up to the theatre, ice-cream and cold-drink vendors shouting their wares, and, altogether intolerable, the music blaring in the glass-and-iron Brazilian pavilion built on piles over the water of the canal. The beating drum brought memories of Paula Menotti.

"There was something festering inside of me," Ar-tamonov senior repeated, fingering his ear, and made to pour cognac into his glass of lemonade. His cousin pulled the bottle out of his hand, with a warning glance.

"Look out. You'll be tight again. Now, take Miron—he wants to be an engineer. I'm only too pleased. He wants to travel abroad. I'm pleased again. That's pure profit, not



loss. Can't you understand? Our estate is the main force...."

Pyotr had no desire to understand anything. Only half listening to his cousin's lively talk, he was thinking to himself that here, this man had in some way attained the respect and friendship of people who were wealthier and, probably, wiser than he—people who pulled the strings of commerce on a nation-wide scale; that his other brother, hiding away in a monastery, was gaining renown as a man of wisdom and righteousness; yet he, Pyotr, was thrown to the cruel mercies of stupid chance. Why? For what sins?

"And you had no call to abuse respectable folk for debauchery," Alexei went on, and now his tone was mild, persuasive. "It isn't debauchery; it's excess energy. That lawyer's a rascal, but he sees things right. He's got a good head! Of course, they're elderly men—old, even, some of them—and rowdy like youngsters. Well, but youngsters too, when they go wild—it's all because they're growing, and they've too much energy. And then, you've got to allow for the fact that our women are insipid. There's no spice in them. They make life dull. Not Olga—I don't mean her. She's different! There's a sort of foolishly wise women that seem to be blind in the eye that sees evil. Olga's one of those. You can't hurt her. She sees no evil, and believes no evil. You can't say that about Natalya. It's true, what you called her in front of everybody: domestic machine!"

"Did I really say that?" Pyotr inquired morosely.

"Well, I don't suppose Loktev invented it."

There were many things Pyotr would have liked to ask about; but that might remind Alexei of new points, of things, perhaps, which he had already forgotten. A feeling of hostility and envy towards his cousin rose in Pyotr's mind.

"He's getting smarter and smarter, the devil."

There was a springiness about Alexei, a tense readiness to go, a foxy shiftiness. Pyotr was irritated by his hawk eyes, by the gold tooth glittering behind his twitching

upper lip, by his grey moustache, twisted in martial fashion—his brisk little beard—his clutching, bird-claw fingers. Particularly unpleasant was the right index finger, incessantly tracing fanciful designs in the air. Alexei's short, iron-grey jacket made him look like a rascally solicitor.

Pyotr suddenly wanted him to leave.

"I need some sleep," he said, half closing his eyes.

"That's sensible," Alexei agreed. "You'd best not go anywhere today."

"Preaching at me, as if I was a youngster," Pyotr thought resentfully, when Alexei was gone. He started for the washstand in the corner, but stopped short, and catching sight of a man, much like himself, who moved soundlessly beside him: a miserably dishevelled man, with crumpled face and eyes that bulged with fear, a man stroking his wet beard and hairy chest with his red hand. At first Pyotr could not believe that this was his own reflection, in the mirror over the couch. Then, with a sickly smile, he began once more to rub his face, his neck and chest, with a lump of ice.

"I'll take a cab and go to town," he decided, and reached for his clothes; but his jacket was only half on before he threw it off again and brought his finger down heavily on the ivory bell button.

"Tea, and make it strong," he told the waiter. "And something salty, and some cognac."

He looked out of the window. The broad doors of the shops were already locked. People crept slowly up and down the street, squat against the cobbles in the sultry darkness. A hissing lamp glowed opal at the theatre entrance. Women's voices were singing somewhere close by.

"Moths."

"Can I clear up?" said a voice behind him; and, swinging sharply around, he saw in the doorway a one-eyed old woman, loaded with a scrubbing brush and an armful of rags. Without a word, he went out into the

corridor. There he bumped into a man in dark eyeglasses and a black hat, who was saying, through a half-open door:

"Yes, yes, that's all!"

Everything was out of joint. Everything compelled mental effort, a quest for hidden meanings in words. And then Artamonov senior was at the table, a round table, with a little samovar humming away before him, and, overhead, the lamp chimney tinkling faintly, as though at the light touch of some invisible hand. Through his memory flashed strange human figures, frantically drunk; words out of songs, and fragments of Alexei's dictatorial speech; somebody's sparkling eyes, noticed somewhere in passing. Yet, for all that, his head was a dark vacuum; a vacuum pierced by one thin, quivering ray of light, in which, like motes of dust, these figures danced and whirled. And because of them he could not concentrate his thoughts upon a something else, a something of tremendous importance.

He drank hot, strong tea and guzzled cognac, scalding his palate; but he felt no intoxication—only a growing uneasiness, a desire to be off. He rang. Someone appeared, mistily flowing, with no face, no hair—like an ivory-headed cane.

"Bring me some green liqueur, Vanka. You know—the green kind."

"Yes, sir. Chartreuse."

"Are you Vanka, then?"

"No, sir. Konstantin."

"All right. Get going."

When the waiter brought the liqueur, Artamonov asked:

"Out of the army?"

"No, sir."

"You talk like a soldier."

"It's the same sort of job—you have to do what you're bid."

Artamonov thought awhile, then gave him a ruble, and added some advice:

"Don't you do it. Send them all to ... and go out and sell ice cream. And that's all!"

The liqueur was sticky as molasses, and acrid as ammonia. It made things lighter, clearer, in Pyotr's head. Things seemed to condense; and while this mental condensation was in process, the sounds in the street also grew softer, merged into one whole, took shape in a low murmur that floated away into the distance and left stillness behind it.

"You have to do what you're bid, eh?" Artamonov mused. "Who—me? I'm the master. I'm no servant. Am I the master, or not?"

But these meditations suddenly broke short and disappeared, yielding place to terror. For all at once Artamonov saw, right there in front of him, the one who was to blame, the one who hindered him from marching through life with easy confidence, like Alexei, or other clever, pushing folk. The one who hindered was a broad-faced, bearded man, sitting just opposite, behind the samovar—sitting silently, his beard clutched in his left hand, his cheek on his palm. He stared mournfully at Pyotr Artamonov, as though parting with him forever, and at the same time as though pitying, reproaching him. Staring, he wept, and venomous tears dripped from beneath his reddish eyelids. A huge fly was fussing about near his left eye, along the edge of his beard. Now it began to crawl over his face, as though he were a corpse. It moved to the temple, then to the forehead, and paused over an eyebrow, looking down into his eye.

"Well, rotter," said Artamonov to his enemy; but his enemy neither stirred nor answered. Only his lips moved briefly.

"Blubbering?" yelled Pyotr Artamonov gloatingly. "Got me in a mess, you filthy hound, and now you're blubbering! Sorry yourself, are you? U-u-ugh!..."

Seizing a bottle from the table, he swung it with all his

might against the bald place that was beginning to show on his enemy's skull.

The crash of the shattered mirror, the din of dishes and the samovar tumbling from the upset table, brought people hurrying in. They were not many, but each of them split in two and seemed to swell and grow. The one-eyed old woman bent to lift the samovar, and at the same time she was standing up straight.

Sitting on the floor, Artamonov heard complaining voices:

"...the middle of the night. The whole house sleeping."

"You broke the mirror."

"That's no way to act."

Artamonov worked his arms to and fro, swimming, and moaned:

"The fly...."

Towards evening, next day, Alexei came briskly in, and looked Pyotr over as solicitously as a doctor his patient, or a coachman his horse. Running a queer little brush over his moustache, he declared:

"You're bloated past all decency. You can't go home looking like that. And besides, you can help me here. You'll have to have your beard trimmed, Pyotr. And buy yourself some other boots. Yours look like a cabdriver's."

Clenching his teeth, Artamonov senior followed his cousin submissively to a barber's, where Alexei issued strict and precise instructions as to how much should be trimmed from hair and beard; and then to a shoe store, where Alexei himself chose him a pair of boots. This done, Pyotr decided, on glancing into a mirror, that he looked rather like a clerk. The new boots, too, were tight around the arch. But he held his tongue, admitting to himself that Alexei was right. The haircut, the change of boots—all this was necessary. In general, it was time he pulled himself together, rid himself of all the turbid, oppressive dregs of drunkenness, that weighed him down, a tangible and ponderable burden.

But through the mist that clogged his mind, through the weariness of his spent and poisoned body, he experienced, as he watched his cousin, an ever more intricate commingling of envy and respect, of concealed mockery and hostility. Lean, springy, sharp-eyed, swinging his cane, the man was all ablaze, showering sparks and smoke, in the fever of his insatiable urge for the business gamble. Lunching and dining with him in private rooms at the fair's best taverns, in the company of prominent merchants, Pyotr noticed amazedly that Alexei conducted himself almost like a professional jester, doing his best to amuse and entertain the wealthy company. But they did not seem to notice this buffoonery. They clearly liked and respected Alexei, and listened attentively to his noisy chatter.

Komolov, a huge, thick-bearded textile manufacturer, shook a carrot-coloured finger at Alexei, but he spoke affectionately, rolling his bullock eyes and smacking his lips loudly after every word or two.

"You're smart, Alyosha! You're sly, old fox! Got the better of me!"

"Yermolai Ivanovich!" Alexei cried rapturously. "Competition—am I right?"

"Right you are. Keep your eyes open, and use your ace of trumps!"

"Yermolai Ivanovich, I'm learning!"

Komolov nodded.

"You have to learn."

"Gentlemen," declared Alexei waving his fork, his tone still rapturous, but at the same time insinuating. "My boy, Miron—a clever boy, going to be an engineer—he tells me there was a learned man once, terribly famous, in the city of Syracuse; and he told his king: 'Give me something to stand on, and I'll turn the whole earth upside down for you.'"

"You don't mean it!"

"'Upside down,' he said! Gentlemen! Our estate has something to stand on—the ruble! We don't need any

wise men to turn things over for us. We're wise enough ourselves. There's just one thing we need: different officials! Gentlemen! The gentry are on the decline. They can't stand in our way. But we've got to have our own people in all the offices, our own people in all the key positions, people who come from the merchantry, who understand our business—that's what!"

Grey-headed, bald-headed, well-fed, they merrily agreed:

"Right you are!"

And one of them, discount broker Losev—a sharp-nosed, raw-boned little old man, blind in one eye—said, tittering politely:

"Alexei Ilyich has a mind like pitch—everything sticks to it! And what he knows, he uses! Here's to him!"

Glasses were raised, and Alexei clinked his happily against them all. Stretching out a tiny hand to clap Komolov on his massive shoulder, Losev exclaimed:

"Clever heads are appearing among us."

"They've always been among us," returned Komolov proudly. "My father began as a stevedore, and look how high he rose."

"They say your father got his start by sticking a knife into a rich Armenian," said Losev, chuckling. The heavy-bearded manufacturer roared with laughter, and replied:

"They lie! People are fools, and so they say—if you're lucky, that means you've sinned. There's some ugly talk going round about you, too, Kuzma."

"So there is," said Losev, sighing. "Eh, the talk, it walks!"

Artamonov senior sat and listened, grunting now and then; eating much, and drinking as little as possible. Dejectedly, he felt himself a beast of another breed than these people around him. All of them, he knew, were former peasants; and in them all he discerned an epic, buccaneering strain that commanded his respect, a something reminiscent of his father. Father, of course, would

have been their companion, both in business and in dissipation. He would probably have plunged as they did into drink and debauchery, have burnt money like shavings. Yes, money was shavings to these men, whose energies were so tirelessly devoted to shaving, whittling whatever they might from the face of the earth, from one another, from the peasantry.

Alexei, however, differed in some way from these big people; and there were moments when Pyotr felt, for all his dislike, that his cousin was sharper, cleverer, more dangerous, even, than they.

"Gentlemen!" Alexei yelled frenziedly, like one possessed. "Look at our inexhaustible labour power, all the millions of the peasantry! They do the work, and they buy the goods. Where else can you find them in such plenty? Nowhere! And we've no need for any foreigners. We can manage ourselves!"

"Right you are," agreed the loud-mouthed, half-tipsy company.

He spoke of the need for higher tariffs on imported goods; of buying up property from the landed proprietors; of the harm caused by the special banks run for the nobility. He seemed to know everything; and, to the astonishment of the elder Artamonov, these people agreed rapturously with everything he said.

"Nikita was right. Alexei knows how to live," reflected the elder enviously.

Despite his bad health, Alexei, too, indulged in debauchery. He had a mistress, evidently permanent and long established: a woman from Moscow, who kept a choir. She was massive, but well built, with a honey-sweet voice and radiant eyes. Said to be forty, she looked under thirty, what with her creamy skin and the warm blood that flushed her cheeks.

"Alyosha, my falcon," she would say, baring her sharp fox teeth. Alexei would be hidden by her bulk, like a child beside its mother.

She must have known that Alexei did not scorn affairs



with the girls of her choir. She could not but have seen it. Yet her attitude was always friendly. Pyotr repeatedly heard Alexei asking her advice about people and affairs—a surprising thing, and one that revived memories of his father and Ulyana Baimakova.

“You devil,” he thought, observing his cousin’s life.

Even the mischief Alexei thought up was somehow different, more ingenious. One Meyer, a fat German clown, showed a trained pig in the circus. It paraded about on its hind legs, dressed up in a long-skirted frock-coat, a top hat, and patent leather boots, the very figure of a merchant. The audience was tremendously amused, and even the merchants laughed. But not Alexei. He took offence, and persuaded a group of friends that the creature must be made away with. They bribed the stableman, and stole the pig; and the merchantry solemnly devoured its meat, served up in a variety of dishes by the splendid chef at the Barbatenko hotel. Pyotr Artamonov later heard vague rumours that the clown had hung himself of grief.\* All these traits, newly noted in Alexei at the fair, aroused very anxious thoughts in Pyotr’s mind.

“A sharp hand. No conscience. He’s liable to ruin me without even noticing it. Not out of greed—simply in the rush of affairs.”

The realization of this danger sobered him, brought him back to normal. He returned home alone, as Alexei went on to Moscow. It was September, wet and windy. With a tinkling of bells, a loud squelching of hoofs in the rain-soaked earth, the post horses trotted willingly along the last lap towards Dryomov: through a wood of low spruces, stretching in even rows, like motionless sentinels guarding the narrow, swampy road. The sky was plastered with a grey dough of autumn clouds; and the same grey tedium filled Artamonov’s tired brain. He had the feeling of one just returned from the burial of a person who,

\* An incident described by P. D. Boborykin in the newspaper *Ruski Kuryer* (Russian Courier). It took place in the 1880s.

though close indeed, had been somewhat wearisome. It was a pity about the deceased; but, nonetheless, it was pleasant to know that one would never meet him again, that he would no longer disturb one's peace by the very vagueness of his demands, of his dumb reproaches—by all those things in him that poisoned life for the real, living man.

"My job is the business, and that's all," he told himself. "It's work keeps everybody going. Yes."

He set about his work with all the energy of which he was capable. The days passed tranquilly, clear days of Indian summer, fading into the mournful glamour of moonlit nights.

Awakening in the pearly gloom of an autumn dawn, Artamonov senior would hear the summoning blast of the mill whistle. Half an hour later would commence the indefatigable murmur and rustle, the accustomed, dull, but powerful din of labour. From dawn until late evening, peasant men and women shouted at the doors of the warehouses, turning in their flax. Drunken singing, to the strains of a screeching accordion, would sound from the tavern on the bank of the Vataraksha, founded by one of the innumerable Morozovs. In the yard, there was always Tikhon Vyalov, with a broom, or a spade, or an axe, moving heavily about his work, with the precision of a machine, and turning stern eyes upon his fellow humans—Tikhon Vyalov, unhurriedly sweeping, digging, chopping, shouting gruffly at the peasants and the workers. Serafim would often pass, always in blue, always neat and clean. Indoors, there was Natalya. She, too, did her work like a machine. Natalya was very pleased with the fine gifts her husband brought her from the fair, and still more pleased by his silent, even calm. Everything ran smoothly; everything seemed durably adjusted. The mill, the people, even the horses—all worked as though wound up to go for eternity. And the months rolled by, rapid as windblown clouds. The years piled up.

With bent head, bull fashion, Artamonov senior paced

through the shops, across the yard, or up the settlement street, to the terror of the mill children. And everywhere he sensed a new and strange development: in this great business, he had become almost superfluous, hardly more than an onlooker. With some satisfaction, he noted that Yakov understood the business, and seemed to take a serious interest in it. Yakov's behaviour diverted the father's thoughts from the elder son—more, appeased his anger against Ilya.

"I'll get along without you, scholar. You can study."

Plump, rosy-cheeked, with prepossessing eyes that became iridescent as soap bubbles when he smiled, Yakov carried his well-rounded body with a dignified gravity. Though strangely reminiscent of a pigeon when seen close at hand, from a distance he had the look of an energetic and efficient man of affairs. The mill girls smiled at him; and a sensual look would come into his screwed-up eyes when he stopped to whisper with them, or strutted sidewise past them, like a young rooster, his eager interest not to be masked by any show of dignity. The father would chuckle and reflect, pulling at his ear:

"You young fool! What would you say about Paula?"

It pleased him to see that Yakov, when visiting at Alexei's, never took any part in the interminable arguments between Miron and his crony, shabby, restless Goritsvetov. Miron had nothing of the merchant left in his outward appearance. Lean, big-nosed, bespectacled, in a short, gilt-button jacket with some sort of insignia on the shoulders, he had the look of a Justice of the Peace. He bore himself erectly as a soldier, and spoke in overbearing, supercilious tones. Pyotr realized that his nephew's talk was always clever; but he did not like Miron.

"I tell you, my boy, that's feeblosophy," Miron liked to say, in the tone of a mentor, standing with his hands thrust into his jacket pockets, his elbows protruding at a sharp angle. "It's the sort of thinking that comes from feebleness, from not knowing how."

To Artamonov senior, Goritsvetov also seemed to

speak well, not foolishly. Goritsvetov was rather small. His student's coat, and the black shirt under it, were always sloppily unbuttoned, his hair tousled, his eyes puffy as though he had not slept for days, his keen, swarthy face dotted with pimples. Attacking Miron, he would shout, gesticulating furiously, deaf to all interruption:

"You'll achieve your aim. The sun will rise in the heavens at the bidding of your factory whistles; the smoky day will come crawling out of the swamps and the forests at the call of your machines. But what will you do with humanity?"

Miron would raise his eyebrows, then draw them together in a frown. Adjusting his spectacles, he would repeat for the twentieth time, coldly, unhurriedly:

"That's feeblosophy. sonnets! It's wandering of the tongue, my boy, and empty imaginings. Life is struggle. Lyrics, hysterics—they're out of place, ridiculous."

Their words stood out in the general talk like white doves among grey, and Artamonov senior mused:

"That's how life goes: new birds, new songs."

He had but a vague understanding of the essence of their dispute. Glancing at Yakov, he noticed with pleasure that his son was studiously smoothing the light down on his upper lip, to hide a mocking smile.

"So," thought Pyotr. "And what would Ilya have said?"

Goritsvetov shouted:

"When you chain the earth and its people in iron fetters, when you make man a slave to the machine...."

But Miron interrupted him, with a jerk of his big nose:

"This man you're so worried about is an idle good-for-nothing. He'll be lost beyond hope unless he realizes, and soon, that his salvation lies in the development of industry."

"Which is right? Which is the better?" Pyotr Artamonov wondered.

He liked Goritsvetov even less than his nephew. There was something wishy-washy, unreliable, about him; he was

clearly afraid of something, and that was why he shouted. Unceremonious as a man drunk, he would sit down at table before his hosts, fidget with the forks and knives, and eat his food rapidly, mannerlessly, burning his lips, choking over unchewed morsels. As in Alexei, there was a jerky quality about him, a something quite unwanted and, it seemed to Pyotr, malign. The dark pupils of his bloodshot eyes stared blindly. He never spoke a word to Pyotr Artamonov, even in greeting, when he would rudely thrust forward a hot, rough hand, and jerk it swiftly back again. All in all, he was a useless sort, and it was hard to understand what Miron could see in him.

"Stop talking and eat, Styopa," Olga would tell him, and he would return bombastically:

"I can't, when baneful heresy is being preached!"

Alexei, Pyotr noticed with some amazement, listened in silent attention to the debates between the two students, only rarely putting in a word of support for his son:

"That's right! Where the strength is, there the power lies; and the strength is in the industrialists, so...."

Olga, after dinner and tea, would sit at her embroidery frame by the window, working silently, concentratedly at her interminable beaded flowers, in colours of remarkable brightness. There were wrinkless on her temples, now, radiating from the corners of her eyes; and the tip of her nose was red with the weight of her thick, rimless spectacles. Pyotr was happier at Alexei's than at home. Time passed more interestingly there, and you could always get a glass of good wine.

Returning home with Yakov, the father would ask:

"Do you understand what they're arguing about?"

"Yes," the son would reply briefly.

Sternly, lest the son divine his own failure to understand, the elder Artamonov would demand:

"Well, what, then?"

Yakov's replies were always brief and reluctant, but comprehensible. According to him, Miron affirmed that Russia must live as all of Europe lived; while Goritsvetov

believed that Russia must follow a path of her own. At this point, to show his son that he, the father, had his own ideas on the subject, Artamonov senior declared impressively:

"If the foreigners were better off than us, they wouldn't keep pushing in here."

But that thought was borrowed from Alexei. Thoughts of his own did not offer. Artamonov frowned with vexation. And, somehow, this vexation was still further aggravated when his son said:

"We could get along without boasting how smart we are, without all that talk."

Artamonov senior mumbled:

"I suppose we could."

Ever more frequently, he experienced the jolt of petty injuries and tiny amazements. They seemed to elbow him away, aside, thrusting upon him the role of an onlooker, of one obliged to notice everything, to ponder over everything. And everything around him was undergoing imperceptible, but rapid change; everywhere, in words, in actions, there was a new and restless something, importunately asserting itself. One day, at tea, Olga remarked:

"Truth is when your soul is full, and you want nothing more."

"That's so," Pyotr agreed.

But Miron's very spectacles flashed as he corrected his mother:

"That's not truth, it's death. Truth is in doing things, in activity."

When he left, with a thick sheet of paper rolled up under his arm, Pyotr said to Olga:

"Your son is rude to you."

"Not at all."

"I see he is!"

"He's cleverer than me," said Olga. "After all, I'm uneducated, and I often say foolish things. And anyway, our children are cleverer than we are."

That was a thing Artamonov could not believe. With a short laugh, he replied:

"It's true—you do say foolish things. Well, our elders knew better than us. They used to say: 'Sons bring sorrow, and daughters double sorrow.' See?"

He had been touched on the raw by her remark about children being wiser than their parents. She was hinting, of course, at Ilya. Pyotr knew that Alexei sent Ilya money, and that Miron corresponded with him; but pride forbade any inquiry as to where Ilya was, or how he was getting on. True, Olga herself, understanding his pride, evinced no little skill in imparting this information to him unasked. And so he knew that, for some reason or other, Ilya had gone to Archangel to live, and then abroad.

"Well, let him live where he pleases. When he's wiser, he'll realize he was foolish."

Sometimes, thinking about Ilya, he would wonder at his son's obstinacy. Everyone was growing so wise. Why, then, did Ilya tarry?

Not infrequently, at Alexei's, Pyotr encountered Vera Popova and her daughter. As ever, he found Popova beautiful, pensively serene, and altogether alien. She spoke to him but seldom, and always in the tone he himself had often used towards Ilya, when he felt he had offended the boy unjustly. She made him uncomfortable. In moments of peaceful thought, her image would rise in his memory; but it evoked no feeling stronger than wonder. Strange! A person appealed to you, occupied your thoughts; yet there was no understanding of what it was that made you think of her, and she could be no harder to talk to, were she deaf and dumb.

Yes, everything was changing. Even the mill workers were becoming ever crankier, ever more bitter, more consumptive, and their women—ever louder-tongued. The din at the settlement grew more and more uneasy, sounding, in the evenings, as though the people had all begun to howl like wolves—as though the very sand in the littered street were grumbling angrily.

The workers evinced a new restlessness, a growing wanderlust. Young fellows, with no cause for complaint of anyone or anything, would suddenly march into the office and demand to be paid off.

"Where are you going?" Pyotr would ask.

"To have a look at other parts."

"What's eating them?" Artamonov senior asked his cousin. Alexei only shrugged and, chuckling foxily, said that there was unrest among the workers everywhere.

"We've got it nice and quiet, comparatively. If you take St. Petersburg.... What we need is different officials, different ministers."

And the things he went on to say were so audacious, so ridiculous, that the elder sullenly admonished him:

"That's all rot. It's the gentry who stand to gain by taking the power away from the tsar, because the gentry are losing their riches, while we get rich without this power. Father wore tarred boots on holidays, and you wear imported shoes and silk neckties. Good workers—that's what we should be to the tsar, not pigs. The tsar is the oak that drops our golden acorns."

Alexei chuckled as he listened, still further increasing Pyotr's irritation. In general, the elder Artamonov felt that people were becoming far too risible. This new chuckling habit they had acquired was cheerless, somehow, and silly. Not a one of them could poke fun so amusingly, so consolingly, as that immortal old man, carpenter Serafim.

Artamonov had become great friends with the Consoler. Fits of tedium had once more begun to seize on him from time to time, evoking an insuperable desire for drink. He was ashamed to drink too much at Alexei's, because there were always strangers there; and, above all, he did not want Popova to see him drunk. At home, when these fits began, Natalya's shoulders would droop despondently, and she would maintain an injured silence. He would have preferred to have her shout, so that he could shout back at her. Instead, she acted like a person robbed, arousing, not anger, but a feeling akin to



pity. And Artamonov would make off to Serafim's.

"I want a drink, old man!"

The merry carpenter would grin approvingly.

"That's only natural—like sunshine in the summer-time! Tired, you are, and weary. Well, and take a bracer! It's no small job, this business of yours, no wart on the cheek!"

He kept the most extraordinary liquors for his employer. Pulling the varicoloured bottles from their hiding places, he would boast:

"My own invention, and there's a hot widow deaconess makes the stuff for me. Here, try this. It's flavoured with birch buds, full of the spring sap. Good?"

He would draw up a chair for himself and chatter on, sipping his invariable "turnip wine".

"Yes, a deaconess, she is. The most unlucky woman! Every lover she takes turns out to be a thief. And she just can't live without lovers, her blood is so hot!"

"Ha! There was one I saw at the fair," said Artamonov.

"Of course!" Serafim rejoined, in swift agreement. "They've not the pick of all the land there. Don't I know!"

Serafim knew everything and everybody. He talked entertainingly of the private lives of the mill employees, using one and the same affectionate tone for all. He spoke in the same way of his own daughter, as though of a stranger.

"She's settled down, the baggage. She lives with Sedov, the fitter, and they get on fine. What do you think of that? Yes, every living thing finds its den."

It was pleasant at Serafim's—in his tidy little room, full of the tarry odour of pine shavings, and sunk in a warm semi-darkness that was not marred by the modest glow of the tin lamp on the wall.

After a few drinks, Artamonov would begin to complain about people, humanity; and the carpenter would console:

"Don't you worry. It's all to the good! Humanity's on

the go—that's the whole point! It lay around, and lay around, thinking, and pondering—and now it's up, and off! And why not? Don't you lose heart. Put your trust in man. You trust yourself, don't you?"

Pyotr Artamonov silently considered the question: did he trust himself, or did he not? But Serafim rattled on, and the glib words, tinkling from his lips, made a consoling chant:

"Don't you worry your head over who's bad, and who's good. That don't last. What was good yesterday, is bad today. I've had my taste of it all, Pyotr Ilyich, both good and bad. Eh, what haven't I seen! Sometimes I'd say: 'Here, this is good!' And it would be gone. I'd be right where I was, and it would be gone. Like dust in the wind. And I'd be right there! Well, and what am I? A gnat! Too small to be seen in a crowd. But you...."

Raising a significant forefinger, Serafim would lapse into silence.

His talk afforded Artamonov double pleasure. On the one hand, it was really entertaining, and therefore consoling; on the other, Artamonov realized that the old man was lying, play-acting, speaking not from the heart, but after the rules of the consoler's trade. Understanding all this, he would muse:

"He's smart, the old rascal! Nikita can't work it that way."

And memory would bring back in review the different consolers he had seen in life: the brazen women at the fair, circus clowns, acrobats, conjurers, animal tamers, singers, musicians, and swarthy Styopa, the "friend of humanity". Alexei, too, had something in common with all these people. But there was nothing of the kind about Tikhon Vyalov. Nor about Paula Menotti, either.

Half drunk, he would say to Serafim:

"You're lying, old devil!"

But the carpenter, clapping his hands down on his bony knees, would return, with the utmost gravity:

"No, I'm not. Just think a minute: how can I lie, if I

don't know the truth? I tell you frankly, I don't know the truth; so how can I lie?"

"Don't talk, then."

"Am I a deaf mute?" Serafim would ask caressingly, his rosy little face bright with a smile. "I'm an old man," he would say. "I've only a short time left, and I can manage without the truth. It's the young folk who have to search for truth. That's what their spectacles are for. Miron Alexeyevich, in his spectacles—why, he sees everything inside out. He knows what's what, and who's who."

It pleased Artamonov senior to see that the carpenter disliked Miron; and he roared with laughter when Serafim sang perkily, strumming on his gusli:

*Woodpecker hopping through the loom shops,  
Thinks the whole place is full of boobies,  
And he's the only smart one at the mill.*

"Right!" Artamonov would cry approvingly.

And the carpenter, also drunk by now, would sing, stamping his neat little foot to mark the time:

*That's no buzzard, that's no kite,  
Plucking all the birdlets.  
That's the good Lord's favourite,  
Alexei Ilyich—yes!*

This, too, pleased the elder Artamonov; and then Serafim sang brazenly of Yakov:

*Yasha hugs the girls so close,  
He can't see beyond his nose.*

And so it went, sometimes until the dawn. Then Tikhon Vyalov would knock at the door, wake his employer if he were already asleep, and say indifferently:

"It's time to go home. The whistle will blow right away, and the workers might see you. That's no way."

Artamonov would shout:

"What's no way? I'm the master here!"

But he would get up obediently and, swaying heavily,

go home to bed. Sometimes he would sleep the whole day through, and night would find him once more at Serafim's.

The merry carpenter died at work. He was making a coffin for a drowned boy, the son of the doctor's one-eyed assistant, when suddenly he dropped to the floor, dead. Artamonov decided to see the old man to his grave. The church was packed with mill workers. Redheaded priest Alexander, successor to the meek Gleb, who had suddenly abandoned the priesthood and disappeared from the town, conducted the services with great severity. The choir, organised by Grekov, the teacher at the mill school—a sleek tomcat of a man—sang beautifully. There were many young people among the crowd.

"It's Sunday," Artamonov told himself, to explain the large attendance at the funeral.

It was the younger weavers, too, that came forward to carry the small, light coffin. The more staid and respectable workers held themselves aloof. Zinaida, in a bright blouse ill-suited to the occasion, followed the coffin, her face overcast, but without tears. Beside her walked the broad-shouldered, neatly-dressed fitter, Sedov. Off at the side of the road, Tikhon Vyalov trampled the sand with heavy step. The sun was shining brightly; the choir sang in swelling harmony; and, all in all, there was a strange absence of melancholy about this funeral.

"They've turned out well," said Artamonov, mopping the perspiration from his forehead. Tikhon stopped short, staring at his toes, and, after some thought, replied:

"He tickled them all. Turn the handle, and he'd play you songs, like that thing...."

He turned an imaginary handle in the air.

"There was an old man used to tramp around with it, and a little girl sang while he played. Consoled."

Glancing at his employer with a disrespectful, provoking severity, he added:

"He turned people's heads. He never hurt anyone, but—he didn't live right."

"Wrong, right!" his employer jeered. "You're chained to those thoughts like Tulun to his post. See you don't go mad the same as he did."

And, turning sharply away from the yard-keeper, Artamonov went home.

It was early, not past noon, but the heat was intense. The sandy road, the blue of the air and sky, grew steadily hotter. Towards evening, the sun drew up white mountains of cloud, and they floated slowly eastward over the horizon, making the air still heavier. Artamonov strolled in the orchard for a while, then went out at the gate. Tikhon was tarring the gate hinges. Rusted by the spring rains, they had begun to squeak offensively.

"Why work today? It's Sunday," said Artamonov lazily, sitting down on the bench. Tikhon glanced at him sidewise, with only the whites of his eyes, and said, in a low voice:

"Serafim was bad."

"What was bad about him?"

And in answer Artamonov heard strange words, black cockroaches crawling:

"He was too mindful, remembered too much. He remembered everything he saw. And what's there to see? Evil, vanity, sloth. And so that was what he talked about to everybody. Unrest, he started, and discontent. I see it all."

Still working his brush over the hinges, Tikhon continued, more and more sourly:

"Memory ought to be knocked out of people's heads. It's the root of evil. Things should be this way: one generation lives and dies, and all its evil, all its foolishness, dies with it. A new generation is born, and it don't remember any evil. It only remembers the good. Take me—I suffer from my memory, too. I'm old. I want peace. And where can I find peace, then? Peace lies in forgetfulness."

Never before had Tikhon spoken so much at a time, and so exasperatingly. Stupid, as always, his talk today was somehow particularly antagonizing. Regarding the yard-

keeper's matted beard, his pale, watery eyes, his stony, furrowed forehead, Artamonov was struck by the man's increasing ugliness. Tikhon's wrinkles were deep as the folds around the ankle of a boot; his high cheeks, hairless with age, had become a pumice grey; his nose was porous as a sponge.

"He's in his dotage," Artamonov thought; and the idea pleased him. "Drivelling. He's not fit to work any more. I'll have to get rid of him. I'll give him a nice sum."

His brush in one hand, his pail of tar in the other, Tikhon came up close to his employer. Pointing with the brush at the mill buildings, the dark red of raw beef, he grumbled:

"You ought to hear them talking—dandy Sedov, and one-eyed Morozov, and his brother Zakhar, and Zinaida, too. They say straight out: a business built by other people's hands is a bad business, and it ought to be destroyed."

"Looks like they borrowed your ideas," said the employer mockingly.

"My ideas?"—Tikhon shook his head in denial. "No, they're not mine. I've nothing to do with such fancies. Let everyone work for himself, and then there won't be any trouble, any evil. But they say: 'Everything is our doing. We're the masters!' And look, Pyotr Ilyich: it's true! It's all their doing. They harnessed you to the business, and you pulled it out of the rut, onto the highroad. And now...."

Artamonov hemmed importantly and got up. Thrusting his hands into his pockets, and looking up, over Tikhon's head, at the clouds, he began to speak, his tone resolute, if his words were somewhat muddled:

"Look here: of course, I understand. You've been with me all these years. That's true. Well, but you're old now. It's hard on you...."

"And Serafim encouraged that kind of talk," said Tikhon, evidently not listening to his employer.

"Hold on! It's time for you to rest...."

"It's time for everyone. Of course."

"Wait. You're a hard man to get along with...."

Tikhon Vyalov did not seem surprised at his discharge. Calmly, he mumbled:

"Well, then...."

"You'll get a nice sum, of course," Artamonov promised, somewhat taken aback by the old man's composure. Tikhon, tarring his dusty boots, made no reply. Then Artamonov said firmly:

"So it's good-bye."

"All right," replied the yard-keeper.

Artamonov went to the river bank, hoping it might be cooler there. Under the pine tree, where he had quarrelled with Ilya, he had a sort of throne of white birch boughs, that Serafim had made him. From this seat he could see all the mill buildings, his house and yard, the mill workers' settlement, the church, the cemetery. An icy glitter marked the big windows of the mill hospital and the school. Tiny human figures darted to and fro like shuttles, weaving the endless fabric of the business. Figures still more tiny ran about in the sandy settlement street. Among the grey alders near the church fence grazed a toylike herd of goats, bred by the doctor's one-eyed assistant—grandson of that ancient weaver, Boris Morozov; many of the mill women bought goat's milk for their children. And by the hospital, on a square, grassless, fenced-in plot, another herd was grazing—little human figures, looking like lunatics in their yellow hospital wrappers and white nightcaps. A multitude of birds had come to live around the mill: crows, jackdaws, sparrows; noisy magpies, flitting hurriedly from place to place, their white sides flashing satin in the sun; blue-grey pigeons, strutting on the ground. The birds were particularly numerous around the tavern on the bank of the Vataraksha, where the peasants stopped off when they brought their flax to the mill.

Of late, however, all these domains had ceased to afford Artamonov either pleasure or pride—had become, for him, only a source of mortification. It was mortifying to see his cousin and nephew, and all their train of

helpers, arguing, shouting, gesticulating like Gypsies at a fair, without so much as a thought for him, the senior in the business. Even when the talk turned on the mill, they would seem to forget his very existence. When he demanded attention, they would hear him out in silence, appearing to agree; but in every matter, big or small, they would do as they themselves saw fit. This sort of thing had begun quite a long time back, with the electric power plant they had built for the mill in spite of his opposition. Afterwards, Artamonov senior had quickly realized that electric power was both safer and cheaper; but the sense of injury had remained. Petty injuries were frequent, and, mounting in number, they became ever more acute.

Most insolent and disagreeable of all was Pyotr's nephew, Miron. His student days over, Miron had replaced his uniform by some foreign sort of leather jacket; and the whole of his long frame glittered, from his gold-rimmed spectacles to his yellow shoes. Scowling and screwing up his eyes, he would say:

"That's old, uncle. The times have changed."

He seemed to fear time, as a servant fears a stern master. But that was the only thing he feared. In everything else, he was insolent beyond all bearing. On one occasion, he actually said:

"Listen here, uncle! Russia can't go on any longer with such men as you and your like in charge."

Artamonov was too perplexed even to put the question: why? He went home in high dudgeon, and for several weeks did not visit at Alexei's or speak to Miron when he met him at the mill.

Miron was planning to marry Vera Popova's daughter, who had grown up as tall and slender as her grey-haired, icy mother. Like everyone else, this girl had the unpleasant chuckling habit. She kept jerking her neck, staring at things intently with her big eyes brazenly wide—eyes that seemed void of faith in anything. Humming through her teeth, like a buzzing fly, she would sit from morning to night at her easel, spoiling good canvas with vivid daubs.



Her straw hat, tied by a ribbon under her chin, was always hanging down her back, exposing her straw-coloured hair to the sun. She dressed sloppily, and her short skirt revealed her legs almost to the knees.

That ne'er-do-well, Goritsvetov, was also irritating. He came and went like a flitting swift, suddenly appearing, as suddenly disappearing, then arriving again, jumping at people like a vicious little dog and shouting always the same:

"You're trying to transform Russia's wealth of soul into American soullessness. You're building a mousetrap for men...."

At times, in these cries, Artamonov would catch some thought that rang true. More often, however, he felt that they had something in common with Tikhon Vyalov's foolishness—though he knew no two people more dissimilar than this convulsive jack-in-the-box and ponderous, indifferent Tikhon. Darting at Elizaveta Popova, Goritsvetov would shout:

"You, with your soul, why do you hold your tongue?"

She would smile at this, but only with her grey autumnal eyes, her features retaining their haughty immobility. New words appeared, words that Artamonov senior had never heard before, and could not understand.

"The death rattle of romanticism," Miron would say, studiously rubbing his spectacles with a bit of chamois.

Alexei was constantly dashing off to Moscow. Yakov, ever plumper, held himself staidly aloof, and spoke very little; but he must have spoken well, for what he said galled both Miron and Goritsvetov, in equal measure. Yakov had grown himself a thick, square, reddish beard, Tatar fashion; and, with his beard, had developed an increasing inclination to scoff. Artamonov liked to hear his son say lazily to all these restless people:

"You'll break your necks, some day, if you climb so fast. Why can't you live more simply?"

Artamonov senior was very much amused, and so—he saw—was Yakov, when Elizaveta Popova suddenly left for

Moscow and got married there to Goritsvetov. Miron was furious, and could not hide it. Twisting his pointed beard, which made him still less like a merchant—drawing from it the thread of his dry speech, he said, with manifest hypocrisy:

“People like Stepan Goritsvetov belong to a tribe that’s becoming extinct. Nowhere in the world can you find human beings so useless as he and his like.”

Yakov said, heaping coals on the flame:

“And yet, one of that tribe has stolen your titbit, right from under your nose!”

Hunching his shoulders, Miron replied:

“I’m no romanticist.”

“What’s that? Who’s that?” demanded Artamonov senior; and Miron said, bringing out every word distinctly, like a judge pronouncing sentence:

“Nobody understands what romanticists are, and you won’t understand it either, uncle. They’re for beauty, like a wig on a bald head. Or precaution, like a swindler’s false beard.”

“Aha! You’ve got your big nose pinched,” gloated Artamonov senior.

Such petty satisfactions made up, in some measure, for the many injuries he suffered from those restless people who were taking ever firmer hold of the business, thrusting him ever further aside, into solitude. In this very solitude, again, he discovered, invented, an element of melancholy pleasure. Solitude introduced him to a new, though vaguely familiar character—a Pyotr Artamonov of somewhat different make-up.

A fine, upstanding man, and brutally dealt with. Life had treated him unjustly, like a stepmother. It had started him off as a mute, obedient servant to his father, who in place of happiness had given him a stupid, tedious wife, and dumped upon his shoulders the responsibility for a large and difficult business. True, his wife loved him, and their first year together had not been bad; but now he knew that even a dissolute bobbin girl like Zinaida put

more fire and spice into her love. And as for the love-schooled furies at the fair, it was best not to recall them. His wife spent her whole life in fear. First she had been afraid of Alexei, and kerosene lamps; later—of electric bulbs. When the light flashed up in them, she would start nervously and cross herself. She had been an embarrassment to him, once, in a phonograph store at the fair.

"Oh, oh, don't buy it," she had begged. "Maybe it's the accursed one. Maybe his soul is hid inside the box!"

Nowadays, she was afraid of Miron, and Doctor Yakovlev, and her own daughter Tatyana. Monstrously fat, she did nothing but eat from morning to night. His brother had almost killed himself, all on account of her. The children did not respect her. When she urged Yakov to marry, he would advise her scoffingly:

"Better get yourself a bite to eat, Mother."

She would answer submissively, uncertainly:

"Why, I don't think I want any more"—

And ate again.

The father said:

"Why do you mock at your mother? It's high time you were married!"

"These are no times to tie yourself down with a family," Yakov answered briskly.

"What makes you all so afraid of the times?" demanded the father angrily; but the son only shrugged his shoulders, and made no reply.

He, too, would often say:

"You don't understand things, Father."

He said it mildly. But after all, it could not be that a father should understand less than his son. It was not to the future that people looked, but to the past. That was how everybody lived.

Ilya, the elder son, the best-beloved, was vanished, gone. For love of him, the father had done a thing he did not like to recall.

The elder daughter, Elena, a broad-faced, broad-

hipped woman, pampered by wealth and by her drunken husband, was a complete stranger. Only rarely did she come to visit her parents—richly dressed, her fingers loaded with rings. With a jingle of gold chains and trinkets, she would raise a gold-rimmed lorgnette to her sated eyes and look about her, saying languidly:

“How bad the air is here! The whole house is putrid and rotting. Why don’t you build a new one? And anyway, it’s not the thing to live right next to the mill.”

By chance, one day, Artamonov overheard her saying to her mother:

“I see Father hasn’t changed. It must be dull for you with him! My tyrant drinks and plays around, but he’s got some life in him, at least.”

She had a passion for cleanliness that was most exasperating. Before sitting down, she would whisk her handkerchief over her chair; and she used so much perfume it made one want to sneeze. Her insulting, unceremonious disgust for everything in the house provoked in Artamonov the desire to get back at her for all these vexing qualities. When she was there, he walked about the house, and even the yard, with his dressing gown unbelted to reveal his underwear, and his bare feet thrust into a pair of rubbers. At table, he would munch his food loudly, and belch like a Bashkir. The daughter would cry indignantly:

“Father, what’s wrong with you?”

Her indignation was just what he was after.

“Excuse me, my fine lady,” he would say. “I’m a plain peasant, you know.”

And he would go on champing and belching, more furiously than ever.

Elena had been abroad. Of an evening, in languid, oily tones, she would tell her mother all sorts of nonsense: in some city she had visited, the women scrubbed the outside of their houses with brushes and soap; in some other city, there was such a fog, summer and winter, that the street lamps were lit all day, and just the same you couldn’t see a

thing; in Paris, all the shops sold ready-made clothes, and there was a tower so high that from its top you could see the cities that lay across the sea.

With her younger sister, Elena was always arguing, even quarrelling violently. Tatyana had grown up thin and swarthy, embittered because she was not good to look at. There was something about her that brought to mind a sexton: her short pigtail, perhaps, or her flat chest and bluish nose. She lived in the city, with her sister. For some reason or other, she had failed to graduate from school. She was afraid of mice. Agreeing with Miron that the tsar's power should be limited, she had recently taken to smoking cigarettes. When she came home for the summer, she would shout at her mother as at a servant, and barely deign her father an indifferent word. She read all day, and of an evening would drive off to town, to her uncle's, whence she would be escorted home by gold-toothed Doctor Yakovlev. At night she would lie awake, thinking her callow girl's thoughts, and killing mosquitoes on the wall with her slipper, with a noise like pistol shots.

Everything in Artamonov's world was becoming noisy, alien, exasperatingly stupid, from Miron's insolent remarks to the idiotic ditties of Vaska, the stoker—a lame fellow with a twisted thigh and a dishevelled mop of hair, who was courting the cook. Vaska would hang about outside the kitchen window every Sunday and holiday, vamping on his accordion and roaring, with closed eyes:

*Just a wre-e-etched ha-abit  
You are of mi-ine!  
I need to see your pretty mu-u-ug  
Like I need wine!*

And it was a long time, now, since Olga had given him any news of Ilya, while the new Pyotr Artamonov, the injured one, thought more and more frequently of his elder son. Most likely, Ilya had received due recompense for his obstinacy. This was to be felt in the changed attitude towards him at Alexei's. Taking off his coat and

hat in the hall, one evening, Artamonov senior heard Miron, just returned from Moscow, say:

"Ilya is one of those people who see life through the pages of their books, and can't tell a cow from a horse."

"That's a lie," reflected Artamonov, deriving a sort of comfort from his nephew's hostility.

Alexei asked:

"Is he of the same party as Goritsvetov?"

"Worse," Miron replied.

Entering the parlour at this point, the elder Artamonov threatened them mentally:

"You just wait. When he comes back, he'll show you."

Miron immediately began to talk about affairs in Moscow, complaining angrily of the government's stupidity. Then Natalya and Yakov arrived, and Miron turned the conversation to the paper mill he wanted to build. He had been worrying them about it for some time past.

"Look at all our money, uncle, lying around to no purpose," he said. Natalya, flushing to the very ears, demanded shrilly:

"Where's money lying around? Whose money's lying around?"

Artamonov suddenly felt a crushing tedium, as though someone had opened wide before him the door to a room where everything was so familiar, so tiresomely the same, that the place seemed empty. This abrupt, physical tedium always came upon him from without, in a heavy fog that clogged his ears and veiled his eyes, bringing bodily weariness and frightening thoughts of illness and death.

"You make me sick," he said. "Will you never let me rest?"

Yakov grumbled:

"What we have is trouble enough."

And Natalya clamoured:

"As it is, you can't go out of the house for the workers all around. Drunkenness, profanity...."

Artamonov went to the window. Out in the orchard,

Tikhon Vyalov, his face uplifted, was pointing out an apple tree to some little girl.

"New-found Adam," thought Pyotr Artamonov, and his tedium lifted. Such extraneous thoughts would sometimes dart, like swift mice, through his mind. He was always glad of their sudden visitations. He liked them because they did not worry him, just flashed and vanished—and that was all.

There was that matter of Tikhon, too; Pyotr Artamonov had been cruelly affronted when his cousin took in the yard-keeper on his sudden reappearance, after an absence of over a year, with the unpleasant tidings that Nikita had disappeared from the monastery, nobody knew where to. Pyotr was sure that the old man knew where Nikita was, and only kept it a secret because of his passion for mortifying people. The elder Artamonov had quarrelled with Alexei in all earnest over this man, though Alexei's defence was strong enough:

"Use your brains. The man worked for us all his life, and now you take and throw him out. Is that the right thing to do?"

Pyotr knew it was not right; but he could not bear Tikhon about the house. His wife, too, for the first time, perhaps, in all their life together, had sided with Alexei. With a firmness quite unusual in her, she had declared:

"It's not right, Pyotr Ilyich. I don't care what you say, but it's not right!"

With Olga's help, they had talked him into acquiescence. But the injured man within him had triumphed.

"There! Your will is no law to anyone. You see!"

The injured man was coming more and more to the fore, growing more and more tangible. Dragging his heavy bulk up the hillside, Artamonov senior would settle down in his armchair under the pine and think of this injured creature—pity him with all his heart. There was sweetness as well as bitterness in the conjuring up of this unhappy man, so incomprehensible, so unappreciated, yet with such

good qualities. He materialized easily, out of nothing, just as the white clouds came into being in the blue void over the swamps, on a sunny day.

Looking out over the mill and all that had grown up around it, he would urge:

"Life could be lived differently, without such fancies."

Manufacturer Artamonov would object:

"That's Tikhon's talk."

"Priest Gleb said the same, and Goritsvetov, and many others, too. Yes, men are struggling like flies in a spider's web."

"You can't get anything for nothing," the manufacturer would make himself reply.

At times, this mute debate of two men within one would flare up hotly, and the injured one, growing merciless, would all but shout:

"Remember, when you were drunk at the fair, you cried about sacrificing your son, the way Abraham sacrificed Isaac, and the Nikonov boy was thrust on you instead of the ram. Remember? True, it was. True! And for that truth you swung a bottle at me. Ah, you crushed me then. You killed me! Me, too, you sacrificed. And who was the sacrifice for, say? The horned god Nikita talked about? Was it for him? Ah, you fool!"

When the debate grew so fierce, the manufacturer, Artamonov senior, would screw his eyes up tight to keep back the bitter tears of shame and anger; but the tears flowed uncontrollably. He would brush them from his cheeks and beard with his palms, and then rub his palms together until they were dry, staring dully at his swollen, crimson hands. And he would drink Madeira, in long swallows, straight from the bottle.

Yet, despite these piteous tears that he evoked, the injured man was welcome, indispensable to Artamonov senior—like the attendant in the steam bath, when he brings the soft, well-soaped bast, pleasantly hot, to bear on just that part of a man's back that he cannot reach himself.



...Suddenly, far off somewhere beyond Siberia, a heavy fist struck out at Russia.

Alexei jerked up and down in his chair, brandishing his newspaper, shouting:

"Piracy! Highway robbery!" Raising a birdclaw hand, with fiercely clutching fingers, he spluttered:

"We'll smash them! We'll show them!"

The gold-toothed doctor, leaning, hands in pockets, against the warm tiles of the stove, muttered:

"There's also the possibility that they'll show us."

He was sneering, of course, this big, coppery-red man. He always sneered, no matter what the talk touched on. Even of disease and death he spoke with the same mocking smile that twisted his lips when he described an unlucky session at the card table. To Artamonov senior, he reminded of a foreigner who smiles because he is embarrassed, because he is incapable of understanding the alien people surrounding him. Artamonov did not like the doctor, and had no faith in him, preferring the services of the town physician, Doctor Kron, a taciturn German.

Miron paced up and down the room like a crane, absently twisting his beard and frowning as though his head ached, preaching at everyone:

"This business should have been started in league with the British."

"What business?" Artamonov senior asked. But neither his brisk cousin nor his clever nephew could explain to him intelligibly what this sudden war had flared up about. It was a satisfying thing to see the confusion of these self-confident, omniscient people. Alexei was particularly amusing. He acted so queerly, one might have thought that he, Alexei Artamonov, was the one person most injured by this unexpected war—that it was preventing him from achieving some highly important objective.

A religious procession was organized. The bearded merchant, pompous and devout, marched in a close herd behind the portly, gold-vestmented clergy, heavily trampling the thick, new-fallen snow. Icons and gonfalons

floated overhead, and the combined choir of all the town churches sang resoundingly, urgently:

"Save thy people, oh Lo-o-ord!"

The words of the prayer, more like a demand, popped out of the round mouths in white jets of steam, that froze on the eyebrows and moustaches of the choristers, and settled in the beards of the tunelessly responding merchantry. The mayor, Voroponov, son of the wagonmaker, sang with particularly shrill insistence, more out of tune and time with the choir than any of the others. Tall, ruddy-cheeked, with eyes the colour of mother-of-pearl buttons, Voroponov had inherited from his father, together with his property, an inveterate enmity for the Artamonovs.

These, seven of them, kept all together. Alexei limped at their head, arm-in-arm with his wife. then Yakov with his mother and Tatyana, then Miron, with the doctor, and, behind them all, shod in soft boots, Artamonov senior.

"A nation," Miron said quietly.

"A parade of strength," rejoined the doctor.

Miron took off his spectacles and began to rub them with his handkerchief. The doctor added:

"They'll be licked. You wait and see."

"Mmm. Raw material. It won't catch fast."

"Be still," Artamonov senior told his nephew. Miron gave him a sidewise glance. Then, running his fingers along the ridge of his long nose, he hooked his spectacles back in place.

"S-save the people, oh Lord!" Voroponov demanded with loud emphasis, bringing out the word "people" in a piercing squeal. Turning, stiff-necked, he looked back at the townspeople, and for some reason brandished his beaver hat at them.

Pomyalov's daughter sang loud and well. Forty, but fresh, well-rounded, high-bosomed, she was three times a widow, and first in the town in brazen, shameless living. Pyotr Artamonov heard her murmur to Natalya:

"Why don't you send your husband to the wars,

kinswoman? He's such a fright to look at, the enemy would be sure to run away."

Of Yakov, she demanded:

"Why don't you marry, godson—you young rooster?"

Artamonov senior shook his head. All these words buzzed in his ears like flies, hindering thoughts of greater consequence. He dropped out of line and walked slowly on along the sidewalk, letting the human stream flow past. Strikingly black, that day, against the fresh, pure snow, the people marched and marched; and their breath rose white, like steam from boiling samovars.

There was Vera Popova, stony-faced, with uncovered head, leading the girls from her school. Snowflakes sparkled in her soft grey hair. Her frosted lashes quivered when she nodded to him. Artamonov pitied her.

"The fool. Hired herself out to herd ducks."

A long wave of close-cropped heads rolled by: the boys from the two town schools. Then, a drab and leaden machine, half a company of soldiers, under command of that imperturbable lieutenant, Mavrin, whom the whole town talked about because he bathed in the Oka every day, from the spring thaws to the winter frosts, and who, as everybody knew, lived with, and on, Pomyalova.

Pompous as a fattened goose came Nesterenko, the gendarme officer, with his Chinese moustache. His sickly wife walked arm in arm with her brother, Zhiteikin—son of the late mayor, and successor to his tannery. Of Zhiteikin it was said that, though he debauched the nuns, he had read seven hundred books and had mastered the drummer's art to high perfection—indeed, that he was even secretly teaching this art to the soldiery.

Stepan Barsky, rolling in fat, rode past in his sleigh, with his sottish son-in-law and his cross-eyed daughter. Then the minor folk dragged by, in a dark, endless stream: the lower middle class, tannery workers, weavers, wagonwrights, and, finally, the beggars, and a few unwanted old women, reminiscent of rats. The snow

peppered lazily the uncovered heads. And from the distance came Voroponov's unrelenting demand:

"Save thy people, oh Lord!"

"What use can the Lord have for these people? None that I can see," reflected Artamonov. He disliked the townspeople, and had almost no connections among them, except for business ties. The townspeople, he knew, reciprocated his dislike, thinking him arrogant and evil-tempered; but they had the greatest respect for Alexei, because of his urge to adorn the town—expressed concretely in the paving of the main street, the planting of lindens around the square, and the laying out of a park on the bank of the Oka. As to Miron, and even Yakov, the townspeople feared them, thought them greedy beyond all measure—out to lay their hands on everything within reach.

Watching the slow, sober procession, Artamonov began to frown. There were so many unfamiliar faces; and too many eyes, of every hue, were turned on him, all with the same hostility.

At Alexei's gate, Tikhon bowed to him. Artamonov asked:

"Well, old fellow, so we're fighting, eh?"

Silently, in the old, familiar gesture, Tikhon raised his heavy hand and rubbed his cheek. And, for the first time in all their years together, Artamonov asked this man with a feeling of trust in him:

"What do you think of it?"

"Child's play," Vyalov replied, as promptly as though he had been expecting the question.

"Everything's child's play to you," said Artamonov vaguely.

"Of course. What are we—dogs? We're no brute beasts."

Artamonov walked on, through the light, dry snow. It came down thicker and thicker, until the dark throng, now far ahead, was almost hidden from view among the mounds of white piling up on trees and roofs.

Now that Serafim, the Consoler, was dead, Artamonov senior had begun to seek relaxation with Taisia Paraklitova, the widowed deaconess, a skinny little woman of indeterminate age, who looked like an adolescent, and in some ways, too, like a black nanny goat. She was a quiet soul, and always agreed with everything he said.

"That's right, dear heart," she would say. "Yes, dear heart, yes indeed!"

Artamonov drank without stint, but the effect was slow, and he chafed because it took so long before his dreary, importunate thoughts would melt in the vapours of Taisia's delicious, breath-taking concoctions. The first moments of intoxication were unpleasant, making Pyotr's thoughts of himself and others still more caustic and bitter—staining life in evil, swamp green hues, making of it a seething current that whirled and dizzied him, and in another moment, it seemed, must cast him over some indefinite precipice. Gritting his teeth, he would sit staring into the murky unrest within him, straining his ears to catch its sounds.

Then he would roar at the deaconess:

"Why don't you say anything? What's new?"

Nimble as a goat, the woman would spring onto his knees. She was amazingly light, and warm. Turning the pages of an invisible book, she would read to him:

"Pomyalova's given Lieutenant Mavrin the boot. He lost three hundred and twenty at cards again. She's going to call his notes—she has notes from him. And the gendarme don't keep his wife in town because she's sick, at all. It's because he's got a mistress there."

"That's a lot of filthy rubbish," Artamonov would say.

"Filthy, dear heart, and how!"

Her chatter about the trashy news of the town muddled Artamonov's thoughts, switched them to different tracks; it justified and strengthened his dislike for those tedious sinners, the townspeople. In place of his old thoughts, scenes of the wild revelry at the fair would rise and circle in his memory. Frantic humans hurtled madly

to and fro, their drunken, yet never sated eyes bulging with greed—burning money, sparing nothing, breaking down all barriers in the bitter fury of the flesh; yearning, aspiring, to her, the big woman, dazzling white against black, shamelessly nude....

Silently, Pyotr Artamonov would drink the varicoloured liquors and chew the slippery pickled mushrooms, feeling in every fibre of his drunken frame that the world's greatest gift, fearful in its power and reality, lay in this wanton woman of the fair, who for money displayed her body, and for whose sake men of weight and position threw to the winds their money, their shame, their health. Yet for him, nothing remained in life but this black nanny goat.

"Take your clothes off," he would roar. "Dance!"

"How can I dance without music?" the deaconess would return, fumbling with the buttons of her dress. "We ought to get Noskov here, the hunter. He's a good hand on the accordion."

In such pastimes, the days rolled by unnoticed; only now and then, in their muddy flow, some strange event would challenge understanding. Thus, in the winter, came reports that the workers in St. Petersburg had tried to wreck the palace and kill the tsar.

Tikhon Vyalov grumbled: "They'll be smashing the churches yet. Of course. There's a limit to what people can stand."

In the summer, there was talk of a Russian ship, sailing in Russian waters, firing its cannon at the cities on the coast. And Tikhon said:

"Of course. They've got the habit of war."

Again the icons were carried in procession; and Voroponov, in a rusty brown frock coat, holding high a portrait of the tsar, demanded:

"Save thy people, oh, Lo-o-ord!"

This time he shouted still more loudly, more angrily, even than before; yet the long-drawn vowels of his call for aid had an anxious ring.

Zhiteikin, drunk and hatless, his bald crown crimson, strode at the head of his tannery workers, a double-barrelled shotgun in his hands, roaring scandalously:

"Fellows! Don't give Russia to the sheenies! Who owns Russia? We do!"

"We do!" yelled the tanners, also drunk. Encountering the weavers, old enemies, they lunged into battle. Doctor Yakovlev had his jacket dusted, and the old druggist was thrown into the Oka. Zhiteikin chased the druggist's son all through the town, and fired his gun at him twice. He missed his aim, however, and some of the shot hit Bruskov, the tailor, in the back.

Work stopped at the mill. The younger weavers rolled up their sleeves and dashed off to town, deaf to the persuasions of Miron and other sensible folk, and to the cries and tears of the women.

The mill stood empty, unpeopled. It seemed to shrink before the wind, which, also in revolt, had begun to whine and scream, splattering the walls with an icy rain, then plastering the smokestack with clinging snow that, a moment later, it washed away.

Artamonov senior sat at his window, staring woodenly at the dark figures of men and women scurrying, ant-like, up and down the road to the town. Shouts reached his ears through the glass, and the people seemed to be merry. At the gate, in a crowd of workers, an accordion was squealing, and Vaska Krotov, the lame stoker, sang:

*Russia's got so cramped for space,  
We're fighting with the Jappies!  
Every time they punch our face,  
We swing our icons at 'em!*

The wind brought from the town a grumbling murmur, as though a whole lake of water were seething and bubbling in some enormous samovar. Alexei's carriage turned in at the gate, with Morozov, the doctor's one-eyed assistant, on the driver's seat. Olga jumped out, huddled up in a shawl. Alarmed, Artamonov sprang to his feet,

forgetting his aching legs, and hurried out to meet her.

"What's up?"

Shaking herself to right, like a ruffled hen, she said:

"The tanners. They smashed our windows."

Artamonov moved aside to let her pass. With an ironic smile, he mumbled:

"There! That's what comes of all their talk. Shouting at me, and—that's how things turn out! The tsar...."

But suddenly Olga broke in loudly, wrathfully, as he had seldom heard her speak before:

"Drop it! He's no honest man, that tsar of yours!"

"A lot you know about tsars," he returned awkwardly, and his hand rose to his ear.

He was amazed by the wrath of this little, spectacled old woman, who was always so quiet, so unwilling to condemn. There was a startling sincerity in her exclamation, though, of course, it was insignificant and useless as the squeaking protest of a mouse when a bull has trodden on its tail, neither seeing the mouse nor desiring to hurt it. Artamonov sat down again in his armchair, absorbed in thought.

He had not seen Olga for quite some time, having quarrelled with her son several weeks before and avoided all encounters with him since. That had been towards the end of the summer, when Pyotr Artamonov was confined to bed with swollen legs. Voroponov had arrived, very official and perspiring, and, smacking his thick blue lips, asked for Artamonov's signature to a telegram to the tsar—a request that the tsar stand firm, and yield his power to none. Artamonov was very much surprised by the mayor's presumptuous undertaking; but he signed, confident that his action would nettle Alexei and Miron—confident, too, that Voroponov would earn sharp reprimand from St. Petersburg. What business had he thrusting himself in where he was not asked, the thick-lipped fool, poking his nose into spheres so high above him!

Voroponov tucked the document away, and buttoned



his frock coat up to the chin. He began complaining about Alexei, Miron, the doctor, and all those others who, incited by the Jews, were working against the tsar—some through ignorance, others in pursuit of selfish interests. Artamonov senior heard out these complaints with a feeling approaching pleasure, and nodded his agreement. But when the blue lips spoke venomously of Vera Popova, he declared sternly:

“Vera Nikolayevna has nothing to do with it!”

“What do you mean—nothing to do with it? We know for a fact....”

“You don’t know anything.”

“You’ll land in trouble yet,” the mayor threatened, and left.

And that same evening, Artamonov’s nephew and daughter attacked him, barked at him like dogs, with no consideration for his age.

“What are you doing, Father?” shouted Tatyana, her eyes rolling insanely in her homely face. Yakov stood at the window, drumming on the glass, and Artamonov felt that his son, too, was against him. Miron demanded caustically:

“Did you read what it says in that telegram?”

“No, I didn’t,” said Artamonov. “I didn’t read it, but I know what it says: that puppies shouldn’t be unleashed!”

He liked to see Miron and Tatyana seethe; but Yakov’s silence was disturbing. He had faith in his son’s business sense, and it occurred to him that, perhaps, he had acted against his interests. But pride would not allow him to draw Yakov into the argument by any direct question as to his attitude. He lay in bed, growling sullenly, while Miron nagged and nagged, his big nose swaying:

“Can’t you understand? The tsar is surrounded by a regular band of swindlers. They’ve got to be replaced by honest men.”

As Artamonov knew, Miron himself was out to be one of these honest men, and Alexei had been to Moscow

trying to get someone there to appoint Miron a candidate to the imperial Duma. It was comical, and at the same time fearful, to imagine this long-legged crane of a nephew near the tsar. Suddenly Alexei came rushing in, his collar loose, his hair dishevelled, and his tongue began to clatter:

"What do you think you're doing, you crazy dimwit?"

He shouted as one might at a clerk.

"To hell with you!" roared Artamonov senior. "Who wants your preaching? You can all go to hell! Get out!"

He himself was startled by this sudden wrathful outburst.

And now, sitting in his corner, while Olga placidly described the disorders in the town, he looked back at this quarrel and made an effort to understand who had been right—he, or those others?

He had been particularly disturbed by Olga's exclamation, with its childish passion. Yet now she was talking tranquilly enough, with even a hint of tenderness in her voice as she declared:

"How nice our weavers are! They drove away Voroponov's workers and the tanners in no time, and now they're staying to protect the house."

Natalya, very much frightened, whimpered angrily:

"It's your house all the trouble started from. Serves you right! It all comes from you."

Miron came in, without so much as a "good day". Pacing up and down the room with springy steps, he began to shower threats:

"Those Voroponovs and Zhiteikins will pay dearly for teaching the mob to riot. They won't get away with it so easy. The recoil will come. There's enough teaching of rebellion by the friends of Ilya Petrovich Artamonov, and if these start it too...."

Artamonov senior did not speak.

Since the quarrel over Voroponov's petition, his repulsion for Miron had become altogether irreconcilable. Yet the mill, as he saw, was entirely in this man's hands.

Miron ran the business skilfully, confidently. The workers respected or feared him, and behaved more meekly than the workmen in the town.

The wind died, buried in heavy snow. Huge flakes were coming down, straight and fast, shrouding the window in white, hiding the yard from view. Nobody spoke to Artamonov senior, and he could feel that all of them, except his wife, blamed everything on him: the disorders, and the bad weather, and the tsar's strange bungling.

"Where's Yasha?" asked the mother anxiously. "Where's Yasha, I say?"

Miron grimaced disgustedly and said, avoiding his aunt's eyes:

"He must be hiding in that hencoop of his, in town."

"What? Where?" Natalya mumbled fearfully.

Artamonov reflected:

"The fool! She don't seem to know about Yakov's mistress."

All at once, he said firmly:

"Listen here! Live as you please. Do as you see fit. Yes. I don't understand. That's true. I'm old. And.... And the devil's at work. All these years... and I don't understand a thing."

**4** Until he was twenty-six, Yakov Artamonov lived a comfortable, peaceful life, marred by no particularly unpleasant experiences. But the day came when time, foe to all lovers of tranquillity, launched an intricate and dishonest game, with Yakov as cat's-paw. It began one April night, some three years after the rebellions that had shaken the long-patient population.

Yakov lay on the sofa, smoking, revelling in a sensation of satiety that excluded all desires, a sensation which he prized above all else in life—which, to his mind, was life's only aim and value. It was equally pleasant, this satiety, after a good meal and after possession of a woman.

The woman, plump and shapely, stood at the table in the middle of the room, looking down thoughtfully at the angry violet flame of the spirit burner under the coffee-pot. The lamplight, falling through a crimson shade, stained her bare arms and childish face the colour of a crisp pie crust. Her dark, tousled hair hung loose over neck and shoulders. She had slipped, nude, into a golden-yellow Bukhara wrapper and a pair of green Morocco slippers. There was something very light and airy about Polina, a non-Russian quality. She had a pleasing little face, like an adolescent boy, with full lips and lively eyes, round as a pair of cherries. Even now, when Yakov had had his fill of her, he found her attractive. Unquestionably, she far excelled all the women and girls he had yet known. Indeed, she would be perfection, were it not for her silly notions.

"I don't want any coffee, honeybunch," said Yakov, through a thick mist of tobacco smoke. Without glancing at him, Polina asked:

"And what about me?"

"I don't know what you want," said Yakov, with a tired yawn.

"Oh, yes, you do," she cried, tossing her head, and burst into brittle speech. After listening to her abrasive, prickly words for a moment or two, Yakov sat up, threw his cigarette on the floor, and pulled on his shoes, remarking, with a sigh:

"I can't understand your habit of spoiling a pleasant mood. You know perfectly well I can't marry you till my father dies."

At this point, as always, Polina showered him with abusive words:

"Of course, that's all you want, you spider—a pleasant mood! I know. For a pleasant mood, you'd be willing to sell me to the Tatar old-clothes man, you would! You haven't got a drop of honour in you!"

Above all else, Yakov hated her to call him "spider." At tender moments, she had another, most amusing name for him: "Savoury Bit." And today, at any rate, he felt, she might have refrained from quarrelling. He had given her a hundred rubles, only two hours ago.

"Screaming won't get you anywhere," he warned her calmly, putting on his hat, and, holding out his hand, added, "Good-bye!"

"Pig! And cigarette butts all over the floor again!"

A damp wind was sweeping down the street. Cloud shadows crept over the ground, as though in an effort to wipe up the puddles. When the moon peeped out for an instant, the puddles, coated with thin ice, glittered like bronze. Winter, that year, was stubbornly resisting the advance of spring. Only the day before, a heavy snow had fallen.

Yakov Artamonov walked along unhurriedly, his hands in his pockets, his heavy stick under his arm. He was thinking how strangely, inexplicably stupid people could be. That sweet little fool, Polina—what did she lack? She lived in security, with no cares or worries, receiving liberal gifts, well dressed, and with a good hundred rubles every

month to spend. She liked Yakov, that he could feel. Well, then, what more? What did she need marriage for?

"Silly as a mouse in a jar of jam," he concluded—a favourite saying of his, and his own invention. Life, to him, seemed a simple thing, demanding nothing more of man than he already possessed. After all, when you got down to it, it was perfectly clear: all men strove for one and the same object—complete repose. The bustling day was but a none-too-pleasant prelude to the calm of night, to the hours in which one remained alone with a woman, and then, pleasantly wearied by her caresses, slept deeply, without dreams. Only this was really important, really genuine. People were fools, if only because nearly all of them, openly or secretly, thought themselves wiser than he. They invented so much that was superfluous—as the result, perhaps, of a sort of blindness that affected them, each being anxious to distinguish himself from all the others, lest he be lost in the throng, lest he lose sight of self.

Ilya—a dolt, letting himself be led away by books while he was still at school, and now hanging around among the Socialists. He had often humiliated Yakov. And now, Ilya was in Siberia. Yakov had only recently sent him money there. Their mother—intolerably, if ludicrously, foolish; their grim father, still more intolerably, incurably, a fool: an old bear, incapable of getting on with anyone, sottish and uncleanly. Ridiculous Uncle Alexei—a bustling jack-in-the-box, eager to get himself into the State Duma, and, for that end, feeding avidly on newspapers, evincing a false sweetness to everyone in town, and flirting with the mill workers like a libidinous old woman. And, worst of all, oppressively, terribly stupid was that big-nosed woodpecker, Miron. Counting himself Russia's most lucid brain, he was evidently looking forward to a Cabinet post in future; and even for the present, he made no effort to conceal his conviction that he alone saw clearly what should be done and what should be thought by all. He, too, was trying to gain the sympathies of the workers,

providing them various amusements, organizing football teams, starting a library—trying to tame wolves by feeding them carrots.

The workers, weaving beautiful fabrics, were clothed in rags and lived in filth and drunkenness. They, too, en masse, were bedevilled by a singular stupidity, a stupidity insolently undisguised, lacking even such simple proprietor's craftiness as every peasant has. The workers occupied a larger place than everything else in Yakov Artamonov's thoughts; for he was in daily contact with them, and entertained against them a long-standing hostility, conceived in early youth. There had been many sharp clashes with young weavers, in those days, on account of girls; and some of his erstwhile rivals still seemed unable to forget old grudges. Even before his beard began to sprout, he had twice been stoned by night. More than once, his mother, besieged by screaming women, had had to pay hard cash to hush up scandalous affairs. On these occasions, she had attempted comically to show him the error of his ways, exclaiming:

"How you behave, just like a rooster! Why can't you wait till you're married? Or at any rate, pick yourself one, and stick to her. Some day they'll complain to your father, and he'll throw you out, just like Ilya."

In the two or three years of turmoil, Yakov had not noticed anything particularly alarming at the mill. Still, there had been Miron's talk, and Uncle Alexei's uneasy sighs, and the newspapers, which Artamonov junior did not like to read, but which—importunately obliging, maliciously and openly menacing—informed him of the labour movement and brought him the speeches of the workers' representatives in the Duma. And all these things had aroused in Yakov a further hostility towards the mill people, an injurious feeling of dependence on them. This, he thought, he had learned to mask skilfully behind jokes and smiles and petty concessions. On the whole, however, things did not go badly, though, at times, he would be suddenly seized and constrained by a strange diffidence,

as if he, Yakov Artamonov, the master, were the guest of these people who worked for him, a guest overstayed, of whom his hosts were weary; as if, watching him in dreary silence, they were thinking:

"Why don't you get out? It's high time!"

At such moments, he would have vague premonitions of something smouldering at the mill, something hidden, invisible, portending serious danger to him, personally to him.

Man, Yakov was convinced, is simple, and simplicity is his dearest wish. Man, of himself, invents no disturbing thoughts, carries no seed of them within him. Such poisoned thoughts dwell somewhere outside of man; and when they invade his mind he becomes disturbingly incomprehensible. It is best not to know these noxious thoughts, not to let them develop. Yet, for all his hostility to these thoughts, Yakov sensed their existence outside of himself; and he saw that they could not undo the hard knots of stupidity all around him, that they only confused all the clear and simple things he loved in life.

Of all the people he knew, Tikhon Vyalov seemed to him the wisest. Observing Tikhon's condescending labour, his composure in relations with other people, Yakov envied the old yard-keeper. Even in sleep, Tikhon looked wise, his ear pressed close to the pillow or the ground, as though he were listening for something.

Yakov asked him:

"Do you ever have dreams?"

"Why should I? I'm no woman," Tikhon replied; and behind these words Yakov sensed a firm and mature strength, a power not to be shaken.

"Women's dreams," Artamonov junior would reflect when he heard the speeches and debates at his uncle Alexei's; and he would laugh to himself at the thought.

Thinking, in general, was a thing he did not do easily. When he began to think, his movements grew slow, as though he were carrying some great weight; his head drooped, and his eyes turned to the ground. So it was that



night, when he left Polina's; and because of this he did not notice the stocky grey figure rising out of the darkness until it was directly before him, swinging an arm high over his head. Yakov dropped quickly to one knee, pulled his revolver from his coat pocket, thrust its muzzle against his assailant's leg, and fired. The sound of the shot was faint and muffled, but the man jumped back. His shoulder struck a fence, and, moaning, he slipped down along the fence to the ground.

Only then did Yakov realize that he was mortally frightened, so frightened that he wanted to shout, but could not. His hands shook, and his legs would not obey when he tried to get up from his kneeling position. Two paces away, this man was wriggling and twisting, also attempting to rise. His hat had fallen off, revealing a shock of curly hair.

"Devil! I'll shoot your head off," said Yakov hoarsely, raising his revolver. The man turned so that his broad face came into view, and mumbled:

"You've shot me already."

Recognizing him, Yakov, too, could only mumble, so great was his surprise:

"Noskov! You dog! Is that you?"

Yakov's fright was rapidly evaporating, yielding place to a feeling approaching joy—a feeling evoked not only by his fortunate repulsion of attack, but also by the fact that his assailant was an outsider, and not a worker from the mill, as Yakov had thought at first. Noskov earned his living by hunting, and by playing the accordion at local weddings. He had no family, and boarded with Taisia Paraklitova, the deaconess. Until this nocturnal attack, no one in the town had ever spoken ill of him.

"So that's what you go in for!" Yakov continued, getting up. He glanced over his shoulder. Quiet everywhere, except for the wind in the branches of the trees behind the fence.

"What do I go in for?" Noskov demanded, his voice suddenly rising. "I was only joking, trying to scare you,

that's all. And right away you had to shoot. You won't be patted on the back for that, I can tell you. I was scared myself."

"Oh, you were, were you?" said Artamonov, in mocking triumph. "Well, get up. We'll go see the police."

"I can't get up. You've crippled me."

Noskov picked up his hat, and, looking down into it, added:

"And I'm not afraid of the police."

"We'll see about that when we get there. Come on!"

"I'm not afraid," Noskov repeated. "In the first place, how can you prove I jumped on you, and not you on me, out of fright?"

"I see. And in the second?" asked Yakov, smiling scornfully, yet at the same time somewhat taken aback by Noskov's composure.

"There's a second, too. You need me."

"Fairy tales. Nursery rhymes!"

And, in sudden passion, Yakov directed his revolver straight at the hunter's face, shouting:

"I'll blow your brains out!"

Noskov looked up at him, then down into his hat again, and said impressively:

"Don't try to start any trouble. You may be rich, but you can't prove anything. I tell you, I was joking. I know your father. I've played for him, many's the time."

He flung his hat up onto his head and, bending forward, mumbling something through clenched teeth, started rolling up his trouser leg. That done, he pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and began to bandage the wound, which was a little above the knee. He kept muttering inarticulately all the while, but Yakov, his courage dampened again by the strange conduct of this unsuccessful robber, did not listen.

With a rapidity of thought extraordinary for him, Yakov Artamonov was considering the situation. Of course, he ought to leave Noskov lying here by the fence,

get the night watchman to guard him, and go to police headquarters to report the attempted attack. An investigation would begin, and Noskov would talk about Father's drinking bouts at the deaconess'. And he might have friends here, cutthroats like himself, who would attempt revenge. Still, the man could not be allowed to go unpunished....

The night was growing steadily chillier. Yakov's fingers, grasping the revolver, ached with cold. It was a long way to police headquarters, and, of course, everyone there would be asleep. He stood there, breathing heavily, unable to decide on a course of action, and regretting angrily that he had not done for this stocky rascal at once. Bowlegged, the fellow was, as if he had spent all his life astride a barrel. But suddenly Yakov's thoughts were interrupted by a declaration of the most unexpected character.

"I'll tell you straight, though it's a secret," Noskov said, still busy with his leg. "It's for your good I live out here, to keep an eye on your workers. That was just talk, maybe, when I said I was trying to scare you, and the real truth is, there's a fellow I had to grab, and I took you for him."

"The devil!" said Yakov. "What do you mean?"

"What I say. You don't know it, but there's Socialists getting together, all the time, out in the deaconess' bathhouse. They talk rebellion again, and they read all sorts of books."

"You're lying," Yakov murmured, though he believed every word. "Who, then? Who gets together?"

"I can't tell you that. When they're pulled in, you'll see."

Clinging to the fence boards, Noskov pulled himself up to his feet, and said:

"Give me your stick. I can't walk without."

Yakov bent to lift the stick, and handed it to the hunter. Glancing uneasily over his shoulder, he asked, in a low voice:

"Well, but then why did you ... what made you jump on me?"

"I didn't jump on you. I mistook you. I was after somebody else. You'd better drop this business. It was just a mistake. You'll find out pretty soon I'm telling you the truth. You'll have to give me some money, to take care of my leg, that's what."

And, leaning on the stick and clutching at the fence for support, Noskov moved slowly away, on his crooked legs, in the direction of the unlit little houses on the outer edge of the town. Advancing, he seemed to scatter the cold cloud shadows before him. Some ten paces away, he paused to call guardedly:

"Yakov Petrovich!"

Yakov went quickly up to him, and the hunter said:

"Not a word to anyone, about this business. Because.... Well, you know yourself."

He swung his stick and moved on, leaving Yakov dumb and stupefied. The thing had so many aspects, all demanding thought, and all at once. He must decide, and immediately: had he acted right? Of course, if Noskov kept watch on the Socialists, he was useful—indispensable, even. But what if it was all a fraud, if Noskov had lied to gain time, hoping later to take revenge for his failure and his wounded leg? It was a lie about his mistaking Yakov for somebody else, and about trying to scare him, too. Clearly, a lie. Suppose the workers had bribed him to murder Yakov? There were many rowdies and hoodlums among the weavers, but Socialists—that was hard to believe. The most respectable of the workers, men like Sedov, Krikunov, Maslov, and a number of others, had themselves only recently demanded the discharge of one of the most incorrigible of the rowdies. Yes, Noskov must have been lying. Should Miron be told of this?

Yakov could not picture what would follow, were he to tell his cousin about Noskov. But one thing was certain: Miron would question him about every little detail, like a

veritable judge, and find something or other to blame him for. And, whatever else he did, he would be sure to jeer. If Noskov was a spy, Miron probably knew it. And besides, there was still the question: who had been mistaken—Noskov, or Yakov? Noskov had said:

"You'll soon find out I'm telling you the truth."

Yakov stood looking after the hunter until he disappeared into the night. Everything had begun quite simply and comprehensibly. Noskov had attacked with the obvious intent of robbery, and Yakov had fired at him. But what had followed was so eerily involved, like a bad dream. There was something out of the ordinary about the way Noskov walked along the fence; something out of the ordinary in the density of the ragged shadows creeping after him. Never before had Yakov seen shadows drag so heavily after anyone.

Wearied and nerve-racked by all these thoughts, Artamonov junior resolved to hold his tongue and wait. Unable to keep Noskov out of mind, however, he felt ill and dejected. At the dinner hour, when the workers thronged out of the mill buildings, he would stand at the office window, watching, and try to guess which of them could be Socialists. Surely not grimy-faced Vaska, the lame stoker, who had learned so well from Serafim to improvise facetious couplets?

Riding along the forest road, a few days later, to exercise a restive horse, Artamonov junior caught sight of the gendarme officer, Nesterenko. In a Swedish jacket and high boots, with a gun over his shoulder and a well-stuffed game bag at his side, Nesterenko stood at the edge of the woods, his back to the road, lighting a cigarette between cupped hands. The red-brown leather of his jacket, glistening in the sun, made his back seem clad in iron. Yakov knew at once what he must do. Riding up to the gendarme, he greeted him hastily, exclaiming:

"Why, I didn't know you were here."

"Since the day before yesterday. My wife's feeling worse and worse."

Having announced this sad news, in quite a lively tone, Nesterenko added, slapping his game bag:

"I've been trying my luck. Not a bad haul, eh?"

"Do you know Noskov? The hunter, I mean," Yakov asked him, lowering his voice. The gendarme's reddish eyebrows lifted in surprise, and his Chinese moustache bristled. He screwed up his eyes, staring skyward and tugging at one end of his moustache. Yakov reflected, watching him:

"He'll lie. But how?"

"Noskov? Who's that?"

"A hunter. Curlyheaded, bowlegged...."

"Yes? I believe I've seen the fellow about, here in the woods. A trashy gun he carries. Well, what about him?"

Now the gendarme's grey eyes, with a tiny speck of light at the centre of the pupil, were turned on Yakov's face in a steady, inquiring gaze. Yakov quickly described his encounter with Noskov. Nesterenko heard him out, his eyes on the ground, crushing a pine cone into the earth with the butt of his gun. When Yakov had finished, he asked, without raising his eyes:

"Why didn't you go to the police? Such things are their affair, my dear fellow, and it was your duty to inform them."

"But I've just been telling you. He said he's here to spy on the workers. And that's your affair, nobody else's."

"Hm." The gendarme snuffed out his cigarette against the barrel of his gun. Once more turning his screwed-up eyes straight on Yakov's face, he began to speak, impressively, but not too comprehensively. Yakov, it appeared, had transgressed against the law in concealing the attempted robbery from the police; but it was too late to mend that now.

"If you'd dragged him to police headquarters right away, it would have been a clear case. And not entirely, even so. But now—how can you prove he jumped on you? His leg? Humph! You might have shot him out of fright. Accidentally. By pure carelessness."

Yakov felt that Nesterenko was dodging, twisting—trying, even, to frighten him, to divorce Yakov, or perhaps himself, from this affair. And when the gendarme spoke of the possibility of a shot being fired in fright, this suspicion was strengthened. Yakov concluded:

“He’s lying.”

“Yes, my dear fellow, that’s how it is. That fool will pay, of course, for making himself out to be some sort of secret agent. We’ll make him talk.”

Then, laying a hand on Yakov’s shoulder, the gendarme continued:

“Look here: give me your word of honour that none of this will go any further. It’s in your own interest, you see. Well, have I got your word?”

“Certainly. Of course.”

“Don’t talk to your uncle, even, or Miron Alexeyevich. Are you sure you haven’t said anything to them so far? Very well, then. Let’s leave this business to its own inherent logic—and not a word to anyone! Right? The hunter put that bullet in his own leg, and it’s got nothing to do with you.”

Yakov smiled. The man addressing him had suddenly become an entirely different person: genial, good-humoured.

“Good-bye,” he said. “And remember: your word of honour!”

Artamonov junior turned homewards, somewhat easier in his mind. That evening, his uncle suggested that he make a trip to the gubernia centre, and he readily agreed. On his return, however, eight days later, his alarms were reawakened by new tidings, heard at his uncle’s dinner table. Miron declared:

“Nesterenko turns out to be less of a loafer than I thought. He’s caught three in town, too. A schoolteacher, Modestov, and two more.”

“Any at the mill?” asked Yakov.

“At the mill? Sedov, Krikunov, Abramov, and five others, younger fellows. The arrests were made by

gendarmes from the city, but it's all Nesterenko's work, of course. So we're the gainers by his wife's illness. Yes, he's no fool. He's afraid he might be killed."

"They've stopped killing nowadays," remarked Alexei.

"Humph," Miron returned. "Oh, yes, I forgot. Another one in town. That fellow—what's his name? The hunter...."

"Noskov?" Yakov asked faintly.

"I don't know his name. He lived at the deaconess', and it was out in her bathhouse those revolutionaries staged their congresses. And at the same time, as you know, your father was amusing himself with the deaconess, in her house. Not a pleasant coincidence."

"Oh, yes," said Alexei, shaking his bald head. "But what can you do with him?"

Yakov's head was in a whirl, and he did not hear his cousin's next remark. So Noskov was arrested. Clearly, then, he was a Socialist, not a robber, and it was the workers had ordered him to kill or beat up the master. The very workers Yakov had considered the most settled, the most respectable! Sedov, always neat and clean, and no longer young; Krikunov, the jolly, polite fitter; pleasant Abramov, a good singer and an excellent worker. Who could have thought that these, too, were his enemies?

It seemed to him, also, that in the few days he had been away, the company at his uncle's had become even noisier, more fidgety than ever. Gold-toothed Doctor Yakovlev, who never spoke well of anyone or anything, observing life from a distance, mockingly, with the eyes of an outsider—doctor Yakovlev was more in the forefront than ever. There was something menacing about the very manner in which he rustled his newspaper.

"Yes," he declared, and his gold teeth flashed. "We're beginning to stir. We're waking up. People are beginning to resemble a bunch of lazy servants who have discovered that their master is suddenly, unexpectedly on his way home. They begin to rush and hurry, driven by fear of



losing their places—sweeping, dusting, trying to bring the neglected house to rights.”

“That’s ambiguous talk, doctor,” remarked Miron, making a wry face. “All this anarchism and scepticism of yours....”

But the doctor’s voice grew ever louder, his speeches ever longer, and his words sowed anxiety in Yakov’s mind. Everyone seemed to be afraid of something. They all kept predicting misfortunes, fanning one another’s fears. Indeed, they seemed to fear precisely what they themselves were doing—their own thoughts and words. This, to Yakov, signified an intensification of the universal stupidity around him; whereas his own fear was not of imaginary terrors, but of terrors all too real, so real that his skin contracted at the touch of the noose around his neck. It was invisible, this noose, but it grew ever tighter, dragging him on to some great and unavertible calamity.

His fear increased still further when, some two months later, Noskov reappeared in the town, and Abramov—thin, sallow, shaven polled—at the mill.

“Will you take the old man back?” Abramov asked, smiling; and Yakov dared not refuse.

“Well, is it bad in prison?” he asked. Abramov replied, still smiling:

“It’s terribly crowded. If the typhus didn’t help out, I don’t know where they’d put all the folks they pull in!”

“You smile,” thought Yakov, when the weaver had left. “But I know what you’re thinking.”

That same evening, Miron raised a humiliating row over Abramov, all but shouting at Yakov, and stamping his foot as though he were talking to a servant.

“Are you crazy?” he cried, and his nose flushed red with fury. “Turn him out tomorrow!”

And then, a few days later, out for his morning bathe in the Oka, Yakov had an encounter with Lieutenant Mavrin and Nesterenko, who came rowing up to the bank in a boat bristling with fishing rods. The imperturbable lieutenant nodded carelessly to Yakov, without speaking,

and rowed off again to midstream; but Nesterenko climbed out and began to undress. In a low voice, he said:

"You shouldn't have turned Abramov off. I was very sorry I couldn't warn you about it."

"That was Miron," mumbled Artamonov junior. The gendarme's breath, he noticed, was heavy with alcohol.

"Was it?" asked Nesterenko. "So it didn't depend on you?"

"No, not on me."

"It's a pity. The fellow would have been useful as bait. A decoy."

The gendarme straightened up, naked, golden yellow in the sunlight. His skin glistened like the scales of a leaping fish. Glancing at Yakov with the air of a fellow conspirator, he asked:

"Have you seen your friend yet? The hunter?"

He chuckled quietly, well satisfied with himself.

"Do you know what made him lay for you? He wanted to buy himself a gun—a double-barrelled one. It's all passions, my dear fellow, passions for this or for that, that govern people's actions. Yes, that's so. The hunter will be very useful, now that I've got a tight grip on him because of his mistake with you."

"Mistake? But you just said...."

"Mistake, sir, mistake," the gendarme repeated forcefully; and, crossing himself, he strode into the water throwing out his legs and splashing like a horse.

"The devil take you all," thought Yakov drearily.

Suddenly—like a door slammed shut in the room where noisy life had been—death came.

Yakov was awakened at night by his mother, who told him tearfully:

"Get up. Tikhon's come. Uncle Alexei is dead!"

Yakov sprang out of bed, muttering:

"It can't be! Why, he hasn't been sick!"

The father pushed in at the doorway, swaying, his breath coming heavily.

"Tikhon," he grumbled. "No good comes with Tikhon. Just like that, Yakov, eh! So suddenly...."

He was barefoot and in his nightclothes, with a dressing gown flung over his shoulders. He kept pulling at his ear, looking about him as though the room were unfamiliar, grunting over and over:

"Ugh."

"How can it be?" Yakov demanded perplexedly.

"With his sins upon him, he didn't have time to confess," said the mother, who looked like a huge sack of flour.

They set out in an open carriage, with Yakov driving. From his high seat, he watched Tikhon, on horseback, bobbing up and down ahead, while his swaying shadow on the road flattened itself to the earth, as though it were trying to burrow underground.

Olga met them in the yard, where she had been pacing back and forth between the woodshed and the gate. She had slipped a white skirt over her nightdress, and in the moonlight seemed but a transparent wisp of blue, so that it was strange to see the heavy shadow stretching from her feet over the bare cobblestones with which the yard was paved.

"And so life is done for me," she said softly. Their black dog, Kuchum, was close behind her, following her every step.

On the bench outside the kitchen window sat Miron, with hunched shoulders, holding a glowing cigarette in one hand and with the other swinging his spectacles so that the lenses flashed and the fine gold chain described a glittering arc. His nose, with the spectacles removed, seemed bigger than ever. Yakov sat down silently beside Miron, while Artamonov senior stopped in the middle of the yard, staring in at the open window like a beggar in hope of alms. Olga, her eyes turned to the sky, told Natalya, in an exalted tone:

"I don't know just when.... All at once, his dear shoulder was deathly cold, and his mouth fell open. He

didn't have a moment, my poor love, to say one last word to me. He complained, yesterday, that his heart was paining him."

She spoke very low; and her words, too, seemed to cast shadows.

Miron threw his cigarette away. Butting his head against Yakov's shoulder, he moaned softly:

"You've no idea how f-fine he was!"

"What's to be done?" returned Yakov, at a loss what else to say. Something ought to be said to his aunt as well—but what? He fell silent, his eyes on the ground, shuffling his feet under the bench.

Pyotr grunted and moved warily indoors. Yakov followed, on tiptoe. His uncle was covered with a sheet. A kerchief was tied around his head to support the jaw. Knotted at the crown, its ends protruded like a pair of horns. The sheet was pulled so taut over the big toes that, sharply outlined, they seemed trying to tear through it. The moon, a little thawed at one edge, peeped brightly in through the window. The curtain fluttered. Out in the yard, Kuchum began to howl; and, as though in response, Artamonov senior said, too loud, with a sweeping sign of the cross:

"A light life, and an easy death!"

Looking out of the window, Yakov saw Vera Popova, all in black, like a nun, pacing up and down beside his aunt. Once more Olga was telling her tale, in the same exalted tone:

"In his sleep, he passed away...."

"Stand still!" Vyalov cried softly. He was rubbing down his horse with bunches of hay, jerking his head because the animal tried to catch his ear between its lips. Joining his son at the window, Artamonov senior muttered:

"The fool, shouting like that. He hasn't got a grain of sense."

"There's no need to say anything," Yakov decided. Coming out to the porch, he stood watching the shadows

of the two women, the white and the black, sweeping the dust from the cobblestones. The stones grew steadily brighter. Natalya was whispering with Tikhon, who nodded agreement. The horse agreed, too. A coppery spot gleamed in its eye. Pyotr came out, and Natalya said to him:

"We ought to telegraph Nikita Ilyich. Tikhon knows where he is."

"Tikhon knows!" Pyotr repeated crossly. "Have it sent, Miron."

Miron got up and moved towards the door. His shoulder brushed the jamb, and he paused to stroke the wood.

"Let Ilya know, too," said Artamonov senior, as his nephew disappeared; but Miron answered, through the black hole that was the doorway:

"Ilya can't come."

"I lived thirty years with him," Olga was saying, as though herself amazed by every word. "And four years before we were married, we were friends, too. What will I do now?"

Pyotr came up close to Yakov.

"Where's Ilya?"

"I don't know."

"Is that a lie?"

"This is no time to talk about Ilya, Father."

Doctor Yakovlev came hurrying into the yard, and asked:

"In the bedroom?"

"Fool!" Yakov reflected. "You can't bring back the dead!"

He was oppressed by the impossibility of avoiding these dreary hours. Everything was so dismal, so needless: the people; their talk; the bay horse, glistening like bronze in the moonlight; the black dog, with its silent grief. His aunt Olga seemed to be boasting of how happy she had been with her husband. His mother, in a corner of the yard, was whimpering laxly, falsely. His father's eyes

stared fixedly, and his face was wooden. Everything, generally, was more dismal, more miserable than it need have been.

On the day of the funeral, when the coffin had already been lowered and the first handfuls of yellow sand cast down, Nikita appeared at the cemetery.

"Umph," thought Yakov, regarding the angular figure of the monk, who was leaning against a birch tree he himself had planted.

"You're late," said Artamonov senior, brushing away his tears, as he approached his brother. Like a turtle, the monk drew his head down to the shelter of his hump. His appearance was beggarly: the cassock faded by long exposure to the sun, the cowl—a dirty grey, like an old tin pail, the boots battered and down at heel. His puffy cheeks were grimy with dust. Staring with muddy eyes at the backs of the people around the grave, he said something inaudible to Pyotr, and his little grey beard trembled. Yakov looked stealthily around. Dozens of eyes were fixed on the monk, taking the measure of this deformed brother and uncle of a wealthy family, evidently hoping for some sort of row. The townsfolk, Yakov knew, were firmly convinced that the Artamonovs had forced the hunchback to take vows, in order to gain control of his portion of their father's business.

The fat, placid priest, Father Nikolai, in his high tenor, exhorted Olga:

"Let us not insult our God by weeping and bemoaning, for His will...."

And Olga replied, in her exalted tone:

"But I'm not crying. I'm not complaining."

Her hands were trembling. With strange, jerky movements, she fumbled for the pocket of her skirt, trying to hide away her crumpled tear-soaked handkerchief.

Tikhon Vyalov, skilfully wielding his spade, helped the sexton to fill in the grave. Miron stood by the graveside, stiff and straight, as though stupefied. The hunchbacked monk said to Natalya, softly, plaintively:

"Ah, how you've changed! Past recognition!"

And, jabbing a finger at his front hump, he added needlessly:

"Me—I can always be recognized. Who's that one—your Yakov? And the tall one over there—Alyosha's boy, Miron? So! Well, let's be going."

Yakov lingered at the cemetery. A moment before, he had caught sight of Noskov among the crowd of workers, side by side with Vaska, the lame stoker; and, passing by, the hunter had given Yakov an inquiring glance that sent the shivers down his spine. What was he thinking, what contemplating? He could certainly have no harmless thoughts about the man who had put a bullet through his leg—who might have killed him.

Tikhon came up, brushing the sand from his coat, and said:

"Just to think, how hard he tried—Alexei Ilyich. And just the same.... And Nikita Ilyich is ailing."

"There's a ..." said Yakov suddenly, and as suddenly broke off.

"What's that?"

"The workers are sorry for uncle."

"Of course."

"There's a hunter here, Noskov," Yakov began again. "I could tell you things about him...."

"Even a horse, if it dies—people are sorry," said Tikhon thoughtfully. "Alexei Ilyich lived on the run, and he died on the run—as if he bumped into something. Just the day before he died, he said to me...."

Yakov gave over, realizing that Tikhon could not grasp what he wanted to say. He had made up his mind to tell Tikhon about Noskov, simply because he had to tell somebody. The thought of Noskov oppressed him even more than the sombre funeral atmosphere. Only the day before, in town, this bowlegged creature with the wooden face of a soldier had come up to Yakov suddenly, from around a corner, pulled off his cap, and staring into it, said:

"There's a little debt coming to me. You promised me some money to take care of my leg. And besides, your uncle's died, so—something to pray for him. I've got a chance to buy a fine accordion, to play for your father on."

Yakov had stared at him, thunderstruck, without a word. Then Noskov had added insistently, admonishingly:

"And seeing as I'm working for your good, against Russia's enemies...."

"How much?" Yakov had asked.

After a pause, Noskov had replied:

"Thirty-five rubles."

Yakov had given him the money and made rapidly off, indignant and frightened, thinking, "He takes me for a fool, thinks I'm afraid of him, the scoundrel! I'll show him yet!"

And now, walking slowly homewards from the cemetery, Yakov was absorbed by the one thought: how to rid himself of this man, who was unquestionably trying to lead him, like an ox, to the slaughter.

The noisy memorial feast dragged out interminably. Growing merry, the guests made deacon Kartsev and the choir singers chant eternal memory to the deceased; and Zhiteikin got so drunk that he forgot all propriety, and, brandishing his fork, roared out:

*The fighters recall days of glory now past,  
And battlefields gory fought out to the last...*

Stepan Barsky, when his huge bulk—soft as a down pillow—was being stuffed into his carriage, declared in loud praise:

"Well, Pyotr Ilyich, you certainly loved your cousin! A feast like that won't be soon forgotten!"

Yakov heard his father, who had been drinking heavily, reply with sullen irony:

"You'll forget everything, soon enough. It won't be long before you bust."

Pyotr had invited Zhiteikin, Barsky, Voroponov, and a



few more of the leading townspeople against his nephew's will, and Miron made no effort to hide his indignation. He sat no more than half an hour at the memorial table, and then, rising, strode away stiffly as a crane. Olga slipped away quietly a short while after; and the monk, too, soon disappeared, evidently annoyed by the inquiries of the half-tipsy guests concerning his life in the monastery. Pyotr acted as though he were determined to offend everyone present, and Yakov sat at table in constant expectation of a quarrel between his father and the townspeople.

Natalya began to sulk and went home, offended because Olga accepted Popova's attentions; but Pyotr, for some reason or other, decided to spend the night in his cousin's study. All this seemed to Yakov a manifestation of absurd and needless caprice: and it still further increased his depression. He lay down on a couch, and for an hour or two tried vainly to sleep. Finally, however, he got up and went out into the yard. There, beside Tikhon, on the bench outside the kitchen window, he saw the black figure of the monk, strangely reminiscent of some broken fragment of machinery. His cowl removed, the monk looked shorter and broader, and his mouldy face was like that of a child. He had a glass in his hand, and a bottle of kvass stood on the bench beside him.

"Who's that?" he asked softly, and immediately answered his own question. "It's Yasha. Come and sit a while with the old folks, Yasha!"

Holding his glass up to the moonlight, he examined the cloudy liquid in it. The moon hid behind the belfry, bathing it in a misty, silvery glow that made it stand out strangely against the warm darkness of the night. High over the belfry hung dark clouds, like dirty patches clumsily sewed onto dark-blue velvet. The heavy-headed dog, Kuchum, Alexei's favourite, wandered mournfully about the yard, its nose to the ground. It wandered about, sniffing the cobblestones, and suddenly, raising its muzzle to the sky, whined low and questioningly.

"Hush, Kuchum," said Tikhon quietly.

The dog came up to him and thrust its thick head against his knees, whining some complaint.

"He feels it," Yakov remarked. The others did not reply. But Yakov wanted badly to talk, in order not to think.

"He understands, I say," he repeated insistently. The yard-keeper responded softly.

"Of course."

"Out in Suzdal, the monastery dog could tell thieves by their smell," the monk recalled.

"What have you been talking about?" asked Yakov. The monk drank some kvass, wiped his lips on his cassock sleeve, and mumbled toothlessly, jerkily, as though he were coming down a flight of stairs:

"Tikhon, here, was saying, folks are inclining to rebellion again. And it does look like it! Everybody seems so full of thought...."

"Worn out by all this business," put in Tikhon, toying with the dog's ears.

"Drive the dog away," Yakov demanded. "It's full of fleas."

The yard-keeper removed Kuchum's paws from his knees and gently pushed the dog away with his foot. It sat down, its tail between its legs, and barked drearily, once and again. The three men looked at it, and one of them had the thought that, possibly, Tikhon and the monk were far sorrier for the grieving dog than for its master, buried in the graveyard.

"Rebellion will come," said Yakov, peering warily into the dark corners of the yard. "Remember, Tikhon, Sedov and his friends, that got arrested?"

"Of course."

The monk pulled a little tin box out of a pocket somewhere in his cassock, took a pinch of snuff from the box, and raised it to his nose, explaining to his nephew:

"Snuff, you see. It helps my eyes. I don't see so well any more."

When he had sneezed, he went on:

"There's arrests in the villages, even."

"Spies all over," said Yakov, trying to speak naturally. "They keep an eye on everybody."

Tikhon grumbled:

"If you don't keep watch, you won't see anything."

Stumbling irresolutely, shivering with the coolness of the night, or perhaps with fear, Yakov continued, almost in a whisper:

"We've got them here, too. There's ugly talk about that hunter, Noskov. They say he informed on Sedov and those fellows in town."

"There's a fool for you," responded Tikhon, after a moment's silence. He stretched out a hand to the dog, but immediately pulled it back and let it drop on his knee. Yakov felt that he had spoken in vain, that his words had fallen into a void. Something made him warn the yard-keeper:

"Only don't you go around talking about Noskov."

"Why should I talk? He's nothing to do with me. And there's no one to talk to, anyway. Nobody puts any faith in anybody."

"Yes," said the monk. "There's little faith. After the war, I talked with some soldiers, wounded they were. And I could see, even the soldiers have no faith in war! It's iron, Yasha, iron everywhere. Machines! Machines work, machines sing, machines talk. And this iron mechanism of life calls for a new sort of people, iron people. There's very many understand that. I've met some of them. 'We'll show you softies,' they say. And there's others that resent it. When a man orders them around, well, they're used to that. But metal—that goes against them! Axes, hammers, all that sort of thing that you can lift and handle—that they're used to; but here you get a thing that weighs a ton, and yet it's like a living creature."

Tikhon grunted and, a thing that Yakov had never heard him do before, began to laugh, saying:

"The cart before the horse. Ah, the devils!"

"And many are angry," the monk continued, very low. "For three years I tramped around, everywhere, and I could see. Dreadfully angry! Only their anger is turned the wrong way—one against the other. Yet they're all to blame, for their wisdom and their foolishness alike. Priest Gleb, it was, told me that. Well said!"

"Is the priest alive?" asked Tikhon.

"There's no more priest," Nikita replied. "He's given up the priesthood. He goes around to village fairs, now, selling books."

"He was a good priest," said Tikhon. "I used to confess to him. A good priest. Only he let on to be a priest because he was poor, that's what I think. He didn't really believe in God."

"He believed in Christ. Everyone believes as he can."

"And that's where all the trouble comes from," said Tikhon firmly. Again he gave an unpleasant laugh. "That's where thinking brings you."

Artamonov senior, barefoot and in his nightclothes, appeared noiselessly on the porch, glanced up at the pale sky, and said to the three on the bench:

"I can't get to sleep. The dog bothers me. And you, too, mumbling and grumbling out here."

The dog sat in the middle of the yard, whining every now and then. Its ears were cocked, its eyes fixed on the dark hole that marked the open window, as though it were awaiting its master's call.

"You, Tikhon—you're still grinding out the same old tune," continued the elder Artamonov. "Look at him, Yakov: the man got an idea into his head, one day, and he's caught like a wolf in a trap. That's how it was with your brother, too. I suppose you know about Ilya, Nikita."

"I've heard."

"Yes. I threw him out. He jumped on the wrong horse and galloped away—where to? Of course, not many would be willing to give up wealth, the way he did, and live from hand to mouth."

"St. Alexei, the man of God—he did the same," Nikita reminded him quietly.

Artamonov senior raised a hand to his temple and stood in silence for some time. Then he moved towards the orchard, telling Yakov:

"Bring a blanket and some pillows to the summerhouse for me. I'll try to get some sleep out there."

Massive, all in white, his hair dishevelled, his face swollen and discoloured, he was almost a fearsome figure.

"You're all wrong, Nikita, about machinery," he said, stopping short halfway across the yard. "What do you know about machines? You talk about your own business—God. Machinery don't hurt...."

Tikhon put in stubbornly, rudely interrupting:

"Machinery makes life dearer, and noisier."

Artamonov senior shrugged contemptuously and walked on slowly towards the orchard. Yakov, preceding him with an armful of pillows, reflected with dreary malice:

"Blood kin. My father, and my uncle. And what good are they to me? They can't help me."

Pyotr did not invite his brother to stay with him. The monk settled down at Olga's, in the garret, promising:

"I won't stay long. I'll soon be leaving you."

He was hardly to be noticed about the house, never entering the rooms downstairs unless he was called for. He liked to work in the orchard, pruning the trees, or, crawling turtle fashion, clearing the ground of weeds. With each day his face grew more shrivelled, his body more wasted; and his voice, when he spoke, was always low, as though he were imparting some grave secret. He attended church seldom and unwillingly, pleading ill health, and spent little time in prayer at home; nor did he like to speak about God, persistently evading conversation on this subject.

Olga, as Yakov could see, made a friend of the monk, and quiet Vera Popova showed him every respect. Even Miron did not frown when his uncle talked of the places

he had seen, and the people met, in the course of his wanderings. Yet Miron, since his father's death, had become more arrogant and overbearing than ever, directing affairs at the mill as though he were the sole owner, and shouting at Yakov as he might at a clerk.

When Natalya was present, the monk would turn upon her rotund, crimson face the same kindly look he had for all; but he spoke less to Natalya than to others. Indeed, she herself was gradually forgetting the art of speech. She only breathed. Her torpid eyes were blank and glassy, their muddy depths but rarely lit by some gleam of feeling—anxiety for her husband's health, fear of Miron, or loving joy at the sight of her fat, imposing Yakov. With Tikhon, the monk seemed to have had some disagreement. They grumbled at one another, and, although they did not quarrel, looked each past the other with unseeing eyes.

To Yakov, the angular black figure of his uncle burdened life with one more shadow. The monk's very appearance aroused dismal premonitions. His dark, wasting features compelled thoughts of death. Yakov Ar-tamonov regarded all that went on at home only from one point of view: that of his cares for his own well-being; yet, while these cares were constantly multiplying, ever new worries seemed to arise at home as well. As a man experienced in the ways of love, Yakov sensed that Polina had begun to cool towards him; and his suspicions were confirmed by the conduct of the imperturbable lieutenant—Mavrin. Encountering Yakov, nowadays, the lieutenant would merely touch a careless finger to his cap, screwing up his eyes as though peering at something very small and distant. Formerly, he had been more civil, more agreeable; and at the town club, when borrowing money from Yakov for a session at cards, or requesting more time for the payment of some debt, he had often declared approvingly:

"You've got just the figure for the artillery, Ar-tamonov."

Or had made some other remark, equally pleasant, with a rough familiarity that Yakov found very flattering. This officer, resilient as india-rubber, kept the whole town agape by his contempt of cold, his strength and agility, and his—latent, but not to be doubted—reckless courage. Staring people straight in the face, with round, stony eyes, he would declare hoarsely, in the tone of one accustomed to command:

“I’m a coolheaded man, and I detest exaggeration.”

One day, quarrelling at cards with the sickly old postmaster, Dronov, whom the whole town feared for his caustic wit, Mavrin had said to him:

“I refuse to exaggerate, but you’re just an old fool!”

Suspecting a rival in Mavrin, Yakov Artamonov began to fear a clash; but it never entered his mind to yield Polina to the lieutenant. He liked the woman more and more. Still, he had already warned her repeatedly:

“Remember: if I notice any goings-on between you and Mavrin, that’s the last you see of me!”

Besides this, there was the growing alarm aroused by the hunter, Noskov. He would lie in wait for Yakov on the outskirts of the town, near the bridge across the Vataraksha, and, appearing suddenly in the road, make his demand for money—insistently, as though it were his due, never lifting his eyes from the cap he held in his hands.

There was something strange and creepy about the hunter’s appearances, always at one and the same spot, where nettles and burdock grew thick around a pair of twisted willows. There had been a house here, only two years ago, the home of market gardener Panfil; but someone had killed the gardener and set the house afire. The two willows were still charred where the flame had licked them. Lovers of skittles, coming here to play, had churned the ashes into the clayey soil, and trampled it firm. Only the stove remained intact, its chimney looming over the ruins of the brick foundation; and when the nights were clear a greenish star hung, trembling, low in

the sky above it. Noskov would come out from behind this chimney, rustling unhurriedly through the nettles, and, slowly pulling off his cap, begin to mumble:

"I'll make it worth your while. There's a new bunch getting together again at the mill."

"That's no affair of mine," Yakov would tell him angrily, only to hear the open insolence of Noskov's reply:

"Of course, it's not your doing; but it has to do with you."

"Wish I'd finished him, that night," Yakov would think regretfully, for the umpteenth time. And, giving the spy money, he would say:

"You be careful!"

"I am."

"Don't mix me up in this business."

"Why should I? Never fear."

"Yes, he certainly takes me for a fool," thought Yakov.

Realizing Noskov's usefulness, Yakov Artamonov was at the same time firmly persuaded that this flat-faced, bowlegged fellow could not but seek vengeance for the bullet in his thigh. He wanted to be revenged. He would intimidate one or another of the workers, or bribe them with the money Yakov himself kept giving him, and order them to kill. Already, it seemed to Yakov, the workers were beginning to watch him more closely, more inimically.

According to Miron—and he spoke more often in this vein—the workers revolted, not for the sake of better conditions, but because of a ridiculous, insane idea, preached at them from without: that they must take into their own hands the banks, the shops and factories, the country's entire economy. When he talked of these things, Miron would stride about the room on his long legs, very stiff and straight, twisting his neck and thrusting a finger under his collar, as though to loosen it, though his neck was thin and his collar was not tight.

"It leaves even Socialism way behind. It's—the devil knows what to call it! And one of the people who



propagate such notions is a brother of yours! Those old crows in our Cabinet....”

All this, Yakov knew, was said with the idea of convincing Miron's listeners—and Miron himself—of his right to a seat in the State Duma. Still, these wrathful tirades left an aftertaste of fear, intensifying Yakov's feeling of defenceless isolation among the hundreds of the workers. On one occasion, he even experienced what was almost a paroxysm of horror. Awakened at daybreak by shouts and screams in the mill yard, he lifted his head from the pillow and saw, on the smooth white warehouse wall, a wild, rushing crowd of shadows. Leaping, gesticulating, they seemed to be dragging the whole warehouse with them through the yard. Yakov broke out in a cold sweat, thinking—soundlessly shouting:

“Rebellion!”

The rushing shadows, more fearful, somehow, than flesh and blood, soon disappeared. All that had happened, Yakov realized, was the usual Monday morning brawl. There were almost always fights after holidays. But he could not forget the fearful haste of those dark, yelling figures. All in all, life was becoming so full of alarms that the very sight of a newspaper was repugnant, and the reading of it still worse. Simplicity, clarity were disappearing. Unpleasantness arouse on every hand. New people appeared on the scene.

Yakov's sister Tatyana suddenly brought a husband home from Vorgorod: a small, spare, redheaded fellow in an engineer's uniform cap, light and swift on his feet, and very jolly. He was two years younger than Tatyana, and, following her example, everyone soon called him simply “Mitya.” Strumming on his guitar, he would sing all sorts of ditties, one of which, repeated with particular frequency, stuck Yakov as rather insulting to Tatyana, and made Natalya very indignant.

*My wife lies in her grave.*

*Lord, save*

*A place in Heaven's conclave  
For thy poor slave.*

But Tatyana did not take offence. The man amused her, as he did everybody. Even Natalya would often say meltingly:

"Ah, you young jackanapes! Have something to eat, you rogue!"

Where eating was concerned, Mitya was not to be outdone, voracious as a pigeon. Artamonov senior watched him as though he were a dream, and asked, blinking amazedly:

"By all the signs, you must be a tippler. Do you drink?"

"I can," the son-in-law replied; and at supper demonstrated quite respectable drinking abilities. He had been everywhere: on the Volga, in the Urals, in the Crimea and the Caucasus. There was no end to his stories, drolleries, and comic exclamations. He was like a guest from some jolly land where people had no cares.

"Life is a pampered beauty!" he affirmed. From the very outset, he was caught up in the ceaseless whirl of the business. The workers liked him, the young folk laughing at his jokes and the old weavers greeting him with friendly nods. Even Miron had to lick a smile from his thin lips when Mitya launched into his laughter-studded speeches. There they were now, crossing the mill yard together to the fifth block. The fifth digit of the red brick fist that was the mill, this block was still swathed in scaffolding. Carpenters were at work on the different levels, their axes flashing silver, and the flash was returned by the glass and gold of Miron's spectacles. Miron swung up his arm, just like the doughty generals in cheap old prints. Mitya nodded, and waved his arms as though he were scattering something over the ground.

Yakov watched them through the office window. He, too, liked this new brother-in-law. Time passed lightly in his company, and oppressive thoughts could be forgotten.

Indeed, Yakov envied the man's character; yet at the same time he felt a strange mistrust—a premonition that this was but a bird of passage, that tomorrow he might declare himself an actor, or a barber, or simply disappear, as unexpectedly as he had come. Another good quality in Mitya was his evident lack of cupidity. He had not even asked the amount of Tatyana's dowry. But that, of course, might be some sly trick of Tatyana's. The father grumbled, when he was sober:

"All my work—for such a little redhead!"

Miron also married.

"Allow me to introduce my wife," he said, returning from a trip to Moscow, and presented a plump, blue-eyed, curly-headed little doll with a twisted neck. Everything about her was miniature, yet fashioned with unusual clarity of line, which to Yakov's eye made her look more like the porcelain statuette on his uncle Alexei's favourite clock than a flesh-and-blood woman. The head of this statuette had broken off, and been glued on again a little askew, so that its eyes were turned, not to the people in the room, but to the mirror by which it stood. Miron informed them that his wife's name was Anna, and that she was eighteen years old. He did not mention the fact that she was a paper manufacturer's only daughter, and had brought him a quarter of a million.

"That's the sort of wives some people find," Pyotr grumbled, turning his bloodshot eyes on Yakov. "While you mess around with the devil knows who. And Ilya swept out of account, like so much rubbish."

Pyotr walked with difficulty, weighed down by the inert, flabby bulk of his body. It seemed to Yakov that his father was angered by this bulk, and tried deliberately to flaunt before them all the oppressive ugliness of his senile flesh. He walked about in his nightclothes, in bedroom slippers on bare feet, his dressing gown unbelted and his nightshirt open, revealing his fatty chest—just as he had done during his elder daughter's visits, to mortify her. Sometimes he would come to the office and sit there

endlessly, interrupting Yakov's work with complaints of how he had sacrificed all his energies to the mill and his children—had spent all his life in harness between the stone cart shafts of the business, harassed by interminable cares, with never an hour's enjoyment.

Yakov would listen in silence. These complaints, affording the father some consolation, bloated him in the eyes of the son to the dimensions of the bell tower over the church which the sun saw at dawn long before it noticed the houses of the town, and bade farewell to the last before departing into the night. But Yakov drew one instructive conclusion from such complaints: that it would be absurd for him to spend his life in the same way as his father.

And always, Yakov saw, having sated himself with complaint, the father would be gripped by a feverish restlessness, an urge to torment people, to hurt their feelings. He would go to his old wife, who liked to sit by the window that looked out into the orchard, her useless hands lying limp on her knees, her blank eyes staring into space. Sitting down beside her, he would begin to nag:

"What are you thinking about? You're fat, but you don't show. Your children don't even notice you. Tatyana's more civil with the cook than she is with you. Elena neglects you. Why don't she come to see you, eh? She must have found herself a new lover. And Ilya—where's he?"

But there was no amusement to be gotten out of badgering his wife. Her crimson face would soon be wet with tears, that seemed to flow not only from her eyes, but from every pore of the taut skin on her cheeks—to drip from her soft double chin—to ooze from some place near her ears.

"Like a leaky barrel," the old man would mutter disgustedly, and leave her to herself, waving away the sight of her tears. It was too tedious.

He made no attempt to badger Yakov; but the son

often sensed a mortifying pity in his father's glance. Sometimes Pyotr would sigh to himself:

"Ekh, empty-eyes!"

Miron was not the one to mock at. Pyotr patently feared and avoided him. This Yakov could well understand. Everyone feared Miron, both at the mill and at home—from his mother and his porcelain wife down to little Grishka, the boy who answered the bell. When Miron walked through the yard, it was as though his long shadow hushed every living sound.

Nor could Pyotr get any pleasure out of teasing his redheaded son-in-law. Mitya poked fun at himself better than anyone else could do it, clearly determined to lash himself rather than be lashed by others. Tatyana, bloated by pregnancy, her lips set in a supercilious grimace, would lie down after dinner to read—three books at once. Then she would go out for a walk, with her husband trotting along at her side like a poodle.

Artamonov senior would order the carriage out, and drive to town to badger his brother and Tikhon. Yakov often heard him at it.

"Well, student in a cowl—lost your god, have you?" he would ask his brother.

Nikita would seem to shrink into his hump. Pressing his palms against his bony knees, he would say softly and plaintively:

"Ah, you shouldn't...."

"Why shouldn't I? You've got the wrong hat on. It's a fake hat you're wearing. All your clothes are fake. What sort of a monk are you?"

"That's my own soul's worry."

"Snuff, you take. I tell you, you lost out. You made a mistake. If you'd married some girl without money, some poor orphan, when you were young, she'd have borne you children out of gratitude, and you'd be a grandfather now, like me. But you ... remember?"

Like a huge, slow turtle, the monk would creep away; and Pyotr Artamonov would go to Olga, to tell her about

Alexei's dissipations at the fair. But this, too, failed to divert him. Since her husband's death, the little old woman had been affected by a fidgety restlessness. She was always on her feet, shifting the furniture, moving knickknacks from one place to another, glancing frequently out of the windows. She rarely turned her head, for, despite the thick spectacles on her nose, she was guided chiefly by her sense of touch, and walked with a stick, her right arm stretched out gropingly. To Pyotr's malicious tales she would reply with a smile:

"You can say what you please. No evil can stick to my Alyosha, and no good can be added."

"He was right about you—that you look at life with one eye shut."

"They're both almost blind," said Olga. "I've gotten to see so badly, I broke his favourite cup, only yesterday."

Artamonov senior tried his hand on Tikhon Vyalov; but this was no easier. Tikhon never got angry. He only grunted, and, with a sidewise glance at his assailant, replied briefly and composedly to every sally.

"You stick to life long," said Artamonov.

Tikhon replied, reasonably enough:

"Some live longer."

"Well, but what for, eh? Tell me that!"

"Everyone lives."

"That's so. But they don't all spend their lives sweeping up yards and clearing away rubbish."

Tikhon's thoughts followed their own line.

"You're born, well, and you live until you die," he went on. But Artamonov did not listen.

"You've spent all your life with a broom in your hands. No wife, no children, no cares of your own. Why? My father offered you a better place, but you wouldn't have it. What made you so stubborn?"

"It's sort of late to be asking about that, Pyotr Ilyich," said Tikhon, turning his eyes away.

Growing angry, Artamonov nagged on persistently:

"Just look—how many people have made their for-

tunes in your lifetime. Everyone seeks a better life, tries to hoard up money...."

"Hoard, and hoard, and pay the Devil board," Tikhon returned, drawing out his o's even more than usual.

Yakov thought his father would flare up and shout; but, after a short silence, the old man only mumbled something inarticulately, turned his back, and stalked away from the yard-keeper. Tikhon had faded with the years, and lost his hair, and his skin had turned the colour of loamy soil; but he was still hale and strong, withstanding all the wily attacks of age. He had even acquired a certain venerable comeliness, and his tone in speaking was ever more weighty and mentorial. To Yakov it seemed that Tikhon spoke and conducted himself more like the "master" than Pyotr.

Yakov himself, as he realized with increasing clarity, was an alien among his family, whose only agreeable member was the outsider, Mitya Longinov. Mitya did not seem to Yakov either wise or foolish. He could not be fixed within such categories. He was unlike anybody else. And his weight was confirmed by Miron's attitude towards him. Cold and domineering, ordering everyone about as he saw fit, Miron was quite friendly with Mitya. Though they often argued, they never quarrelled; and even in argument, Miron kept his tongue well in hand. From morning to night, the house resounded to urgent calls:

"Mitya!" Tatyana would cry.

"Where's Mitya?" Natalya would ask; and even Pyotr would rumble, putting his head out of the window:

"Mitya! It's time for dinner!"

Mitya trotted about the mill, light as a fox, trailing behind him a bushy tail of quips and jests that swept away the stiffness caused by Miron's cold and humiliating acerbity towards the mill employees. He addressed the workers as friends.

"Look, friend, that's all wrong," he would say to the carpenters' bearded foreman, pulling out a notebook

bound in red leather and a pencil, or sketching rapidly on the nearest board.

"See? Like that. And that. And then like that. Right?"

"Right," the foreman would agree. "We were doing it the old way, like we always used."

"No, my dear fellow, that's no good. You've got to get used to the new way. It pays better!"

Again the foreman would agree:

"That's so."

Mitya's brisk business play was reminiscent of Alexei; but he lacked Alexei's proprietorial greed. In his jolly clowning, he strongly recalled the little carpenter, Serafim. This was duly noted by Pyotr. At supper one day, when Mitya had dispersed and swept away the heavy atmosphere at table, Artamonov senior mumbled, grinning:

"We used to have another consoler, once. Serafim."

After one of the clashes which were constantly occurring between Miron and Pyotr, Yakov heard his brother-in-law saying to Miron:

"A combination of the pettily fearful and repulsive with the pitiful—pure Russian chemistry!"

To which he added consolingly:

"But it's all right. That sort of thing will soon be outlived. We're cleansing ourselves."

On a holiday evening, at tea in the orchard, Pyotr said querulously:

"I've lived my life without a holiday."

Mitya burst out, at this, in a veritable firework of spirited protest:

"That's your own mistake, nobody else's! A man makes his own holidays. Life is a pampered beauty. It demands gifts, amusements, play. Living should be enjoyed. Every day offers something to be happy about."

He talked on and on, never hesitating for words, like a tireless piper. The others fell silent. It was always so: people, listening to his talk, would fall into a sort of dream. Yakov, too, was drawn by these words, feeling that



a real truth lay behind them; yet at the same time he felt an urge to ask Mitya:

"In that case, why did you marry such a stupid, unattractive girl?"

In Mitya's relations with his wife; Yakov detected a false ring, an exaggerated politeness. His solicitude was too stressed. Tatyana, Yakov thought, also sensed this falsity. She was dreary, untalkative, irritable, and discussed politics with Miron far more often and more animatedly than with her lively husband. Politics was the only thing she knew how to talk about.

Sometimes it would occur to Yakov that Mitya Longinov had come to them, not from a jolly land where people had no cares, but from some dark pit where deadly tedium reigned—that, leaping from this pit, he had at last found new and unfamiliar people, and, in his joy at finding them, could not help but jig and clown, admire and wonder. In this wonderment, Yakov noted an element of foolishness. Mitya was like a boy, gaping with wonder in a store full of toys—but a boy who distinguished quickly and cleverly which of the toys were most worthwhile.

Of all the family and all the employees, there were two who definitely disliked Tatyana's husband: Nikita, and Tikhon Vyalov. When Yakov asked the yard-keeper what he thought of Mitya, he answered calmly:

"No good."

"What makes you think so?"

"He's like a fly. Settles on any rubbish."

Yakov questioned the old man long and persistently, but could elicit nothing more lucid than:

"You can see yourself, Yakov Petrovich. Don't you see? The man makes up all sorts of tricks."

The monk, Yakov's uncle, said almost the same.

"Raising dust," he said, with a sigh. "I've seen lots of that kind. Blathering. They mix the people up. And they're all mixed up themselves, too, all tangled up in words. Tell a fellow like that, 'Alas, no ease,' and he'll

come back at you with, 'A glass of peas.' Yes, that's the kind."

The meek cripple spoke in a vexed, almost choleric tone, entirely unlike his usual manner. This Yakov thought strange: and stranger still was the agreement between Tikhon and Nikita in their appraisal of Tatyana's husband. The two old men lived at variance, in open, if unspoken, hostility, avoiding encounters and only rarely exchanging a word or two. In this Yakov found one more manifestation of the human stupidity of which he was so weary. What differences could there be between two people, each of whom had one foot in the grave?

Uncle Nikita was dying. And Pyotr, Yakov felt, was assiduously helping the monk to his grave. At almost every encounter, he would torment his brother, crush him with reproaches:

"I've lived all my life like a beast of burden, and you live like a cat. Everyone tries to make things softer for you, and warmer. They don't even seem to notice that you're hunch-backed. And me—everyone calls me mean. What's mean about me? All my life...."

The monk would draw his head down to the shelter of his hump and plead, between coughs:

"Don't be angry."

Another thing that made life hard on Yakov was the repulsion he felt for his father, the disgust aroused by the sight of Pyotr's bare chest, like a mass of soft soap, covered with mouldy, greyish hair. This feeling was not easy to conceal, to keep within bounds. Now and again, Yakov would have to remind himself:

"He's my father. He begot me."

But this thought could not improve his father's appearance, could not drown the repugnance he inspired. On the contrary, the thought in itself was offensive, humiliating. Pyotr drove to town almost every day, as though to watch his brother die. He would climb the stairs to the garret, puffing with exertion, and, seating himself at the monk's bedside, look down at him with inflamed

and bloodshot eyes. Nikita would lie silent, coughing frequently, his eyes fixed on the ceiling in a leaden stare. His hands, grown restless, would wander up and down his cassock, brushing away something that others did not see. Sometimes, coughing until he gasped for breath, he would try to get up.

"Failing, are you?" the elder brother would ask.

Nikita would creep to the window, clutching for support at his brother's shoulders, the bedstead, the backs of the chairs. His cassock hung on his thin frame like a sail on a broken mast. Sitting down at the window, he would look out, panting, into the orchard below, or at the dark bristling forest in the distance.

"Well, rest, then," the elder brother would say, pulling at the flabby lobe of his ear. Coming downstairs, he would announce to Olga:

"He's failing. It won't be much longer."

A fat monk arrived: Father Mardari. He demanded that Nikita be sent to the monastery, some statute ordaining that he must die only there, and be buried there as well. But the hunchback persuaded Olga to refuse.

"You can send me there afterwards, when I'm dead."

And three times over, plaintively, he begged:

"Make the coffin lid high, so it won't cramp me. Please don't forget!"

He died four days before the war broke out. The day before his death, he asked them to notify the monastery.

"Let them come. By the time they get here, I'll be dead."

On the last morning, Yakov helped his father up the stairs to the garret. Pyotr crossed himself, and stood looking down at his brother's ashy-grey features, his sunken mouth and half-closed eyes. Nikita said, unnaturally loud:

"Forgive me."

"What are you saying? What's there to forgive you for?" Pyotr Artamonov mumbled.

"For my presumption...."

"You forgive me," said the elder. "I poked fun at you here, sometimes."

"God won't condemn a jest," the monk assured him, in a faint whisper. After a pause, Pyotr asked:

"How do you feel about things now? Which way...."

"Yes, I forgot," the monk said hurriedly, interrupting his brother, "Tell Tikhon, Yasha. He ought to cut down that little maple by the summerhouse. It won't grow."

Yakov could not bear the sound of his voice, unearthly clear, could not bear the sight of his gaunt, misshapen chest, protruding grotesquely, like a box turned corner up. There was nothing human left about this immobile, blackclad heap of bones—about the folded hands, holding an old-style copper cross. Yakov was sorry for his uncle, but at the same time reflected that it was a foolish custom, to have old people, and relatives generally, die where everyone could see them.

Pyotr stood there for a while, waiting for his brother to speak again. Then, taking Yakov's arm, he silently bowed his head and left the garret. Downstairs, he said:

"Nikita's dying."

"Is he?" asked Miron, who sat at the table, half concealed behind a huge newsheet. He put the question mechanically, without lifting his eyes from what he was reading. A moment later, dropping the paper onto the table, he called to his wife, at the other end of the room:

"I was right! Come and read this!"

His roly-poly wife hurried across the room to the table, and Olga, at the window, cried anxiously:

"Not really, Miron? Not really war?"

"That makes the second Artamonov," Pyotr reminded them loudly.

"It's all lies, of course," Miron said to his wife, or perhaps to Yakov, who had also bent over the paper, reading the alarming reports and trying to figure out just what he, personally, had to fear in all this. Artamonov senior waved his hand angrily and went out into the yard. The sun had made the cobblestones so hot that the

warmth reached his skin through the soft soles of his velvet boots. Through the window came Miron's dry, admonitory voice. Yakov, coming to the window with the newspaper, saw his father shake a crimson fist, as though threatening someone.

The monks came three days later, at daybreak. There were seven of them, and no two were of the same height or breadth; but to Yakov they seemed alike as new-born babes, except for one. This was the tallest and thinnest of them all, the one who strode at their head, holding up a big black cross. He had a thick beard and a loud, jolly voice, ill-fitted both to his calling and to the occasion, and he seemed to have no face at all; for his flat, fleshy nose merged with his cheeks, leaving nothing where the face should be but two dark pits between his bald crown and his beard. He lifted his feet so slowly that he looked like a blind man; and he sang in three voices:

"God most holy"—very deep, almost bass;

"Holy, mighty"—somewhat higher, approaching the tenor; and—

"Holy, immortal, have mercy upon us!"—so piercingly that the little boys in the street ran to stare at the beard that hid this amazing triple tongue.

When the funeral procession reached the square, they found it crammed with townsfolk and reservists. In the midst of the throng were Lieutenant Mavrin and his men, a few of the town's authorities, and a group of clergy. The imperturbable lieutenant stood like a monument at the head of his men, with the sun flashing on his uniform. Priests and deacons, conical in their vestments, stood stiff and motionless as graven images, their chasubles glittering, molten gold in the sunlight, throwing a yellow glow on the lieutenant. A fat officer was jumping about before the lectern, waving his cap in the air above his tinny head.

The triple-voiced monk halted before the human wall, his black cross swaying, and said in his deepest bass:

"Make way!"

The people made way, not for the monk, but for the

lanky bay horse of Ekke, the assistant ispravnik. Pressing up against the monk, Ekke turned his horse sidewise across the street, to block the way into the square, and shouted reproachfully, with a wave of his white-gloved hand:

"Where to? Can't you see? Turn back!"

The monk raised his cross and began to intone:

"God most ho-o-o-o...."

"Hurrah!" yelled the officer at the lectern; and all the people in the square yelled furiously:

"Hurra-a-ah!"

Ekke rose in his stirrups, shouting through the clamour:

"Pyotr Ilyich, if-f-f you please, take a side street! Detour! Miron Alexeyevich, have the goodness! Such enthusiasm, and you come here with.... Can't you see?"

Artamonov senior, standing at the head of the coffin, supported by his wife and Yakov, glanced up at Ekke's wooden features and said sombrely to the monks who carried the coffin:

"Turn back, fathers."

And, suppressing a sob, added:

"It looks like the last time I'll be giving orders."

The whole incident seemed to Yakov unseemly, and at the same time somewhat ridiculous. But then they turned down the little street in which Polina lived, and Polina herself appeared, dressed in white and carrying a pink parasol. Tripping up the street in the direction of the square, she crossed her rounded bosom hurriedly as she passed the funeral procession.

"Going to gape at Mavrin," Yakov concluded, stifling with dust and resentment. The monks hastened their step. The black beard sang lower, more pensively, and the choristers lapsed into silence. Outside the town, just opposite the slaughterhouse, stood a strangely-shaped cart, draped with black cloth, behind a pair of piebald horses. The coffin was placed on the cart, and the funeral services began. Down the street, from the town, came the martial

roar of a brass band playing "God Save the Tsar". The bells of three churches pealed, and over all, like smoke, rose a bellowing:

"R-r-rah!"

Yakov even thought he heard Lieutenant Mavrin commanding:

"Ten-shun!"

After the services, he had to drive back with the rest to his aunt's and sit interminably at the memorial table, listening to his father's angry grumbling:

"What idiot had the horses put opposite the slaughterhouse?"

"The police it was, the police," Mitya explained soothingly. "It's sort of awkward, don't you see? Such national enthusiasm, and—a hearse! They don't go together!"

Miron was talking to Doctor Yakovlev, who always came particularly to the fore on gloomy and unpleasant occasions. Licking a smile from his lips, Miron said:

"Well, but if we put our shoulder to it, all together, like Mitka in *The Silver Prince*.... In the final account, it's numbers that decide everything."

"Not numbers. Technical equipment," the doctor returned.

"Technical equipment? Well, that's true, but...."

It was past nine o'clock in the evening before Yakov could get away from all this tedious business and hurry to Polina's. All the way, he felt an anxiety such as had never visited him before, a premonition of extraordinary happenings. And, of course, he was right.

"Oh, my," said Polina's cook, plumping heavily onto the bench by the kitchen stove, when Yakov came in through the back door.

"Dirty pander," Yakov threw at her in passing. He stood a moment outside the door to Polina's room, listening to the soldierly footsteps and the familiar martial voice that sounded within. The voice said:

"Well, then, you've got to use your head, madame. Is

it so, or isn't it? Use your head!"

Yakov made a mental note:

"Madame, he says. Maybe nothing's happened yet."

But when he opened the door he saw at once that everything had already happened. The imperturbable lieutenant stood in the middle of the room, his hands in his pockets, his brows contracted sternly. His uniform jacket was unbuttoned, revealing his suspenders, one of which was not fastened to his trousers. Polina sat on the couch, with crossed legs, and one of her stockings hung loose, twisted around her ankle and calf. Her saucy eyes were strangely round, and her cheeks were heavily flushed.

"Well?" asked the imperturbable lieutenant; and his question at once confirmed Yakov's worst suspicions. Stepping into the room, he threw his hat onto a chair and said in a strangely altered, falsetto voice:

"I've come from the funeral... From the memorial."

"Yes?" said the lieutenant inquiringly, in the tone of one who was the master here. Polina drew at her cigarette until the tobacco began to crackle, and, exhaling the smoke, said carelessly, not guiltily:

"Ippolit Sergeyevich says I ought to join the nurses."

"Nurses? Hmm," said Yakov, with a mocking laugh. The imperturbable lieutenant took a step in his direction, demanding crisply:

"What are you laughing at? Get this straight: I don't-t like exaggeration. I won't stand for it!"

In these short moments, Yakov had been pierced by hot currents of anger and resentment, which left behind a crushing, almost grievous realization that this small woman was as necessary to him as any limb or organ of his own body; that he could not allow her to be rent away from him. With this realization, his wrath returned. A cold chill ran up his spine. He thrust his hand into his pocket.

"Don't come near me," he warned the lieutenant. His eyes were bulging painfully.

"Why not-t?" the lieutenant demanded, taking another



step towards him. Yakov had never liked the lieutenant's offensive way of doubling his consonants; and now it made him frantic. Trying to pull his hand out of his pocket, he cried:

"I'll kill you!"

Lieutenant Mavrin seized his wrist and compressed it painfully. The revolver went off dully in Yakov's pocket. Then, with a twist that seemed almost to snap his arm at the elbow, his hand was jerked out. The lieutenant took the revolver from his nerveless fingers and, throwing it into an armchair, said:

"It didn't work."

"Yasha, Yasha!" Polina was whispering loudly. "Ippolit Sergeyevich! Gentlemen! Are you mad? What are you fighting about? You'll disgrace me! What for?"

"Well, then," said the imperturbable lieutenant thunderously. Seizing Yakov's beard, he jerked it downwards, making Yakov bow, as it were, to him. "Ask—my pardon—fool!"

At every word he jerked Yakov's beard downward, and then, by a light blow on the chin, forced him to pull it up.

"Oh, for shame! Oh, oh!" whispered Polina, clutching at the lieutenant's elbow.

Yakov's right arm hung limp, but, gritting his teeth, he tried to push the lieutenant off with his left. He grunted inarticulately, and tears of humiliation ran down his cheeks.

"Keep your hands off!" the lieutenant bellowed, and thrust Yakov down into the armchair where the revolver lay. Burying his face in his hands to hide his tears, Yakov sat motionless, almost fainting. Through the ringing in his ears, he heard Polina screaming at the lieutenant:

"Oh, my God, how infamous! And you, of all people! Such a disgrace! What for?"

"Go to hell, lady," said the lieutenant metallically. "Here's a ruble for the pleasure—that's enough and plenty! I detest exaggeration, but you're just a plain, ordinary...."

The lieutenant stamped across the room and disappeared, slamming the door, leaving behind Polina's startled squeal and the light tinkle of the hanging lamp. Yakov stood up. His legs were limp and cottony, and his whole body trembled as though with cold. Polina was under the lamp, in the middle of the room, her mouth agape, gasping for breath, her eyes fixed on the filthy bill she held in her hand.

"Hussy!" said Yakov. "What did you do it for? And you always said.... I ought to kill you."

The woman glanced at him, and, throwing the money to the floor, said hoarsely, amazedly:

"Wha-at a scoundrel!"

She dropped into the armchair, clutching her head with both hands. Yakov struck her on the shoulder with his clenched fist, shouting:

"Get off! Let me get that revolver!"

She did not move. In the same amazed tone, she asked:

"So you love me?"

"I hate you!"

"It's a lie! You do love me, now!"

She sprang on him so suddenly that she had her arms around his neck before he could push her away, and, scorching his lips with savage kisses, breathing hotly into his eyes and mouth, whispered insistently:

"It's a lie! You do love me! You do! And I you! Ah, my soft little Savoury Bit!"

This was her most caressing name for him, uttered only in moments of the greatest emotion; and it invariably intoxicated Yakov, arousing him to frenzied and brutal tenderness. Even now, it had the same effect. He crushed her to him, pawing, pinching, muttering breathlessly, between kisses:

"Slut. Strumpet. When you know...."

An hour later found him sitting on the couch, rocking her on his knees, reflecting in amazement:

"How quickly it passed over!"

Lying back wearily against him, she said:

"I got angry, and I thought I'd drop you. You're busy with your family all the time, funerals and all, and I got lonely. And I didn't know for sure if you really loved me. Now you'll love me more than ever, because you'll be jealous, that's why. When you're jealous...."

"If we could go away from here," said Yakov heavily.

"Umhm. To Paris. I can talk French."

They had not lit the lamp, and the room was dark and stuffy. Out in the street, though it was late, past midnight, reservists were shouting, and women's voices responding.

"We can't go abroad now. There's war on," Yakov recalled. "A war, the devil take them all."

The woman returned to her former train of thought.

"There's no love without jealousy, except maybe dogs' love. Look at all the tragedies, all the dramas—all out of jealousy."

Yakov shuddered and said, with a short laugh:

"It was lucky the way the bullet went. It might have landed in my leg, but—look!—just a hole in my trousers."

Polina thrust her finger into the hole. Suddenly, half sobbing, she exclaimed, with hushed, but furious hatred:

"Ah, what a shame you didn't shoot him! Right in his india-rubber belly!"

"Be still!" said Yakov, shaking her roughly; but she hissed on, through clenched teeth, with unabated fury:

"The swine! How he insulted me! How you all.... You've no understanding of a woman!"

Parting her swollen lips to show her clenched fox teeth, she added:

"If a woman's unfaithful to you, that needn't mean she's stopped loving you!"

"Be still, I tell you," Yakov shouted, squeezing her until she cried out with pain.

"Ah, now I can feel you love me! Yasha, my Savoury Bit!"

Day was breaking when he left her, striding lightly down the street with the feeling of a man who has just won a valuable prize in dangerous contest. Just before he left, the hushed rejoicing that filled his heart received new stimulus. Preparing to go, he asked Polina for his revolver, which she had hidden away somewhere; and, as she refused to give it to him, he was compelled to explain that he was afraid to walk the streets without it, and to describe his encounter with Noskov. Polina's fright was very satisfying; it convinced him that she really loved him dearly. She threw up her hands, with many oh's and ah's, and cried reproachfully:

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

Then, turning it over anxiously in her mind:

"Of course, it's awfully interesting. A real detective! If you take Sherlock Holmes—did you ever read it? Only out here, I suppose, even detectives are scoundrels."

"Of course they are," Yakov agreed.

Returning the revolver, she desired to test how well it worked, and persuaded Yakov to fire a shot up the stove chimney. To do this, he had to lie down flat on the floor. She lay down beside him. He pressed the trigger, and a cloud of ashes blew out at them from the open stove. With a frightened cry, Polina scrambled away. Suddenly, pointing, she said softly:

"Look!"

In the painted wood of the floor there was a narrow hole, slanting down farther than they could see.

"Just to think it was death went through that hole," said Polina, and sighed, her fine, arched brows drawn together in a frown.

Never had she been so sweet, so much his own. Her eyes grew round with childish astonishment when he told her about Noskov, and there was no sign of anger left in her sharp, boyish little face.

"She doesn't feel guilty," Yakov thought amazedly; and the thought was pleasant.

In parting, she said, fondling his beard:

"Oh, Yasha, Yasha! So that's how it is! Serious? Oh, Lord!... But that swine!"

Clenching both hands in one round fist, she shook them indignantly, complaining:

"Good Lord! How many swine!"

But suddenly, seizing Yakov's arm, she said in a low voice, with a thoughtful frown:

"Wait! Let me think! There's a girl here in town.... Yes, of course!"

And, beaming, she made the sign of the cross over Yakov and dismissed him.

"Go, my Savoury Bit."

The morning was cool and dewy. A breeze sighed in the orchards, and the pearly green of the sky was apple-scented.

"Of course, it was just out of spite she started playing around. I'll have to marry her, just as soon as Father dies," he reflected magnanimously; and one of Serafim Consoler's jests recurred to mind:

"Any girl is like a drowning man—she catches at a straw. So, don't fail to grab her at this moment!"

The thought of the imperturbable lieutenant was disturbing. The lieutenant was no straw. He got angry, and would probably cause unpleasantness. However, he would most likely be sent off to the war. Even the thought of Noskov caused Yakov less uneasiness than usual, though, this being the hour at which the hunter most often waylaid him, he kept looking about him suspiciously, his hand in his revolver pocket, listening for the slightest sound.

But a week or two later Yakov's old fear of the hunter enveloped him once more, like acrid smoke. Out in the forest on a Sunday, examining a stretch of forest purchased for felling from Voroponov, Yakov saw the hunter pushing through the underbrush, with a sack on his back and innumerable traps hung to his belt.

"A lucky meeting for you," he said, coming up to Yakov and pulling off his cap. He wore it soldier-fashion,

Yakov had noted—tilted over his right eye; and he pulled it off by the top, instead of the peak.

Yakov made no reply to his strange greeting, which seemed to hold a note of menace. He waited, clenching his teeth and gripping the revolver in his pocket. Noskov was also silent, poking at the lining of his cap and avoiding Yakov's eyes. A minute passed.

"Well?" Artamonov demanded. Noskov raised his dog eyes and said very distinctly, smoothing down his bristly hair:

"Your sweetheart, Polina Andreyevna, I mean, is getting friendly with priest Sladkopevtsev's daughter. Tell her to drop it."

"Why should I?"

"Because."

After a pause, in which he listened to the church bells ringing in the town, the hunter added:

"That's my honest advice, because I wish you well. And you can give me...."

Looking up at the sky, he considered, and concluded:

"Thirty-five rubles."

"I ought to shoot him, the cur," thought Yakov Artamonov, counting out the bills.

The hunter took the money, swung around on his crooked legs, with a rattle of his traps, and made off into the underbrush, his cap still in his hand. Yakov, watching him, felt that this man had become even more unpleasant, more intolerable than before.

"Noskov!" he called quietly; and when the hunter stopped, half concealed by the low spruces, proposed:

"Why don't you drop this business?"

"Why should I?" Noskov demanded, thrusting his face forward. Artamonov thought he detected in the hunter's blank eyes a glint of fear, or, perhaps, of malice.

"It's dangerous," he explained.

"You've got to know how," said Noskov, and the glint in his eyes disappeared. "If you don't know how, any job is dangerous."

"As you please."

"You're talking against your own interests."

"What interest can there be in enmity?" Yakov muttered, regretting that he had said anything to the spy.

"What does he think he is? Arguing with me, the idiot!"

Mentorially, Noskov returned:

"That's a thing you can't get on without. Everyone has his own enmities, and his own needs. Good-bye!"

He turned his back on Yakov and pushed into the thick green of the spruces. Yakov listened awhile to the rustling of the prickly branches as he pushed them aside, and the crunching of dry twigs underfoot. Then he hurried to the clearing where his harnessed horse was waiting, and drove rapidly to town, to Polina's.

"The swine!" Polina cried, in almost joyous astonishment. "How'd he find out so fast that she comes to see me? Well, what do you say to that!"

"Why do you make friends with such people?" Yakov demanded crossly. But she rattled out, also crossly, twisting her gauzy yellow scarf:

"In the first place, it's for your own good! And in the second place—what am I to do? Keep cats, or dogs? Or Mavrin? I'm all alone all day, just like in prison. No one to go out walking with, even. And she's interesting. She gives me books to read, and magazines, and she's interested in politics, and tells me all about it. We went to school together, at Popova's, but then we had a quarrel."

Poking her finger at his shoulder, she talked on, more and more resentfully.

"Do you think it's easy, living this way, being a secret mistress? Sladkopevtseva says a mistress is like a pair of rubbers, only wanted when it's muddy. There! She's having an affair with that doctor of yours, and they don't make any secret of it. And you hide me away like an ulcer. You're ashamed, as if I was hunchbacked, or blind in one eye, or something. I'm no monster."

"Hold on!" said Yakov. "I'm going to marry you. I'm telling you seriously, for all you're a pig, and...."

"It's still to be settled which of us is piggier," she cried, and, giggling gleefully, repeated: "Piggier, wiggier—ah, I'm all mixed up! My Savoury Bit! My sweet unselfishness! Another man would have held his tongue. After all, that spy's useful to you."

As always, Yakov left her in an easier frame of mind. And just a week later Elagin, the small pock-marked, crook-nosed timekeeper, reported early one morning that weaver Mordvinov was in the hospital. A group of weavers had gone out fishing with a dragnet, at daybreak, and Mordvinov, trying to save the hunter, Noskov, from drowning, had almost been drowned himself. As the nasal voice droned on, Yakov stretched his legs under the desk, so as to thrust his trembling hands deeper into his pockets.

"They drowned him," he thought. But, recalling Mordvinov, a good-natured fellow with a soft, womanish face, he could not believe that this man was capable of killing.

"A lucky accident," he decided, breathing a sigh of relief. Polina, too, agreed that it was lucky.

"Of course," she said gravely, "it's better so. Because there'd have been a rumpus if he was killed any other way."

Still, she was sorry.

"It would have been more interesting to catch him, and make him confess, and then—well, hang him, or shoot him. Did you ever read...."

"Don't talk rot, Polina," put in Yakov, interrupting her regrets.

A few days passed peacefully. Yakov made a trip to Vorgorod. On his return, Miron said, with a worried frown:

"There's ugly doings at the mill again. Ekke has orders from the city to investigate the circumstances of that hunter's drowning. They've arrested Mordvinov, and Kiryakov, and that merry-andrew, stoker Krotov. And all



the rest who were out fishing that day. Mordvinov's face is all scratched up, and his ear's torn. They seem to see something political about it. Not about the ear, of course."

He was standing by the piano, balancing his pince-nez on one finger and staring with screwed-up eyes into a corner of the room. In his rumpled Swedish jacket, rust-brown trousers, and dusty, knee-high boots, he had the look of an engine driver, while his highboned, close-shaven cheeks and clipped moustache gave him a military air. His somewhat rigid features underwent very little change, no matter what he said, or in what tone.

"Idiotic times!" he said thoughtfully. "Now we've let ourselves in for another war. The same as always—we go to war to divert attention from our own stupidity; and we haven't got the sense or the power to go to war against stupidity. Yet all our problems, so far, are domestic. In a peasant country, a workers' party is dreaming of seizing power. And in that party, Ilya Artamonov, a merchant's son—a son of the class that's called upon to accomplish the great work of Europeanizing the country, industrially and technologically. Absurdity upon absurdity! Betrayal of class interests ought to be punished as a criminal offence. If you get down to it, it's the same thing as treason.... I can understand such things in an intellectual like Goritsvetov, who has no connections and no place to connect to, because he's ungifted and unfit for any sort of work, except maybe reading and talking. In general, it's my opinion that revolutionary activities, in Russia, are the only occupation for people with no gifts or abilities."

Miron talked as though he saw before him a whole roomful of listeners. He screwed his eyes tighter and tighter, until they were entirely closed. Yakov stopped listening, absorbed in his own worries: how would the investigation of Noskov's death end, and how would it affect him, Yakov Artamonov?

Miron's wife came in, big as a chest of drawers in her pregnancy. Glancing at her husband, she said tiredly:

"Go change your clothes."

Meekly enough, he fixed his pince-nez on his nose and left the room.

About a month later, all the arrested workers were released. Miron told Yakov sternly, in a tone admitting of no debate:

"Discharge them all."

Yakov had long since, by imperceptible degrees, formed the habit of obedience to Miron's peremptory orders. It was rather convenient, indeed, relieving him of responsibility for the conduct of mill affairs. This time, however, he remarked:

"The stoker ought to be kept on."

"Why?"

"He's so jolly, and he's been working with us for years. He keeps the people amused."

"Yes? Well, perhaps we'll keep him, then."

And, licking his lips, Miron added:

"Clowns can be useful. That's true."

For some time it seemed to Yakov that all, on the whole, was going well. The war had put a damper onto people, had made everyone more thoughtful, more subdued. But Yakov was accustomed to unpleasantness by now, and, feeling that his troubles were not yet over, waited in vague expectation of new blows. He had not long to wait. Nesterenko made his appearance in the town again, arm in arm with a tall lady who resembled Vera Popova. Meeting Yakov in the street, he fixed him with a penetrating stare; and when greetings were done, he asked:

"Can you come to see me, an hour from now? I'm at my father-in-law's. Only—my wife is dying, so I'll have to ask you not to ring at the front door. The bell will disturb her. Come in through the courtyard. Good-bye!"

The hour dragged out interminably. When it was over, and Artamonov sat down wearily in the book-filled room, Nesterenko said quietly, as though listening for some other sound:

"Well, our friend's been done away with. That's

certain, though it hasn't been proved. A skilful job, I must admit. Now, the thing is this: your lady love, Polina Andreyevna Nazarova, is friendly with a girl named Sladkopevtseva, who was arrested the other day in Vorgorod. Is that correct?"

"I don't know," said Yakov; and cold beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead. The gendarme raised a hand to his moustache, and, studying his fingernails, said very composedly:

"You do."

"Well, I believe she's met her."

"That's just it."

"What's he after?" Yakov wondered, looking glumly at Nesterenko's flat, drab, red-veined face—his thick nose, and his muddy eyes, that seemed to drip grim tedium and radiate the smell of liquor.

"I'm not talking to you in my official capacity, but simply as an acquaintance who wishes you well and has your business interests at heart," the husky voice continued. "You see how the thing is, my dear ... marksman!" The gendarme chuckled. After a pause, he explained:

"I say, marksman, because I know of another time when you tried firearms without much luck. Well, you see, the thing is this: Sladkopevtseva is acquainted with Nazarova, who happens to be your lady love. Now, think it over yourself. Nobody could have known about Noskov's job but yourself and me. I don't count. Noskov himself was no fool, though he was sluggish, and...."

Nesterenko sighed, and continued, his eyes on the floor under his desk:

"We're all mortal. That leaves—you."

To Yakov Artamonov, the gendarme's lips seemed to shape, not words, but nooses. Finespun, invisible nooses, that circled his neck so tight that a cold spasm seized his chest, and his heart stood still, while everything around him whirled and whined like a winter storm. But Nesterenko continued, with a slowness of speech that was clearly deliberate:

"I think, in fact I'm almost sure, that you weren't as careful as you might have been. You must have said something. Eh? Don't you remember?"

"That's not so," said Yakov faintly, hoping his voice would not betray him.

"Are you sure?" the gendarme asked, fingering the ends of his moustache.

"It's not so," Yakov repeated, shaking his head.

"Strange. Very strange. However, matters can be mended. Look: Noskov will have to be replaced by another man, who will be equally useful to you. A fellow by the name of Minayev will come around to see you. You'll hire him, I hope."

"Very well," said Yakov.

"There! That's all. The matter's ended. Only I must ask you to be careful. Not a word to any ladies. Mum! Is that clear?"

"He talks as if I was a fool boy," Yakov reflected.

Then the gendarme began to talk about the approaching autumn flight of the game, about the war, his wife's illness, and his sister, who was looking after her.

"But we have to be prepared for the worst," he concluded, and pulled the ends of his moustache up to the fat lobes of his ears. This raised his upper lip, revealing his yellow teeth.

"I must get away," thought Yakov. "He'll drag me into something. I must leave these parts."

And, returning home along the bank of the Oka, he muttered:

"The devil take you all. What use are you to me? What use?"

A light rain, harbinger of autumn, lazily sprinkled the earth, speckling the yellow river; and the air, nauseatingly warm, breathed a something that intensified Yakov Artamonov's despondency. Was it really impossible, then, to live simply, peacefully, without all these senseless and needless alarms?

But the months rolled on, like a baggage train

dragging through winter winds and snows, heavily laden with new alarms.

One of the Morozovs came back from the war—Zakhar, with a St. George cross on his chest. His hair was gone, his fire-seared scalp covered with red sores, an ear torn off; in place of his right eyebrow there was a crimson scar, and under it—a dead, squashed eye. The other eye looked out at the world with stern attention. Zakhar struck up a friendship with the lame stoker, Krotov, and this pupil of Serafim Consoler soon boasted a new song:

*Hey, rain and wind and snow and sleet,  
And I lie in the trenches,  
Like a blame fool idi-it,  
Helping out the Frenchies.*

Yakov asked Morozov:

“What’s wrong, Zakhar? Aren’t we fighting properly?”

“We’ve nothing to fight properly with,” the weaver replied. His voice was loud and rude, and his words had the same brazen ring as the stoker’s songs.

“We haven’t got a master, Yakov Petrovich,” he told the master to his face. “There’s cheats and scoundrels in charge everywhere.”

He and stoker Vaska stood out among the workers like lanterns in the darkness of an autumn night. When Tatyana’s gay husband came out in a pair of ridiculously, wide-seated trousers, the foul colour of Zakhar’s army coat, the stoker looked him up and down and sang:

*There’s a lubber’s pants, ho, ho!  
No two ways about ’em.  
Some folks want their heads to grow,  
And other folks—their bottoms!*

To Yakov’s surprise, Mitya took no offence at this scoffing, but guffawed heartily, encouraging the stoker to further liberties. The workers also laughed. And the whole mill roared, one day, when Zakhar Morozov led into the yard a woolly puppy, with its fluffy tail curled up martially

over its back. From the tip of the tail dangled a little white St. George cross fastened by a wisp of bast. This was too much for Miron, and Zakhar was arrested. The puppy remained with Tikhon Vyalov.

Cripples in army greatcoats appeared in the streets: armless, legless, battered, blind. The whole town took on the putrid colour of their uniforms. The crippled soldiers were taken out for walks by the ladies of the town, organized for this work by Vera Popova, who had grown stiff and gaunt as a broomstick. Polina, too, was recruited; but to Yakov she would cry, tossing her head protestingly:

"Oh, I can't, I just can't bear it! It's outrageous! Just think of it. Yasha: they're all so young, and strong, and all cut up and mutilated. And the way they smell! I can't bear it! Look—let's go away from here!"

"Where to?" Yakov would ask drearily. His woman, he saw, was growing more and more irritable. She smoked far too much, and her breath reeked of tobacco. All the women, generally—in the town, and particularly at the mill—were developing wicked tempers, grumbling, sneering, complaining of the high cost of living. Their husbands, whistling carelessly, demanded higher wages, at the same time putting less and less energy into their work. The sounds at the mill settlement, of an evening, were loud and ill-tempered as never before.

Among the workers moved the quiet fitter. Minayev, a swarthy, Jewish-looking man of about thirty, with a big nose. Yakov studiously avoided him, afraid to meet his brooding eyes; for the fitter stared at people, as though he had forgotten something and were trying vainly to recall it.

Pyotr drifted about the yard like a fragment of dirty wreckage, barely dragging his aching legs. On his broad shoulders hung an old travelling coat, lined with worn fox. Stopping passing workers, he would question them sternly:

"Where are you going?"

And when they had answered, he would mumble, with a hopeless wave of the hand:

"Well, go ahead. Loafers. Bed-bugs. Sucking my blood!"

His purple, bloated face quivered disgustedly, and his lower lip would not stay closed. Yakov was ashamed that anyone should see his father so. Tatyana spent all her days poring over the newspapers, and something kept her so frightened that her ears were always flushed. Miron swooped back and forth as though on wings, to the gubernia centre, to Moscow, to St. Petersburg. Returning home, he would pace up and down in his broad-heeled American shoes and talk with malicious glee about a drunken, dissolute peasant who clung like a leech to the tsar.

"I don't believe there's really any such peasant," Olga, half-blind now, put in stubbornly from the sofa where she sat beside her daughter-in-law, with her two-year-old grandson, Platon, playing and crowing near her. "It's all made up, on purpose, as a lesson."

"Wonderful!" cried Tatyana's merry husband. "Magnificent! The countryside avenges itself! Eh?"

Rapturously, he rubbed together his plump little hands, overgrown with reddish wool. He alone, of them all, lived in confident expectation of some impending joy.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Tatyana vexedly. "I can't see what you're so pleased about!"

Gaping at her in amazement, Mitya croaked:

"Wha-at? You can't see? Why, can't you understand—the countryside is avenging itself for all it's had to endure! It's developed a destructive poison, in the shape of this one peasant...."

"Hold on!" Miron put in, scowling. "Not so long ago, you sang a different tune."

But Mitya continued, almost frenziedly, pouring out his words in a breathless, emotional whisper:

"A symbol—that's what he is, not just a peasant! Three years ago they celebrated the tercentenary of their rule, and now...."

"Rubbish," Miron said brusquely. Doctor Yakovlev

chuckled, as usual. And Yakov Artamonov reflected that, should this sort of talk become known to the gendarme, Nesterenko....

"Why do you say such things?" he asked. "What's the good of it?"

And again he urged them:

"Drop it!"

Even Miron, Yakov noted—and this worried him more than anything else—was nervous and preoccupied to an extraordinary degree. In the final account, of all the people with whom Yakov came into contact, only Mitya remained unchanged, spinning about like a top as always, spattering jokes, and, of an evening, singing, with twanging guitar:

*My wife lies in her grave....*

But his songs no longer amused Tatyana.

"Ugh! You make me sick!" she would say, and leave the room to spend the evening with her children.

Mitya was very clever about keeping the workers satisfied. He advised Miron to buy up flour, cereals, dried peas, and potatoes in the rural districts, where food was cheaper, and sell them to the mill employees at cost. This pleased the workers, and Yakov saw that they put more faith in this merry fellow than in Miron. Further, Yakov noticed that Miron had begun to quarrel with Mitya more and more frequently.

"What are you trying to do—veer with the wind?" Miron would demand crisply, making no effort to hide his malice; but Mitya would respond, smiling:

"The people's will.... The people's rights...."

"Where do you stand? That's what I want to know," Miron would shout.

"That's enough noise," Artamonov senior would grumble; but Yakov would note a glint of pleasure in his father's dulling eyes. The old man liked to see his nephew and son-in-law quarrelling. He chuckled at Tatyana's



shrill, peevish reproaches, chuckled when Natalya asked timidly:

"Pour me another cup, Tanya, please."

Every new development brought new elements of alarm. Each event seemed to spring up of itself, somehow, altogether unconnected with what had gone before. All at once Olga, who had gone entirely blind, caught cold, and, two days later, died. And a few days after her death, town and mill were shaken as by a thunderbolt: the tsar's abdication.

"What now? A republic?" Yakov asked his cousin, who was studying the newspaper in high elation.

"A republic, of course!" Miron replied. He was leaning over his desk, his hands pressed down upon the open newspaper: and suddenly, under his weight, the paper snapped in two. To Yakov, this seemed an evil portent. But Miron straightened up, his face transfigured, and said in a strangely altered voice, very loud, but amicable:

"Renewal, recovery—that's what's beginning for Russia, man!"

He spread his arms, as though to embrace Yakov, but immediately dropped one back to his side, and raised the other to adjust his pince-nez. Then, stretching out his hand again, so that he looked like a semaphore, he announced that he would leave for Moscow the very next evening.

Mitya, too, gesticulated like an excited cab-driver, shouting:

"Now everything will be fine. Now, at last, the people will give utterance to the mighty sentiments that have been pent up so long in their hearts!"

Miron no longer argued with Mitya, only smiling thoughtfully and licking his thin lips. And Yakov saw that, indeed, everything was fine, and everybody was pleased. When the workers gathered in the yard, and Mitya informed them from the porch of what was going on in St. Petersburg, they all cheered, and, dragging him off the porch, began to toss him in the air. Mitya curled himself

up into a ball, and flew very high; whereas Miron, when he, too, was tossed up, seemed to break to bits in the air, his arms and legs flying wildly. The older workers crowded around Mitya, and Gerasim Voinov, a huge, sinewy weaver, shouted:

"You're a comfortable fellow, Mitri Pavlovich, comfortable—see? Hurrah for Mitri Pavlovich, fellows!"

They cheered loudly, and stoker Vaska, his baldish crown gleaming, began to jig, roaring as though he were drunk:

*Hey, the people were down below,  
And the tsar's throne was high!  
When they climbed up, they found on the throne  
A silly magpie!*

"More, Vaska!" the workers yelled.

They wanted to toss up Yakov also, but he ran away and hid in the house; for he was quite sure that, once he flew up, the workers would drop their arms and let him fall to the ground. Towards evening, sitting in the office, he heard Tikhon Vyalov's voice just outside the window, saying:

"What do you want with the pup? Sell him to me. I'll make a good dog out of him."

"Ah, is this a time for training dogs, old man?" returned the voice of Zakhar Morozov.

"Well, then, what will you do with it? Here—take a ruble, and make it a deal."

"Drop it."

Yakov put his head out of the window, and said:

"Such news—eh? Tikhon?"

"Umhm," the old man answered, and, glancing around the corner of the house, whistled softly.

"The tsar—so they've downed him!"

Tikhon bent to pull his boot top straight. To the ground, he said:

"The storm's broken. Like Antonushka used to say: the wagon lost a wheel!"

Straightening up, he made off around the corner of the house, calling quietly:

"Tulun, Tulun."

Gay and boisterous, the weeks sped by. Miron, Tatyana, the doctor—all the people Yakov encountered—were pleasanter, more friendly with one another. Some strangers arrived from the city and took fitter Minayev away with them. Spring came, hot and sunny.

"Listen here, Savoury Bit," Polina said. "Say what you please. I can't understand it. The tsar refuses to rule, and all the soldiers are crippled or killed, and the police disbanded, and some sort of plain civilians running everything. How are we going to live? Every scoundrel can do anything he pleases, and now Zhiteikin won't give me any peace, I can tell you that. And all the others that were after me, and got turned down. I can't stay here any longer, with everything gone topsy-turvy. I won't. I have to live somewhere where nobody knows me. And besides, once it's been done—the revolution, and freedom, why, of course, it's so that everyone can be able to live as he pleases!"

Polina spoke of this more and more urgently, more and more loquaciously; and Yakov, sensing an incontestable logic in her arguments, would answer soothingly:

"Wait another while, till things quiet down, and then...."

But he no longer believed that the agitation surrounding him would ever settle. Day after day, as he could see, the clamour at the mill was growing louder, more menacing. A man to whom fear has become customary will always find cause for it; and Yakov began to fear Zakhar Morozov's roasted skull. Zakhar bore himself like an acknowledged sovereign. The workers flocked after him as ewes follow the sheep dog, and Mitya fluttered around him like a tame magpie. Indeed, Zakhar had acquired a certain resemblance to a big dog trained to walk upright; for, his burnt scalp evidently bothering him, he would sometimes wrap his head, turbanlike, in a Turkish

bathtowel of Tatyana's that Mitya had given him, and this huge headdress seemed to press down upon his shoulders, making his figure squatter. He strutted pompously, like fat Ekke, the assistant ispravnik, with his thumbs stuck under the belt of his shabby army trousers, flipping his free fingers up and down as a fish waves its fins, and shouting every now and then:

"Order, comrades!"

He sat in judgment over three young fellows who had been caught stealing linen. In a voice that rang through the whole mill yard, he demanded of the thieves:

"Do you know who you're stealing from?"

And himself replied:

"From yourselves, and all of us! You can't steal now, you sons of bitches!"

He ordered the culprits whipped, and two of the workers gladly set upon them with willow switches, while stoker Vaska sang crazily, jigging:

*See how vermin parasites get lashed today!*

*What fair judgment is dealt out today!*

The song broke off. The stoker muttered something to himself, shrugging, then shouted suddenly:

*Save thy people, oh Lord!*

And Mitya yelled:

"Bravo!"

He ran about, a little man in grey trousers, his leather cap pushed far back on his head, with beads of perspiration on his red-whiskered face, and a greenish, tipsy joy shining from his eyes. The night before, he had had a bad quarrel with his wife. Yakov had heard loud whispers floating from their window out into the orchard, and then Tatyana's voice had cried in unrestrained fury:

"You're a clown! You have no honour! Your convictions? Beggars have no convictions. It's all lies! A month ago, those convictions of yours.... I've had enough! I'm

going to the city tomorrow, to stay with my sister. Yes, the children go with me."

This caused Yakov no surprise. He had long since noted that redheaded Mitya was becoming a more and more objectionable character. What did surprise Yakov, and even made him rather proud, was the fact that he had been the first to detect the redhead's unreliability. And now even Natalya, who only recently had shown for Mitya the same sentimental fondness that she lavished on the roosters in the barnyard, grumbled:

"What's come over him, arguing all the time, just like a sheeny! There's gratitude!"

Mitya would cry:

"Everything is wonderful! Life is a beauty, a beauty with brains! But it's time we forgot the fairy tales about the wolves and the sheep living in peace. The time for that has passed, Tatyana Petrovna!"

Miron would demand, with cold malice:

"And what will you say tomorrow?"

"Whatever life prompts! That's what! Well, what more?"

Miron and Tatyana skirted him as gingerly as though he were smeared with soot. A few days later, he went away to the city, with all his belongings: three big piles of books and a wicker box of clothes.

Everywhere, Yakov observed a bustling confusion, as at a conflagration. All the people around him were smouldering, giving off smoke that was obvious foolishness. And there was nothing to indicate that these insane times would soon be ended.

"Well," he told Polina, "I've made up my mind. We're leaving! We'll go to Moscow, first, and then we'll see."

"At last!" the woman cried joyfully, and, throwing her arms around him, kissed him warmly.

The July evening spread in reddish twilight over the orchard, breathing into the windows the heavy odours of rain-wet, sunwarmed soil. A pleasant evening, but full of mournful thoughts.

Yakov lifted Polina's hot, damp hands from his shoulders, saying absently:

"Get into something. Button up. We've got to talk this over seriously."

Slipping from his knees, she darted to the bed and got into a wrapper. Then, with a businesslike air, she sat down beside him.

"You see," Yakov began, rubbing his beard against his cheek until the hair squeaked. "We've got to find some place, some country, where things are quiet. Where there's nothing you have to try to understand, and no need to worry your head over other people's business. That's what we want."

"Of course," said Polina.

"We'll have to watch our step all the time. Miron says the trains are packed with runaway soldiers. We'll have to act poor."

"Only be sure you take plenty of money along."

"Yes, of course. I won't let my folks know where I'm going. I'll say it's just a trip to Vorganod—see?"

"Why make a secret of it?" Polina asked, surprised and suspicious.

He did not know why. The idea had only just arisen. But he felt that it was a good idea.

"Well, my father, you know, and Miron. They'll ask questions. There's no good in that. There's money in Moscow. I can get plenty of good money there."

"Make it soon, though," Polina pleaded. "You can see yourself. We can't live here. Everything's so dear, and you can't get a thing. And there's sure to be looting, because life is getting so hard."

Glancing over her shoulder at the door, she whispered:

"Take my cook, for instance. She used to be so nice, and now she snaps at me, and she always looks drunk. She might murder me some night. Why not, when everything's in such a muddle? Yesterday I heard her whispering with someone. 'Good Lord!' I thought. 'Now it's coming!' But I

opened the door, just a crack, as quiet as I could, and she was down on her knees, snarling! It's simply ghastly!"

"Hold on," Yakov put in, hushing her swift, nervous whisper. "I'll leave first...."

"No," she said, very loud, bringing her fist down on her knee. "Me first! You'll give me the money, and...."

"Don't you trust me, then?" he asked, insulted and angry; and received the firm reply:

"No. I don't. I'm frank. I tell you straight: no! How can a person trust anyone, when everyone's betrayed the tsar, and everything on earth? Do *you* trust anyone?"

Her argument was convincing; and still more convincing was her bosom, half revealed by the loose folds of her wrapper. Yakov Artamonov yielded. It was decided that she begin packing the very next day, and set out for Vorogod, where she would await his arrival.

Next morning, Yakov complained at home of headache and pains in his stomach—plausibly enough, as he had lost much weight in the last few months, and grown sluggish and absent-minded, with a dull film over his rainbow eyes. Eight days later, he set out for the railway station, driving slowly along the edge of the neglected highway. Displaced cobblestones lay here and there, among deep pits full of humped-up mud, dried and cracked by the heat. Behind him lay a similarly shattered and uprooted life; ahead, a dull sun peered blindly down from the soft depths of a pit among the smoky clouds.

A month later, Miron Artamonov, returning from a trip to Moscow, stopped in to see Tatyana. Bowing his head and, seemingly studying the palm of his hand, he said:

"I have a rather sad piece of news for you. The wench Yakov lived with came to see me in Moscow, and said some persons on the train—you know the sort of people there are these days!—beat Yakov up and threw him out of the car...."

"No!" Tatyana cried, making an effort to get up from her chair.

"While the train was moving. He died two days later, and she buried him in a village cemetery near Petushki station."

Tatyana pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. Her thin shoulders heaved, and her black dress seemed to stream floorwards, as though this skinny, long-necked woman had begun to melt.

Miron adjusted his pince-nez, cracked his knuckles, rubbed his hands together, listened a while to a solitary church bell, sounding the call to evening services, and finally said, pacing up and down the room:

"What's the sense of crying? Between you and me, he was no good for anything. And stupid to the point of indecency, if you'll forgive my saying so. It's a shame, of course. That's true."

"Good Lord!" said Tatyana, blinking. Her eyelids were red with crying. Wetting the tip of a finger with her tongue, she smoothed her eyebrows.

"That enterprising wench," Miron went on, thrusting his hands into his pockets, "tried most unconvincingly to pose as an inconsolable widow. But she was so dressed up that it's quite clear she fleeced Yakov thoroughly. She says she wrote to the family."

Tatyana shook her head.

"So she didn't? Just as I thought. I don't think your father and mother ought to be told what's happened. Let them think Yakov's alive somewhere. Right?"

"Yes, that will be best," Tatyana agreed.

"True, Uncle Pyotr seems in no state to understand anything. But your mother would drown herself in tears."

Tatyana said, shaking her head:

"We'll all be done for pretty soon."

"Possibly, if we stay here. But I'm sending my wife and the children away right off, and I advise you to get out too, before Zakhar Morozov.... So we won't tell the old people anything. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll be getting home. My wife isn't well."



Extending his long arm, he shook her hand. As he left, he added:

"Travelling is terribly difficult nowadays. The roads are in a frightful state."

Artamonov senior lived in a state of semi-stupor, sinking gradually into heavier and heavier slumber. He spent the night and most of the day in bed, and the remaining hours in his armchair by the window. Outside the window stretched a blue void, dimmed now and then by clouds. Then the glass would mirror a fat old man with a sullen face, his eyes swollen, his beard matted and grey. Examining his reflection, Artamonov would mutter to himself:

"What a gnat!"

His wife would come and bend over him, trying to jog him awake, whimpering:

"You need to go away somewhere. You need treatment."

"Get out," Artamonov would tell her languidly. "Get out, nag. I'm sick of you. Let me be."

And, left to himself, he would sit listening. People were clamouring festively, in the yard, in the orchard, everywhere; but the mill—the mill was silent.

The accustomed companion within him, the disillusioned being whose prickly thoughts had been wont to enliven Artamonov, was gone, dead. And a good thing. The old man found thinking difficult. He had lost all desire for it. More, as he had long since realized, thinking was useless, because, think as you might, you could not understand a thing. Where had everyone disappeared to—Yakov, Tatyana, Mitya?

Sometimes he would ask his wife:

"Is Ilya back?"

"No."

"Not yet?"

"Not yet."

"Yakov?"

"Yakov neither."

"So. They're taking life easy. And Miron sucks the business like a leech."

"Don't think about that," Natalya would advise.

"Go away."

She would move away and sit down in the corner, turning dull eyes on this one-time man with whom she had spent all the years of her life. Her head was unsteady, her hands clumsy as though out of joint. She had grown thin, melted away like a tallow candle.

Now and then, and with increasing frequency, Pyotr Artamonov would be awakened by an incomprehensible bustle in the house, by the presence of strangers in his room. He would stare at them, trying to make sense of their loud ravings, while his wife wailed:

"Good Lord, what are you doing? Why? He's the master, I tell you. We're the masters! Let me take him away, then. He needs treatment. He needs to be in the city. Let me take him away."

"She wants to hide me. What for?" Artamonov wondered. "The fool. All her life, a fool. Yakov takes after her. All of them do. But Ilya—he takes after me. Wait till he comes home. He'll put things straight."

Rains, and then snow, and biting frost, and whistling storm.

Artamonov was jerked out of this semi-consciousness by an acute sensation of hunger. He found himself out in the orchard, in the summerhouse. Through the glassed wall opposite him, and the wet branches brushing against it, the sky gleamed red and strangely near. It seemed to hang just beyond the trees, within arm's reach.

"I'm hungry," he said. There was no reply.

A damp, bluish murk hung over the orchard. There were two horses standing in front of the summerhouse, resting their heads on one another's necks. One was grey, the other some dark colour. On the bench nearby sat a man in a white shirt, putting in order a big coil of rope.

"Natalya! Don't you hear? Give me something to eat."

His wife had always come at his first call, whenever he

awakened from his stupor. She had always been near at hand. Yet now, she was not there.

"Can she be..." he wondered; and his head grew clearer. "Or maybe she's sick."

He raised his head. Through the bushes, something glittered near the door of the bathhouse. Then he saw that it was a rifle, with a bayonet at its muzzle, slung on the back of a greenish soldier whose figure was hidden by the bushes. Someone shouted, in the yard:

"What's this, comrades? Is that a way to treat horses? Pigs are treated better! And why's the hay left outside to get wet? Are you out to land in the bathhouse under lock and key?"

The man in the white shirt dropped his rope to the ground and got up, remarking guardedly to the soldier:

"He thinks he's it, the devil take him!"

"There's more commanders now than there used to be," the soldier responded.

"Who on earth appoints 'em all, the devils?"

"They appoint themselves. Everything gets done by itself, these days, my boy. Like in old wives' tales."

The man walked up to the horses and took them by their manes. Artamonov senior shouted, as loudly as he was able:

"Hey, there! Call my wife!"

"Shut up, old man," the answer came. "Humph! His wife, he wants!"

The horses were led away. Artamonov passed a hand over his face and beard, felt his ear with icy fingers, and looked about him. He was lying by the windowless back wall of the summerhouse, under a painted apple tree on which the red fruit hung in clusters, like rowan berries. He was lying on something hard and stiff. His shabby fox-lined coat was spread over him, and he had a warm winter jacket on, yet he was not hot. He could not understand why he should be out here. Perhaps the house was being cleaned, for some holiday? What holiday? Why were there horses in the orchard, and a soldier by

the bathhouse? And who was that yelling in the yard? "I tell you, comrade, you're just a brainless cub! What? The men are tired? It's too early to be tired! Don't play the fool!"

Though the shouting was distant, it deafened him, made his head hum. And his legs seemed to be gone. From the knees down, they refused to move. The apple tree on the wall had been painted by Ivan Lukin. A thief, he was. Later on, he had robbed a church, and died in prison.

Someone entered the summerhouse, a broad figure in a shaggy hat, bringing in a cold shadow and a strong smell of tar.

"Who's that—Tikhon?"

"Who else?"

Tikhon's gruff reply was also deafening. The old yard-keeper swung his arms as though he were swimming across the creaky floor.

"Who's yelling out there?"

"Zakhar Morozov."

"And what's that soldier doing here?"

"There's a war on."

After a silence, Artamonov asked:

"Did the enemy get all the way out here?"

"This is a war against you, Pyotr Ilyich."

The employer said sternly:

"No jokes with me, you old fool. I'm no comrade of yours."

To which he received the calm reply:

"It's the last war. They don't want any more. And everyone's comrades, now. And for a fool, I am sort of old—that's true."

Clearly, Tikhon was mocking. Now he sat down unceremoniously at his employer's feet, without taking off his hat. A hoarse voice commanded, out in the yard:

"And remember: no civilians in the streets after eight o'clock!"

"Where's my wife?" Artamonov asked.

"She's gone foraging for bread."

"What do you mean—foraging?"

"What I say. Bread isn't stones. It don't lie around loose."

The blue darkness in the orchard was thickening. The soldier by the bathhouse yawned loudly. He could no longer be distinguished; only his bayonet glittered, like a fish in water. There were many questions Artamonov would have liked to ask; but he held his tongue. There was nothing sensible to be gotten out of Tikhon. And in any case, the questions kept skipping about in his brain, getting all tangled up, so that he could not tell which were most important. And he was very hungry.

Tikhon grumbled:

"I may be a fool, but I was the first to see the truth. See what a turn life's taken. I always said: hard labour for you all! And it's come. They flipped you out like dust, like so much shavings. That's how it is, Pyotr Ilyich. Yes, the devil whittled, and you whetted his knife. What for? You sinned, and sinned—there's no counting the sins! I watched it all, and wondered. When would it end? And now your end has come. You're being paid back in lead. The wagon lost a wheel!"

"He's raving," Artamonov decided. Still, he asked:

"Why am I out here?"

"They've turned you out of the house."

"Miron?"

"Everybody."

"What about Yakov?"

"He's been gone long since."

"Where's Ilya?"

"With the new power, they say. That must be why you're alive at all—because he's with them. Otherwise...."

"He's raving." Artamonov was sure of that now, and fell silent, musing: "Off his rocker in his old age. That was only to be expected."

Small, lacklustre stars appeared in the sky. The stars had never looked like that before, that Pyotr could

remember. Nor had there ever been so many of them.

Tikhon took his hat off, and, twisting it in his hands, resumed his grumbling:

"It's coming back on you, all that sly foolishness of yours. Beggars have it easier."

And suddenly, in an entirely different tone, he asked:

"Do you remember that boy? The clerk's youngster?"

"Well? What about him?"

Pyotr Artamonov did not know whether he was frightened or merely surprised by this unexpected question. But he knew well enough a moment later, when Tikhon said:

"You killed him, like Zakhar killed his puppy. What did you kill him for?"

Now Artamonov understood. Tikhon had informed on him, after all these years, and now, sick as he was, he was under arrest. But this did not particularly alarm him. Rather, it exasperated him, by its inhuman stupidity. Propping himself on his elbows, he lifted his head and began to speak, quietly, with a mixture of reproach and mockery. There was a dryness in his mouth, and a bitter taste on his tongue.

"That's a lie! And besides, there's a statute of limitations for any misdemeanor. The time limit's long past. You've missed out, yes, and gone off your head, besides. You forget what you saw, what you said yourself that day...."

"Well, what did I say?" the old man put in. "I didn't see you do it, that's so; but I understood. I said what I did to see how you'd act. I lied, and you were only too pleased—grabbed at the lie with both hands! I've watched and watched—waited and waited.... And you're all of you the same. Alexei Ilyich made his drunken father-in-law set fire to Barsky's tavern. And your father guessed who was behind it, so he made sure the drunkard got beaten to death. Nikita Ilyich knew. He had brains, too, and understood everything. He might have held his tongue, only he got so angry at you, he told me about it. I said to

him, 'You're a monk. You ought to forget such things. But me—I'll remember!' You made him afraid, the sort of things you did. Drove him to the noose, and then to the monastery—to pray for you! He was afraid, even, to pray for you. He didn't dare! And on account of that he lost his faith in God...."

It seemed as though Tikhon would talk till the doomsday. He spoke quietly, thoughtfully, with no apparent malice. In the thick, hot murk of the advancing evening, his figure was almost undistinguishable. His husky words, like black cockroaches rustling by night, caused Artamonov no fear. But their weight bore him down; their unexpectedness dumbed him. He grew more and more certain that this incomprehensible man had lost his reason. Tikhon drew a long breath, like one who has thrown a heavy burden from his shoulders, and talked on, in the same monotonous drone, digging up things past and gone, things better forgotten.

"My faith, too, you killed—you Artamonovs. Nikita Ilyich killed my faith, all on account of you. He lost his, and killed mine. You have no God. No, nor any Devil. The icons in your house are just to fool the world. What do you believe in? It's past understanding. Do you believe in anything? Frauds. Your whole lives were false. Now it's all uncovered. They've pulled the mask off you...."

Overcoming the resistance of his body, Artamonov swung down his fearfully heavy legs. But the soles of his feet did not feel the contact of the floor, and it seemed to him that his legs had broken away, had left him hanging in mid-air. Frightened, he clutched at Tikhon's shoulder.

"Where to?" the yard-keeper demanded, roughly shaking him off. "Don't you touch me. You can't strangle me—you haven't got the strength. Your father, he was strong, but he wasted his strength on bragging. You killed my faith, I say. And now I'm afraid to die. All from watching your tricks, you devils."

Artamonov was growing steadily hungrier; and he was very much alarmed by the state of his legs.

"Can I be dying? I'm not even seventy-five. Good God...."

He tried to lie down again, but could not lift his legs. Then he told Tikhon:

"Help me. Lift up my legs."

Tikhon lifted the dead legs of his one-time employer onto the bench, spat, and sat down again, bending over his hat. Something glittered in his hand. Peering intently, Artamonov saw that it was a needle. Tikhon was sewing something up in his hat, in this darkness—thus confirming his insanity. A grey moth fluttered over his head. Out in the orchard, three strips of yellow light appeared. A voice, distant but clear, said:

"There's no turning back for us, comrades, and there never will be."

Tikhon drowned it out.

"Your father, too. He killed my brother."

"That's a lie," said Artamonov mechanically—but immediately asked: "When?"

"Then."

"Why do you lie and lie, you insane fool?" cried Artamonov, in sudden indignation. Hunger was gnawing at him, draining his strength. "What are you after? Are you my conscience? My judge? Why didn't you say anything, these thirty years and more?"

"Because I didn't. I was thinking."

"Pilling up spite? Ekh.... Well, go on—inform the police."

"There is no police."

"Tell them: 'Look at this man. All my life, he fed and clothed me. Sentence him!' Ah, but you've informed already, haven't you? What are you after, I want to know. Threaten me, why don't you? Squeeze money out of me."

"You haven't got any money. You haven't got anything, nor ever did have. Judges? What do I care for your judges? I'm my own judge."

"Well, then, what are you threatening me with, you raving idiot?"



But Tikhon, Artamonov vaguely sensed, was not threatening at all. Tikhon grumbled:

"The end has come for all the sons of Cain. Why did they kill my brother?"

"It's a lie about your brother!"

The old men were talking faster now, interrupting one another.

"A lie? I was with him that night."

"With whom?"

"My brother. I ran away when your father killed him. That was his blood your father bled with, when he died. What did he need to spill blood for?"

"You're too late."

"Well, and now they've downed you, thrown you out. Nobody left to defend you. And I stand aside and watch, the same as ever."

"As crazy as ever."

Artamonov felt that the former ditch digger was driving him into a corner, into a pit, where all was obscure, incomprehensible, appalling. He repeated again and again:

"You're too late. It's a lie. You never had any brother. Your kind never has anything."

"We have conscience."

"You muddled my son for me, Ilya. You made his go wrong."

"It was you muddled me, you Artamonovs. Nikita Ilyich and his talk...."

"He said it was you started him that way."

"How many times I thought I'd kill your father! I almost swung my spade down on his head.... You're foxy."

"Yourself, you...."

"Serafim, you had to have. He mixed me up too. He never hurt anyone, but he didn't live right. How is that? Foxy tricks everywhere you turn."

"Who goes? Where to?" cried a loud, angry voice in the darkness. "How many times do you skunks have to be told? No gallivanting after eight!"

Tikhon got up, went to the door, and seemed to fall out into the darkness. Artamonov, crushed by excitement, hunger, fatigue, saw something black and broad cut across the three strips of greasy light in the orchard. He closed his eyes, in expectation of something still more fearful.

"Did you get anything?" Tikhon asked somebody.

"This. That's all."

His wife's voice. Where had she been? Why had she left him alone with this old man?

Artamonov opened his eyes, and, propping himself on his elbows, peered at the doorway, now plugged by two black figures. Suddenly he recalled how, all his life, he had puzzled over the problem: who was to blame? By whose fault had his life been so unbearably messed up, so saturated with disappointment and deceit? Now it was all clear.

His wife came up and, bending over him, whispered:

"Well, thank the good Lord...."

"There, Tikhon—she's the one to blame!" said Artamonov firmly, breathing a sigh of relief. "She was greedy, and she drove me. That's how it was!"

And, triumphantly, he growled:

"Nikita, too—it was all on account of her. You know yourself."

Artamonov gasped for breath. Strange: his wife did not get angry, or frightened. She did not begin to cry. Stroking his hair with an unsteady hand, she whispered, anxiously but caressingly:

"Shh. Don't make any noise. They're all so cross, out there."

"Give me something to eat."

She thrust into his hand a dill pickle and a soggy hunk of bread. The pickle was warm, and the bread stuck to his fingers like raw dough.

Artamonov cried out in amazement:

"What's this? This—for me? And that's all?"

"Quiet, in Christ's name," Natalya whispered. "There isn't anything. And the soldiers, too...."

"Is this what you give me, for all that's past? For all my fears, and all my life?"

Mumbling, he weighed the bread in his hand. He realized dimly that something had happened, something intolerable, some mortal insult. And for this even she, Natalya, was not to blame.

He threw the bread towards the door, saying dully, but determinedly:

"I won't have it."

Tikhon picked up the bread, and blew at it. Natalya tried once more to thrust it into her husband's hand, whispering:

"Eat. Don't be angry."

Pushing her hand away, Artamonov closed his eyes tight and repeated, with bitter fury:

"I won't have it. Get away."

## Notes \*

The story was first printed as a separate book at Kniga Publishers in 1925. However, the idea for it had been conceived by the author as early as the beginning of the 1900s. Recalling his meetings with Tolstoy at Gaspra in the Crimea between November 1901 and May 1902, Gorky wrote: "I told him the story of three generations of a merchant family I knew, a story in which the law of degeneration operated with particular relentlessness; then he began to tug excitedly at my sleeve, urging me to go ahead: 'It's all true!... I know it myself, there are two families like that in Tula. It must be written. You must write a big novel in brief, you understand? Definitely!...'"

In 1904, the clear outlines were already taking shape

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in Gorky's mind for a work initially to be called *The Artamonovs*.

A crucial part in shaping the idea for *The Artamonovs* was played by meetings and talks between Gorky and Lenin in 1908 and 1910 on the Isle of Capri.

Recalling these encounters, Gorky wrote: "Talking to me on Capri about the literature of those years, evaluating with remarkable accuracy the writers of my generation and revealing, mercilessly and with ease, their true worth, he also pointed out certain fundamental shortcomings in my stories and then reproached me: 'It's a waste breaking up your experience into little stories. It's time you put it all into one book, a big novel of some kind.' I said that I dreamed of writing the story of one family over a period of 100 years, from 1813, from the time when Moscow was being rebuilt, to our own days. The founder of the family was to be a peasant, a serf bailiff freed by the landowner for his heroism as a partisan in 1812. From this family would come officials, priests, manufacturers, members of the Petrashevsky conspiracy, followers of Nechayev, and progressives of the 1870s and 1880s. He listened very closely, asked some questions and then said: 'An excellent subject, but a difficult one too, of course. It'll consume masses of time. I think you could cope with it, but what I don't see is how you're going to end it. Reality doesn't give you an ending. No, you must write it after the revolution; what's needed now is something along the lines of *Mother*.' Needless to say, I couldn't see the ending either. Lenin was always on an amazingly direct line to the truth; he always saw and felt ahead."

After the meeting with Lenin, Gorky postponed writing his novel "about three generations of the Russian bourgeoisie", but he did not give up the preparatory work on the theme.

He began writing *The Artamonovs* in 1924. On March 15, 1925, in correspondence with Stefan Zweig, he announced that he had written a story, *The Artamonovs*, which he wanted to dedicate to Romain Rolland.

