Netochka Nezvanova; an Incomplete Novel

Fyodor Dostoevsky

1848

Contents

Netochka Nezvanova is Dostoyevsky's first - although unfinished - attempt at writing a novel. The first completed section of the book was published in 1849. According to translator Jane Kentish, this first publication was intended as "no more than a prologue to the novel". Further work on the novel was hindered by Dostoyevsky's arrest and exile to Siberia for alleged revolutionary activities. Dostoyevsky never resumed work on Netochka Nezvanova, leaving it incomplete. The fragment tells the story of Netochka and her childhood, which dominated by her stepfather, Efimov, a failed musician that believes he is a neglected genius. The young girl is strangely drawn to this drunken ruin of a man, who exploits her and drives the family to poverty. But when she is rescued by an aristocratic family, the abuse against Netochka's delicate psyche continues in a more subtle way, condemning her to remain an outsider - a solitary spectator of an otherwise glittering society. With its depiction of the suffering, loneliness, madness and sin that affect both rich and poor in St Petersburg, Netochka Nezvanova begins to explore the many great themes that were to dominate Dostoyevsky's later novels.

Chapter I

I DON'T remember my father. He died when I was two years old. My mother married a second time. This second marriage brought her a great deal of sorrow, though it was a marriage of love. My stepfather was a musician. His history was a remarkable one: he was the strangest, the most extraordinary man I have ever known'. His image is very vivid among the earliest impressions of my childhood, so vivid that those impressions have had an influence on the whole of my life. First of all, to make my story intelligible, I will give a sketch of his biography. Everything which I am now going to tell you I learned later on from the celebrated violinist B., who was a comrade and an intimate friend of my stepfather's in his youth.

My stepfather's surname was Yefimov. He was born on the estate of a very rich landowner and was the son of a poor musician, who after years of wandering had settled on the estate of this landowner and played in the latter's orchestra. The landowner lived in luxurious style, and loved music passionately, above everything. The story was told of him that, though he never left home even to go to Moscow, yet on one occasion he took it into his head to go to some watering- place abroad, and that he went there for no longer than a few weeks with the sole object of hearing a famous violinist who, as the newspapers announced, was going to give three concerts at the watering-place. He had himself a fairly good orchestra of musicians, on which he spent almost the whole of his income. This orchestra my stepfather entered as clarinet player. He was twenty-two years old when he made the acquaintance of a strange man. In the same district there was living a wealthy count, who ruined himself over keeping up a private theatre

in his house. This count had dismissed the conductor of his orchestra, an Italian, for bad conduct. This Italian certainly was a bad man. After he had been turned off he sank into complete degradation. He took to going from one village tavern to another, got drunk, sometimes begged, and there was no one in the whole province who would employ him. It was with this fellow that my stepfather made friends. This connection was strange and inexplicable, for no one noticed that he changed for the worse in his behaviour through imitation of his friend; and even his patron himself, who had at first forbidden him to associate with the Italian, afterwards winked at their friendship. At last the Italian met with a sudden death. One morning he was found by some peasants in a ditch by the dam. An inquest was held, and it appeared that he had died of an apoplectic fit. His belongings were in the keeping of my stepfather, who promptly produced evidence that he was entitled to take possession of them: the Italian had left a note in his own handwriting bequeathing everything he had to my stepfather in case of his death. The property consisted of a black frock-coat which had been carefully preserved by its late owner, as he never gave up hope of getting a situation, and of a rather ordinary-looking violin. Nobody disputed the inheritance. But a short time afterwards, the first violin of the count's orchestra came to the landowner with a letter from the count, in which the latter begged him to persuade Yefimov in sell the violin left him by the Italian, as he greatly desired to obtain it for his orchestra. He offered three thousand roubles, and added that he had several times already sent for Yegor Yefimov in order that he might arrange the sale with him personally, but had always met with an obstinate refusal from the latter. The count concluded by saying that the price he offered was what the violin was worth, that he was not trying to get it for less than its value, and that in Yefimov's refusal he saw an insulting suspicion that he, the count, was trying to take advantage of the musician's simplicity and ignorance, and he therefore begged Yefimov's patron to bring him to reason.

The landowner promptly sent for my stepfather.

"Why won't you sell the violin?" he asked him. "It's no use to you. You'll be given three thousand roubles, that's what it is worth, and you are making a mistake if you think you will get more. The count isn't going to cheat you."

Yefimov answered that he would not go to the count of his own accord, but that if he were sent, he must do his master's bidding; he would not sell the fiddle to the count, but if they should take it from him by force, then again he must submit to his master's will.

It was clear that by this answer he had touched a very sensitive spot in his patron's character. The fact was that the latter had always said with pride that he knew how to treat his musicians, for they were all genuine artists, every one of them, and that thanks to them his orchestra was not only better than the count's, but equal to any in Petersburg or Moscow.

"Very well," answered the landowner. "I will inform the count that you won't sell the violin because you won't, for you have a perfect right to sell it or not to sell it, you understand? But I ask you myself, what use is the violin to you? The clarinet is your

instrument, though you are a poor player. Let me have it. I'll give you three thousand" (who could have told it was such a valuable instrument?).

Yefimov gave a laugh.

"No, sir, I won't sell it you," he answered. "Of course you are the master..."

"Why, I am not forcing you, am I? I am not compelling you, am I?" cried the landowner, losing his temper, the more readily as the conversation took place before the count's musician, who might from this scene draw very disadvantageous conclusions as to the position of the musicians in the landowner's orchestra. "Be off, you ungrateful fellow! Don't let me see you again. But for me what would have become of you with your clarinet, which you can't play? With me you are fed and clothed and get a salary; you live like a gentleman, but you don't care to understand that, and you don't feel it. Be off, and do not exasperate me with your presence here!"

The landowner used to drive everyone with whom he got angry out of his presence, because he was afraid of himself and his own hastiness. And on no account would he have behaved too severely with "artists", as he called his musicians.

The bargain did not come off, and it seemed as though that was the end of the matter, when a month later the count's violinist got up a horrible plot. On his own initiative, he made a statement to the police, in which he charged my stepfather with being responsible for the Italian's death, and with having murdered him with the mercenary object of acquiring a rich inheritance. He asserted that the will had been extorted by force, and swore that he could produce witnesses in support of his accusation. Neither the warnings nor the entreaties of the count and the landowner on behalf of my stepfather could move the informer from his purpose. They pointed out to him that the inquest on the Italian had been properly conducted, that he was flying in the face of facts, possibly through personal spite and disappointment at not getting the valuable instrument which was to have been bought for him. The musician stuck to his point, swore that he was right, asserted that the apoplectic fit had been due not to drunkenness but to poison, and demanded a second inquest. At the first glance there seemed to be something in his story. The case was followed up, of course. Yefimov was taken and sent to prison in town. The trial, in which the whole province took an interest, began. It was soon over, and ended in the musician being convicted of false witness. He was sentenced to a fitting punishment, but he stuck to the story to the end, and maintained that he was right. Finally he acknowledged that he had no proofs, that the evidence he had brought forward had been invented by himself, but that he had been led by suppositions, by surmises, to invent it all; for up to the time of the second inquest, when Yefimov's innocence was formally proved, he had been fully convinced that Yefimov had caused the death of the luckless Italian, though he had perhaps not poisoned him, but murdered him in some other way. But the informer's sentence was not carried out, he was suddenly taken ill with inflammation of the brain, went out of his mind, and died in the prison hospital.

During the whole of this affair, the landowner behaved in the most generous way. He defended my stepfather as though he had been his own son. Several times he went

to the prison, to comfort him, to give him money, and learning that Yefimov was fond of smoking, took him the best cigars, and when he was acquitted gave a fete to the orchestra. The landowner looked upon the Yefimov affair as a matter concerning the whole orchestra, because he prized good behaviour in his musicians, if not more than, at least as much as their talents. A whole year passed, and suddenly a rumour went round the province, that a famous violinist, a Frenchman, had arrived in the chief town of the province and was going to give a few concerts there. The landowner began at once trying to get him to pay him a visit. Everything seemed favourable; the Frenchman promised to come. All the preparations were made, almost the whole district had been invited to meet him, but all at once things took quite a different turn.

One morning it was announced that Yefimov had disappeared, no one knew where. A search was made, but there was no trace of him. The orchestra was in a desperate plight, there was no one to play the clarinet; when, three days after Yefimov's disappearance, the landowner received a letter from the French violinist in which the latter haughtily refused the invitation, adding, in a roundabout way of course, that he would for the future be extremely careful in his relations with gentlemen who keep their own orchestras of musicians, that it was an offence against good taste to see real talent under the control of a man who did not know its value, and that the example of Yefimov, a true artist and the best violinist he had met in Russia, was a proof of the justice of his words.

The landowner was thrown into the utmost amazement by reading this letter. He was mortified to the depths of his soul. What! Yefimov, the Yefimov for whom he had done so much, on whom he had heaped such kindness, had so mercilessly and shamelessly slandered him to a European artist, the sort of man whose opinion he most valued! And the letter was inexplicable in another way: he was informed that Yefimov was an artist of real talent, that he was a violinist, but that his talent had not been recognised and he had been forced to play another instrument. All this so much astounded the landowner that he immediately prepared to go to the town for a personal interview with the Frenchman, when he received a letter from the count in which the latter invited him to come to his house at once, and told him that he knew all about the affair, that the famous Frenchman was now in his house with Yefimov, that, being astonished at the latter's impudence and slander, he, the count, had ordered him to be detained, and that the presence of the landowner was essential, since he, the count, was also implicated in Yefimov's accusation. He added that the affair was very important, and must be cleared up as soon as possible.

The landowner, promptly setting off to the count's, at" once made the acquaintance of the Frenchman there and told him all my stepfather's story, adding that he had never suspected so great a talent in Yefimov, that the latter had been on the contrary a very poor clarinet player, and that he heard now for the first time that his runaway musician was a violinist. He added further that Yefimov was a free man, that he enjoyed complete liberty, and could leave him at any moment if he really were oppressed. The

Frenchman was surprised. They sent for Yefimov, and he was almost unrecognisable: he behaved conceitedly, answered with derision and persisted in the truth of all he had told the Frenchman. All this intensely exasperated the count, who told my stepfather in so many words that he was a scoundrel and a slanderer, and that he deserved an ignominious punishment.

"Don't excite yourself, your Excellency. I know you well enough already, and understand you thoroughly," my stepfather answered. "Thanks to you, I was within an inch of being sentenced for murder. I know at whose instigation Alexey Nikiforitch, your late musician, trumped up a false charge against me."

The count was beside himself with rage on hearing this horrible accusation. He could hardly control himself; but a government official who had come to the count's on business and happened to be in the room, declared that he could not let this pass without investigation, that Yefimov's insulting rudeness was equivalent to malice, wilful slander and libel, and he respectfully asked to be allowed to arrest him on the spot in the count's house. The Frenchman showed great indignation, and said that he could not understand such black ingratitude. Then my stepfather replied emphatically that to be punished, to be tried, even though it were again on a charge of murder, was better than such an existence as he had hitherto endured, belonging to the landowner's orchestra, and being unable to leave it owing to his extreme poverty. And with these words he went out of the room, accompanied by the man who arrested him. They shut him up in a room apart, and threatened to take him to the town next day.

About midnight the prisoner's door was opened. The landowner walked in. He was in his dressing-gown and slippers and was carrying a lighted lantern. It appeared that he could not sleep, and that he was so terribly worried that he had been driven to leave his bed at such an hour. Yefimov was not asleep and he looked with amazement at his visitor, who put down the lantern and in great agitation sat down in a chair facing him.

"Yegor," he said to him, "why have you done me this wrong?''

Yefimov did not answer. The landowner repeated his question, and there was a note of deep feeling, of strange misery in his words.

"God knows why I have, sir!" my stepfather answered at last, with a despairing gesture. "I suppose that the devil confounded me! I don't know myself who drove me to do it! But I can't go on living with you, I can't bear it... The devil himself has got hold of me!"

"Yegor," the landowner began again, "come back to me. I will forget everything, I will forgive everything. Listen: you shall be my leading musician, I offer you a salary above all the others...

"No, sir, no, and don't speak of it; your house is not for me to live in! I tell you that the devil has got hold of me. I shall set fire to the house if I stay with you. Such misery comes over me at times that it would have been better if I had never been born. I cannot answer for myself now; you had better leave me alone, sir. It has been like this with me ever since that devil made a friend of me..."

"Who?" asked the landowner.

"Why, who died like a forsaken dog, the Italian."

"It was he who taught you to play, Yegorushka."

"Yes! Many things he taught me to my ruin. It would have been better for me not to have seen him."

"Was he a first-rate violinist too, Yegorushka?"

"No, he couldn't do much himself, but he taught well. I learned by myself, he only showed me, and better for me if my hand had been withered than what I have learned. I don't myself know now what I want. Here, sir, if you were to ask me: 'What do you want, Yegorka? I can give you anything,' I shouldn't say a word in answer, because I don't know myself what I want. No, sir, I tell you again you had better leave me alone. I shall do myself some mischief, so as to be sent far away, and that will be the end of it!"

"Yegor," said the landowner after a minute's silence, "I cannot leave you like this. Since you don't want to be in my service, go your own way, you are a free man, I cannot keep you; but I cannot part from you like this. Play me something, Yegor, play on your violin. For God's sake play something. I am not ordering you, understand me, I am not compelling you, I beg you with tears: play me, Yegorushka, for God's sake, what you played to the Frenchman. Give me the pleasure. You are obstinate and I am obstinate. I have my ways too, Yegorushka. I feel for you, you too might have feeling. I can't bear it if of your own free will and pleasure you do not play me what you played the Frenchman."

"Well, so be it," said Yefimov. "I had vowed to myself never to play before you, sir, before you above all, but now my heart has melted. I will play to you only for the first and last time, and you will never hear me again anywhere, sir, not if you pay me a thousand roubles."

Then he took his violin and began playing variations on Russian songs. B. said that these variations were his first and best piece for the violin, and that he never played anything so well and with such inspiration. The landowner, who could not listen to any music with indifference, shed tears. When the performance was over, he got up from his chair, took out three hundred roubles, gave them to my stepfather and said:

"Now go your way, Yegor. I will let you out from here and will make everything right with the count; but listen: never meet me again. A wide road lies open to you, but if we run against each other on it, it will be mortifying for you and also for me. Well, good-bye... Wait a moment, one more piece of advice for you on your way, one only. Don't drink, but study, study every hour. Don't grow conceited. I speak to you as your own father would speak to you. Mind, I tell you once again, study and don't take to drink; but if you once take to it from grief (and you will have much trouble) you may reckon all is lost, everything will go to the devil, and maybe you yourself will die in the ditch like your Italian. Come, now, good-bye!... Stay, kiss me."

They kissed each other, and then my stepfather went away in freedom.

Scarcely had he found himself at liberty when he began by squandering his three hundred roubles on debauchery in the nearest town, associating with a very low, dirty crew of rollicking companions. Being left penniless with no one to help him, he ended by being compelled to go into a wretched band attached to a strolling provincial company, as the first and perhaps the only violinist. All this was utterly inconsistent with his original intentions, which were to go as soon as possible to study in Petersburg, to obtain a good situation, and to develop into a first-rate artist. But he did not get on in the little orchestra. He soon quarrelled with the manager of the company, and left. Then he completely lost heart, and even brought himself to a desperate step very galling to his pride. He wrote a letter to the landowner, his former patron, describing his position and asking for money. The letter was written in a rather independent style, but no answer came to him. Then he wrote a second letter in which in the most cringing phrases, calling the landowner his benefactor and a true connoisseur of the arts, he begged him again for assistance. At last an answer came. The landowner sent him a hundred roubles and a few lines in the handwriting of his valet, in which he told him not to trouble him with begging letters in the future. When he got this money, my stepfather meant to set off for Petersburg at once, but after paying his debts he had so little money left that the journey was out of the question.

He was obliged to remain in the provinces, again went into some provincial orchestra, then again could not get on in it, and passing from one place to another, spent six whole years in the provinces, all the while cherishing the dream of getting in a short time to Petersburg. At last he was attacked by something like terror. With despair he noticed how his talent was suffering, continually hampered by his disorderly and beggarly existence; and one morning he abandoned his manager, took his violin and, almost begging his way, at last reached Petersburg. He installed himself somewhere in a garret, and it was here that he made the acquaintance of B., who had just arrived from Germany and was also striving to make a career. They soon made friends, and B. recalls their acquaintance with deep feeling even now. Both were young; they had the same hopes and the same object. But B. was still in his first youth; he had had little experience of poverty and sorrow; moreover he was pre-eminently a German and worked for his object obstinately and systematically, with a complete consciousness of his powers, and almost able to calculate beforehand the degree of success he could attain; while his companion, Yefimov, who was thirty, was already tired and weary, had lost all capacity for persistent effort, and had exhausted his early health and vigour in the seven years during which he had been forced for a crust of bread to lead a vagabond existence shifting about from one provincial company or private orchestra to another. He had been supported by the one perpetual unchanging hope of struggling out of his wretched position, saving money and getting to Petersburg. But this hope had been dim and vague, it was a sort of irresistible inner impulse which had with years lost its first definiteness even in Yefimov's own eyes; and by the time he came to Petersburg he was acting almost unconsciously through a sort of everlasting habit of everlasting yearning and brooding over the journey, and scarcely knew himself what he was going to do in

the capital. His enthusiasm was somehow spasmodic, jaundiced, and came by fits and starts, as though he were trying to deceive himself by this enthusiasm, and to persuade himself that his vigour, his first fervour, his first inspiration, had not yet disappeared. His incessant ecstasies impressed the cool and methodical B.; he was dazzled, and hailed my stepfather as the coming musical genius. At first B. could imagine no other future for him. But before long his eyes were opened, and he saw through my step father completely. He saw clearly that all this jerkiness, feverish haste, and impatience were nothing but unconscious despair at the thought of his wasted talents; and that possibly the talent itself had not been even at the very first so great, that there had been in it a great deal of blindness, of mistaken self-confidence, of premature self-satisfaction and of incessant dreaming, incessant brooding over his own genius. "But," B. used to tell me, "I could not help wondering at the strange character of my companion. A desperate feverish contest between violently over-strained will and inner impotence was taking place in actual life before my eyes. The unhappy man had for seven whole years been content with mere dreams of his future glory, so much so that he did not even notice how he had lost what is most fundamental in our art, how he had let slip even the most fundamental mechanism of his work. And yet the most colossal plans for the future were continually taking shape in his disordered imagination. It was not enough for him to want to be a genius of the first rank, one of the first violinists in the world; it was not enough for him that he already considered himself such a genius — on the top of all that, he dreamed of becoming also a composer, though he knew nothing about counterpoint. But what astounded me most of all," B. added, "was that this man, with his complete impotence, with his really insignificant knowledge of the technique of his art, had yet so deep, so clear, and so instinctive an understanding of music. He felt and understood it so deeply that it was no wonder if he went astray in his own estimate of himself, and took himself not merely for a profound instinctive critic of music, but for a high priest of that art, for a genius. Sometimes in his coarse, plain language, untouched by any education, he would utter such profound truths that I was struck dumb, and could not understand how he had divined it all, never having read anything and never having been taught anything. And I was indebted to him," B. would add, "to him and his counsels, for much of my own progress. As for me," B. continued, "I was not troubled on my own account. I, too, loved my art passionately, though from the very beginning of my career I knew that I should be in a real sense a humble labourer in the field of art and that I wanted nothing more; but on the other hand, I was proud of the fact that I had not, like the ungrateful servant, buried what had been given me by nature, but had increased it a hundredfold. And if the finish of my execution were praised, if the perfection of my mechanism were admired, all that I owed to unceasing, unflagging toil, to the clear recognition of my own powers, to voluntary self-subordination and to a persistent struggle against conceit, against premature self-satisfaction, and the indolence that is the natural consequence of that self- satisfaction."

B. in his turn tried to give good advice to the friend by whom he was at first so dominated, but only succeeded in irritating him to no purpose. A coolness between them followed. B. soon observed that his friend was beginning to be more and more a prey to apathy, misery and boredom, that his bouts of enthusiasm were becoming less and less frequent, and that all this was followed by a gloomy, savage despondency. Finally Yefimov took to abandoning his violin and sometimes would not touch it for a whole week. Complete moral collapse was not far off, and before long the wretched man had sunk into every vice. What his former patron had foretold came true. He gave way to excessive drinking. B. looked on at him with horror; his advice had no effect, and indeed he was afraid to say a word. Little by little Yefimov became utterly shameless; he did not scruple to live at B.'s expense, and even behaved as though he had a complete right to do so. Meanwhile B.'s resources were being exhausted, he lived from hand to mouth by giving lessons, or by playing at evening parties for merchants, for Germans, and for petty officials who, though they paid little, paid him something. Yefimov seemed unwilling to notice his friend's straits: he behaved sullenly with him, and for weeks together did not deign to say a word to him. One day B. observed to him in the mildest way that it would not be amiss for him to take up his violin occasionally, that he might not lose his skill with the instrument altogether; then Yefimov flew into a rage and declared that he would never touch his violin again, as though he imagined that someone would implore him on his knees to do so. On another occasion B. needed someone to play with him at an evening party, and he asked Yefimov. This invitation moved Yefimov to fury. He declared that he was not a street musician, and would not demean himself like B. to degrade his noble art by playing to low tradesmen who would not understand his talent and his playing. B. did not say one word in answer; but Yefimov, brooding over this suggestion in the absence of his friend, who had gone to play, imagined that all this was only a hint at the fact that he was living at B.'s expense, and a desire to make him feel that he, too, ought to try to earn some money. When B.

came back, Yefimov began to reproach him for the meanness of his conduct, and declared that he would not remain with him another minute. He actually did disappear for two days, but on the third turned up again as though nothing had happened, and went on living as before.

Only their former intimacy and affection, and the compassion which B. felt for the ruined man, restrained him from making up his mind to put an end to this disorderly existence and to part with Yefimov for ever. At last they did part. Fortune smiled on B., he obtained powerful patronage and succeeded in giving a brilliant concert. By that time he was a first-rate performer, and his rapidly growing reputation soon afterwards gained him a place in the orchestra of an opera-house where he quickly won well-deserved success. At parting he gave Yefimov money, and begged him with tears in his eyes to return to the right path. B. cannot to this day remember him without marked feeling. His friendship with Yefimov was one of the strongest impressions of his youth. They had begun their career together, had become warmly attached to one

another, and even Yefimov's strangeness, his coarse and glaring defects, drew B. more warmly to him. B. understood him; he saw through him, and knew beforehand how it would end. They embraced, and both shed tears at parting. Then Yefimov said through tears and sobs that he was a ruined and most unhappy man, that he had known it a long time, and that only now he saw his ruin clearly.

"I have no talent!" he said, turning as pale as death.

B. was deeply moved.

"Listen, Yegor Petrovitch," he said to him. "What are you doing to yourself? You will only ruin yourself with your despair; you have no patience, no courage. Now you are saying in a fit of despondency that you have no talent. It's not true. You have talent, I assure you you have. You have it. I can tell that merely from the way you feel and understand music. I will prove you that by the whole of your life. You have told me about the way you lived in the past; then, too, you were haunted by the same despair. Then your first teacher, that strange man of whom you have told me so much, first roused in you a love for music and divined your talent. You felt it then as intensely and painfully as you feel it now, but you did not understand what was happening to you. You could not bear living in your patron's house, and you did not know yourself what you wanted. Your teacher died too early. He left you with nothing but vague yearnings and, worst of all, did not explain you to yourself. You felt that you needed some other wider path, that you were destined for other aims, but you did not understand how this could come about, and in your misery you came to hate everything that surrounded you. Your six years of poverty and hardship have not been lost; you have studied, you have thought, you have become conscious of yourself and your powers, you understand music and your vocation now. My friend, you must have patience and courage. A lot far more to be envied than mine awaits you; you are a hundred times more of an artist than I; but God gave you but the tenth part of my patience. Study and do not drink, as your kind old patron told you; and above all, begin from the beginning again, from the ABC. What worries you? Is it poverty, privation? But poverty and privation form the artist. They are inevitable at first. No one wants you now, no one cares to know you; that is the way of the world. Wait a bit, it will be different presently when they find out that you have a gift. Envy, petty meanness, and, worst of all, stupidity will weigh upon you more heavily than privation. Talent wants sympathy, it wants to be understood, and you will see what people will press round you when you attain ever so little of your aim. They will set at nought and despise what you have gained by bitter toil, privations, hunger, sleepless nights. They will not encourage you, they will not comfort you, your future comrades, they will not point out to you what is good and true in you; but with spiteful glee will catch up every mistake you make, will urge you to what is bad in you, to what you are mistaken about, and under an outward show of coolness and contempt will rejoice as though it were a festivity over every mistake you make. (As though anyone were free from mistakes!) You are conceited, you are often proud when there is no need to be, and may offend the amour-propre of some nonentity, and then there will be trouble — you will be one and they will be many.

They will torment you with pin-pricks. Even I am beginning to have experience of that. Cheer up! You are not so poor, you can live. Don't look down on humble work, slave away as I have done at poor artisans' entertainments. But you are impatient, you are sick with your impatience, you are not simple enough, you are too subtle, you think too much, you give your brain too much work. You are audacious in words, and faint-hearted when you take up your bow. You are vain, and yet not bold enough.

Courage! wait a bit, study; and if you do not rely on your own powers, then trust to luck: you have fervour, you have feeling. You may reach your goal, and if not, anyway try your luck, you will not lose in any case, for the stake is too great. Trusting to luck, brother, is a great tiling."

Yefimov listened to his comrade with deep feeling. But as the latter talked, the pallor left his cheeks; they flushed red; his eyes flashed with unaccustomed fire, courage and hope. This courage soon passed into self-confidence, and then into his habitual arrogance; and at last, when B. was finishing his exhortation, Yefimov listened to him absent-mindedly and impatiently. He warmly pressed his hand, however, thanked him, and always rapid in his transitions from the lowest self- abasement and despondency to extreme arrogance and insolence, declared conceitedly that his friend need not trouble himself about his future, that he knew how to manage his own affairs, that he hoped very shortly to get powerful support, that he would give a concert and so at once obtain fame and money. B. shrugged his shoulders but did not contradict him; and they parted, though of course not for long. Yefimov at once spent the money that had been given to him and came to borrow more; then a second time, and a fourth, and a tenth, till at last B. lost patience and said he was not at home. From that time he lost sight of him completely.

Several years passed. One day, as B. was coming home from a rehearsal, at the entrance of a dirty tavern in a back street he jostled against a badly dressed drunken man who called him by his name. It was Yefimov. He was greatly changed, his face looked yellow and bloated. It could be seen that his reckless life was putting a stamp upon him that could never be effaced. B. was overjoyed, and before he had time to say a couple of words to him, had followed him into the tavern into which Yefimov dragged him. There in a little grimy room apart B. scrutinised his companion more closely. The latter was almost in rags, in broken boots; his frayed shirt-front was covered with wine stains. His hair was thin and beginning to turn grey.

"How are you getting on? Where are you now?" B. asked him.

Yefimov was overcome with embarrassment, even scared at first; he answered jerkily and incoherently, so much so that B. began to think that he was out of his mind. At last Yefimov confessed that he could not talk until he had had a drink of vodka, and that they had long since refused him credit in the tavern. Saying this, he flushed crimson, though he tried to carry it off with a jaunty gesture; but it gave an effect of insolence, artificiality and importunity, so that it was all very pitiful and excited the compassion of kind-hearted B., who saw that his worst apprehensions were fulfilled. He ordered vodka, however. Yefimov's face was transformed with gratitude, and he

was so overcome that he was ready with tears in his eyes to kiss his benefactor's hand. Over dinner B. learned to his great surprise that the wretched man was married. But he was still more amazed when he heard that his wife was the cause of all his misery and misfortunes, and that his marriage had destroyed all his talent.

"How is that?" asked B.

"It's two years since I have taken up my violin, brother," Yefimov answered. "She's a common woman, a cook, a coarse, uneducated woman. Damn her... We do nothing but quarrel."

"Then why did you marry her if that is how it is?"

"I had nothing to eat. I got to know her; she had about a thousand roubles. I rushed headlong into matrimony. It was she fell in love with me. She flung herself on my neck. No one drove her to it. The money has gone on food and on drink, and — it's all up with my talent! All is lost."

B. saw that Yefimov seemed in a hurry to justify himself.

"I have thrown it all up, thrown it all up," he added. Then he informed him that of late years he had attained almost perfection on the violin, that though B. was one of the first violinists in the town, yet he would not have been able to hold a candle to him, Yefimov, perhaps, if the latter had cared to outshine him.

"Then what's the difficulty?" said B., surprised. "You should get a post!"

"It's not worth while," said Yefimov, with a wave of his hand. "There isn't one of you there who knows anything about it. What do you know? Bosh! nothing, that's all you know. To scrape out some jig in a ballet — that's your job. You have never seen and never heard good violinists. What's the good of bothering you: you can stay as you like!"

At this point Yefimov waved his arm again and gave a lurch in his chair, for he was quite drunk. Then he began inviting B. to come and see him. But the latter refused, taking his address and promising to go to him next day. Yefimov, who by now had eaten his fill, looked sarcastically at his old friend, and did everything he could to stick pins into him. When they were going away he took B.'s expensive fur coat and handed it to him like a menial to his superior. As they passed through the outer room he stopped and introduced him to the people of the tavern and the company generally as the greatest violinist in Petersburg. In fact he was very disgusting at that moment.

B. did, however, seek him out next morning, and found him in a garret where we were all living at that time in great poverty. I was four years old then, and my mother had been married to Yefimov two years. She was an unhappy woman. In the past she had been a governess, very well educated, and good-looking, and had through poverty married an old government clerk, my father. She only lived with him a year. When my father died suddenly and his meagre fortune was divided among his heirs, my mother was left to face the world alone with me, with a trifling sum of money, all that came to her share. To get a situation as a governess again, with a very young child, was difficult. It was then that in some casual way she met Yefimov, and really did fall in love with him. She was an enthusiast and a dreamer; she saw in Yefimov a genius and believed

in him on the strength of his conceited talk of a brilliant future. Her imagination was flattered by the glorious task of being the prop, the guide of a man of genius, and she married him.

All her dreams and hopes vanished in the first month, and there was left before her the pitiful reality. Yefimov, who really had, perhaps, married my mother because she had about a thousand roubles, folded his hands as soon as the money was spent; and as though delighted at the excuse, declared to each and all that marriage was the death of his talent, that he could not work in a stuffy room face to face with his starving family, that songs and music would not come into his mind in such surroundings, and that evidently he was fated to be unlucky. I believe he persuaded himself of the justice of his complaints, and it seemed as though he were glad of an excuse. It seemed as though this unhappy ruined genius were seeking for an external cause upon which the blame for all his failures, all his calamities, could be cast. He could not face the awful thought that he had been ruined for art long ago and for ever. He struggled convulsively with that fearful conviction as with a delirious nightmare, and when at last the reality overcame him, when at moments his eyes were opened, he felt ready to go mad with horror. He could not so easily lose his belief in what had so long been the centre of his life, and to his last hour imagined that the moment had not passed. In times of doubt he gave himself up to drink, which drove away his depression with its vile, stupefying fumes. In fact he did not know how necessary his wife was to him at that time. She was a living pretext, and in reality my stepfather became almost insane over the idea that when he buried his wife who had ruined him all would go well again. My poor mother did not understand him. Like a regular dreamer, she broke down at the first step into hostile reality; she became hot-tempered, bitter, shrewish. She was continually quarrelling with her husband, who took a sort of pleasure in tormenting her, and was continually egging him on to work. But my stepfather's blind obsession, his fixed idea, his craze, made him almost inhuman and unfeeling. He only laughed, and swore he would not touch his violin till the death of his wife, and he told her this with brutal frankness. My mother, who in spite of everything loved him passionately to the day of her death, could not endure such a life. She became permanently ill and suffering, lived continually on the rack, and in addition to all this misery, the whole anxiety of maintaining the family fell upon her alone. She took to preparing meals for persons who would come and fetch them. But her husband carried off all her money on the sly, and she was often compelled to send back empty dishes instead of dinner to those for whom she cooked. When B. visited us she was busy washing linen and remaking old clothes. We lived like this from hand to mouth in our garret.

B. was struck by the poverty of the family.

"I say, it's all nonsense what you tell me," he said to my stepfather. "It's not a case of ruining your talent. She is keeping you, and what are you doing?"

"Oh, nothing," answered my stepfather.

But B. did not know all my mother's troubles yet. Her husband often brought home a regular rabble of ragamuffins and rowdies, and what scenes there were then!

B. spent a long time persuading his old comrade to reform. At last he told him if he wouldn't mend his ways he, B., would not help him; he declared without beating about the bush that he would not give him money, because it would be spent on drink; and he asked him finally to play him something on the violin, that he might see what could be done for him. While my stepfather went for his violin, B. began secretly giving money to my mother, but she would not take it. It was the first time she had had to take charity. Then B. gave the money to me, and the poor woman melted into tears. My stepfather brought his violin, but asked for vodka, saying he could not play without it. They sent for vodka. He drank it, and began getting excited. "I will play you something of my own composition, because you are a friend," he said to B., and he drew out from under a chest of drawers a thick dusty manuscript book.

"I wrote all that myself," he said, pointing to the book. "There you shall see! It's very different from your ballets, my boy."

B. looked at a few pages without a word; then he opened the music he had with him, and asked Yefimov to lay aside his own composition for the time and to play something of what he had brought.

My stepfather was a little offended; however, afraid of losing a powerful friend, he did as B. told him. B. perceived that his old friend had really worked and made much progress since they had parted, though he did boast that he hadn't touched the violin since his marriage. The joy of my poor mother was worth seeing. She looked at her husband and was proud of him again. The kind-hearted B., genuinely delighted, determined to set my stepfather on his feet again. Even then he had powerful connections, and promptly began recommending his poor friend and asking for help for him, making him promise beforehand that he would behave himself. And meanwhile at his own expense he rigged him out in better clothes, and took him to see several prominent persons upon whom the appointment he wanted to get for him depended. The fact was that Yefimov's bravado was only in words, and he seems to have gladly accepted his old friend's proposition. B. told me that the flattery and cringing obsequiousness with which my stepfather tried to conciliate him, from fear of losing his favour, made him feel ashamed. Yefimov realised that he was being put on the right path, and even left off drinking.

At last a place was found for him in the orchestra of a theatre. He stood the test well, for in one month of diligence and hard work he regained all that he had lost in a year and a half of idleness, and he promised to work for the future and be punctual in the discharge of his new duties. But the position of my mother and me was not in the least improved. My stepfather did not give my mother a farthing of his salary; he spent it all on himself, eating and drinking with his new companions, of whom he soon had a regular circle. He associated chiefly with the theatre attendants, chorus singers, supers — in short, with people amongst whom he could be first; and he avoided men of real talent. He succeeded in inspiring in them a peculiar respect for himself; he at once impressed upon them that he was an unrecognised genius, that he had been ruined by his wife, and finally that their conductor knew nothing at all about music. He

laughed at all the players in the orchestra, at the selection of plays that were produced, and even at the composers of the operas they played. Finally, he propounded a new theory of music; in short, he made all the orchestra sick of him. He quarrelled with his superiors and with the conductor, was rude to the manager, gained the reputation of being the most troublesome, the most nonsensical, and at the same time the most worthless person, and made himself insufferable to everybody.

And indeed it was extremely strange to see such an insignificant man, such a poor and useless performer and careless musician, with such immense pretensions, with such boastfulness and swagger, with such an overbearing manner.

It ended in my stepfather's quarrelling with B., inventing the most horrible slander, the most disgusting calumny against him, and circulating it as authentic fact. After six months of desultory work he was discharged from the orchestra, for drunkenness and negligence in the discharge of his duties. But he still hung round the place. He was soon seen in his old rags, for his decent clothes were all sold or pawned. He took to visiting his former associates, regardless of whether they were pleased to see him or not; he spread spiteful gossip, babbled nonsense, wept over his hard lot, and invited them all to come and see his wicked wife. Of course there were people found to listen, people who took pleasure in giving drink to the discharged musician, and making him talk all sorts of nonsense. Besides, he always talked wittily and cleverly, and interspersed his talk with biting sarcasm and cynical sallies which pleased listeners of a certain class. He was taken for something like a crazy buffoon, whom it was sometimes pleasant to set talking to pass an idle hour. They liked teasing him by talking before him of some new violinist who had come to Petersburg. When he heard this, Yefimov's face fell, he grew depressed and would begin inquiring who had come, and who was this new celebrity, and at once began to feel jealous of his fame. I believe that this was the beginning of his real permanent madness — the fixed idea that he was the finest violinist, at least in Petersburg, but that he was persecuted by fate and ill-used, that owing to various intrigues he was not understood and left in obscurity. The last idea positively flattered him, for there are natures who are very fond of thinking themselves injured and oppressed, complaining aloud of it, or consoling themselves by gloating in secret over their unrecognised greatness. He could count over all the violinists in Petersburg on his fingers, and according to his notions could not find a rival in any one of them. Connoisseurs and musical amateurs who knew the poor crazy fellow liked to talk before him of some celebrated violinist so as to set him talking. They liked his malice, his biting remarks, they liked the apt and clever things he said as he criticised the playing of his supposed rivals. Often they did not understand him, but they were convinced that no one else could hit off the musical celebrities of the day so neatly and with such smart caricature. Even the musicians at whom he laughed were a little afraid of him, for they knew his biting wit. They recognised the aptness of his attacks and the justice of his criticism when there was something to find fault with. People grew used to seeing him in the corridors of the theatre and behind the scenes. The attendants let him pass unquestioned as though he were someone indispensable, and he became something like

a Russian Thersites. This manner of life lasted for two or three years, but at last he bored everyone in this latter pose as well. His complete ostracism followed, and for the last two years of his life my stepfather seemed to have vanished entirely and was seen nowhere. B., however, met him on two occasions, but in such a pitiful plight that compassion once more got the upper hand of his repugnance. He called out his name, but my stepfather was offended and affected not to have heard him, pulled his old battered hat over his eyes and passed by. At last, on the morning of one of the chief holidays, B. was informed that his old friend Yefimov had come with his greetings. B. went out to him. Yefimov was drunk, and began making extremely low bows almost down to the ground, murmured something inarticulate, and obstinately refused to go into the room. What his behaviour was meant to convey was: "How should poor wretches like us associate with great people like you? the flunkey's place is good enough for the likes of us; just to greet you on a holiday, we make our bow and take ourselves off." In fact, it was all horrid, stupid, and revoltingly nasty. From that time B. did not see him again, till the catastrophe by which this miserable, morbid, and delirious life was ended. It ended strangely. This catastrophe is closely interwoven not only with the earliest impressions of my childhood, but with my whole life. This is how it came to pass. But I ought first to explain what my childhood was like, and what this man, whose image is so painfully reflected in my earliest impressions, and who was the cause of my mother's death, meant to me.

Chapter II

I BEGIN to remember myself very late, not till I was nearly line years old. I don't know how it was, but everything what happened to me before that age has left no impression I can recall now. But from the time I was eight and a half I remember everything very distinctly, day by day, without a break, as though everything that happened then had occurred not longer ago than yesterday. It is true I can, as though in a dream, remember something earlier — a little lamp always burning in a dark corner before an old-fashioned ikon; then my being once kicked in the street by a horse, from which, as I was told afterwards, I lay ill in bed for three months; then, too, during that illness my waking up at night beside my mother with whom I was sleeping, and being suddenly terrified by my sick dreams, the stillness of the night, and the mice scratching in the corner, and trembling with terror all night, huddling under the bedclothes but not daring to wake my mother, from which I conclude that my fear of her was greater than any other terror. But from the minute when I began to be conscious of myself I developed rapidly, surprisingly, and was terribly capable of receiving many quite unchildlike impressions. Everything became clear before my eyes, everything became intelligible to me extremely quickly. The time from which I begin to remember my feelings well made a vivid and sorrowful impression on me; this impression was repeated every day afterwards and grew stronger every day; it threw a

strange and gloomy colour over the whole time I lived with my parents, and over the whole of my childhood too.

It seems to me now that I became suddenly conscious, as though awaking from deep sleep (though at the time, of course, the change cannot have been so startling). I found myself in a big room with a low-pitched ceiling, stuffy and unclean. The walls were coloured a dirty grey tint; in the corner stood a huge Russian stove; the windows looked out into the street, or more accurately, on to the roof of the house opposite, and were low and broad, like chinks. The window-sills were so high from the floor that I remember — I had to push the table up, set a stool on it, and so clamber up to the window, in which I was very fond of sitting when there was no one at home. From our room one could see half the town; we lived just under the roof of a very huge six-storey house. Our furniture consisted of a relic of a sofa with the stuffing coming out, covered with American leather and coated with dust, a plain white table, two chairs, my mother's bed, in the corner a little cupboard with things in it, a chest of drawers which always stood tilted to one side, and a torn paper screen.

I remember that it was dusk; everything was in disorder and had been flung about — brushes, rags, our wooden bowls and spoons, a broken bottle, and I don't know what else besides. I remember that my mother was intensely excited and was crying about something. My stepfather was sitting in a corner in the tattered frock-coat he always wore. He said something sarcastic, which made her angrier than ever, and then brushes and bowls began flying about again. I burst out crying, I began screaming and rushed at them both. I was in a terrible panic, and put my arms round my stepfather to shield him. God knows why, but it seemed to me that my mother had no reason to be angry with him, that he was not to blame; I wanted to beg forgiveness for him, to bear any punishment for his sake. I was dreadfully frightened of my mother, and imagined that everyone else was equally afraid of her. At first my mother was astonished, then she took me by the hand and dragged me away behind the screen. I knocked my arm against the bedstead rather painfully, but my terror was greater than the pain and I did not even wince. I remember, too, that my mother began hotly and bitterly saying something to my father and pointing at me. (I will henceforward call him my father, as it was only much later that I learned that he was not related to me.) The whole scene lasted about two hours and, quivering with suspense, I did my very utmost to guess how it would end. At last the quarrel subsided, and my mother went out. Then my father called me, kissed me, stroked my head, took me on his knee, and I nestled closely, sweetly to his bosom. It was perhaps the first caress I had ever received from either parent, and perhaps that is why I began to remember everything so distinctly from that time. I observed, too, that I had gained my father's favour by defending him; and the idea occurred to me, I believe for the first time, that he had a great deal to put up with, and suffered at my mother's hands. From that time this idea was always with me, and made me more indignant every day.

From that moment I began to feel a boundless love for my father; but a strange sort of love, not a childlike feeling. I should say that it was rather a compassionate,

motherly feeling, if such a definition of my love were not rather absurd as applied to a child. My father always seemed to me so much to be pitied, so persecuted, so crushed, such a victim, that it seemed to me a terrible and unnatural thing not to love him passionately, not to comfort him and be kind to him, not to do one's utmost for him. But I don't understand to this day how the idea entered my head that my father was such a victim, the most unhappy man in the world! Who had instilled that idea into me? In what way could a child such as I was have any understanding of his failures? But I did understand them, though I interpreted them and changed them in my imagination; but to this day I cannot conceive how this impression was formed. Perhaps my mother was too severe with me, and I attached myself to my father as a creature suffering together with me from the same cause.

I have already described my first awakening from the sleep of childhood, the first stirrings of life in me. My heart was wounded from the first moment, and my development began with inconceivable and exhausting rapidity. I could no longer be satisfied with external impressions alone. I began to think, to reason, to notice, but this noticing began so unnaturally early, that my imagination could not but interpret in its own way what was noticed, and I found myself all at once in a world apart. Everything around me began to be like the fairy tale which my father used often to tell me, and which I could not but take for the holy truth. A strange idea arose in me. I became fully aware — though I don't know how it came about — that I was living in a strange home, and that my parents were utterly unlike the other people I had chanced to meet at that time. Why is it, I wondered, why is it I see other people unlike my parents even in appearance? How is it that I have noticed laughter on other faces, and how is it that I was at once struck by the fact that in our corner they never laughed, they never rejoiced? What force, what cause drove me, a child of nine, to look about me so diligently and listen to every word uttered by the people I chanced to meet on the stairs, or in the street when, covering my rags with my mother's old jacket, I went out in the evening with a few coppers to buy a few ha'p'orths of sugar, tea, or bread? I understood — and I don't remember how I came to — that there was everlasting, unbearable sorrow in our garret. I racked my brains trying to guess why it was so, and I don't know who helped me to solve the riddle in my own way; I blamed my mother and accepted her as my father's evil genius; and I repeat, I don't know how so monstrous an idea could have taken shape in my brain... And the more attached I became to my father, the more I grew to hate my mother. The memory of all this is a deep and bitter anguish to me to this day. Here is another incident, which did even more than the first to strengthen my strange devotion to my father. About nine o'clock one evening my mother sent me out to the shop for some yeast. My father was not at home. On my way back I fell down in the street and spilt the whole cupful. My first thought was, how angry my mother would be. At the same time I felt a horrible pain in my left arm, and could not get up. Passers-by stopped round me; an old woman began picking me up, and a boy running by hit me on the head with a key. At last I was set upon my feet. I picked up the pieces of the broken cup and walked on staggering, hardly able to

put one leg before the other. Suddenly I caught sight of my father. He was standing in a crowd before a grand house that was opposite our lodging. This house belonged to people of consequence and was brilliantly lighted up; a great number of carriages had driven up to the entrance, and strains of music floated down from the windows into the street. I clutched my father by the skirt of his frock-coat, pointed to the pieces of the broken cup, and with tears began saying that I was afraid to go in to mother. I felt somehow sure that he would stand up for me. But why was I convinced of it? Who had suggested to me, who had instilled into me that he loved me more than my mother did? Why was it I approached him without fear? He took me by the hand, began comforting me, then said that he wanted to show me something, and lifted me up in his arms. I could not see anything, for he took me by my bruised arm and it hurt me frightfully; but I did not cry out for fear of wounding him. He kept asking me whether I saw something. I did my utmost to answer so as to please him, and said that I could see red curtains. When he wanted to carry me to the other side of the street nearer to the house, I suddenly, I don't know why, began crying, hugging him, and entreating him to make haste and take me up to mother. I remember that my father's caresses were bitter to me at the time, and I could not bear the thought that one of the two people I so longed to love loved me and was kind to me, while I dared not go to the other and was afraid. But my mother was scarcely angry at all, and sent me to bed at once. I remember that the pain in my arm, growing more and more acute, made me feverish. Yet I was particularly happy that it had all gone off so well, and dreamed all night of the house with the red curtains.

And when I woke next morning my first thought, my first care, was the house with the red curtains. As soon as my mother had gone out I clambered up to the little window and began looking at it. The house had long ago excited my childish curiosity. I liked looking at it particularly in the evening, when the street was lighted up, and when the crimson red curtains behind the plate-glass windows of the brightly lighted house began to gleam with a peculiar blood-red glow. Sumptuous carriages with lovely proud horses were continually driving up to the front door, and everything attracted my curiosity: the clamour and bustle at the entrance, and the different coloured lamps of the carriages, and the grandly dressed women who arrived in them. All this took, in my childish imagination, an air of royal magnificence and fairytale enchantment. Now since my meeting with my father before the grand house it became doubly marvellous and interesting. Now strange conceptions and theories began to stir in my excited imagination. And I am not surprised that, between two such strange people as my father and mother, I became such a strange, fantastic child. I was peculiarly affected by the contrast of their characters. I was struck, for instance, by the fact that my mother was continually working and worrying to gain our poor livelihood, was continually reproaching my father that she was the only one to toil for us all; and I could not help asking myself the question: why was it my father did not help her at all, why was it that he lived like a stranger in our home? One or two words dropped by my mother gave me a notion about this, and with some astonishment I learned that my

father was an artist (that word I retained in my memory), that my father was a man of genius; the notion that an artist was a special sort of man, unlike others, shaped itself immediately in my imagination. Possibly my father's behaviour led me to that reflection; perhaps I had heard something which now has escaped my memory; but the meaning of my father's words uttered before me on one occasion with peculiar feeling was strangely intelligible to me. The words were: "The time would come when he would not be in poverty, when he would be a gentleman and wealthy; and, in fact, he would rise again when my mother died." I remember that at first I was fearfully frightened at those words. I could not stay in the room, I ran out into our cold passage and there burst into sobs, with my elbows on the window-sill and my face in my hands. But afterwards, when I had pondered continually over it, when I had grown used to my father's horrible desire, my wild imagination came to my assistance. Yes, I could not long remain in the agony of uncertainty, and absolutely had to fix upon some supposition. And so, I don't know how it all began at first — but in the end I fastened upon the idea that when my mother died, my father would leave this dreary garret and would go away somewhere with me. But where? Up to the last I could not clearly picture. I remember only that everything with which I could beautify the place to which we were going (and I made up my mind for certain that we were going together), everything brilliant, luxurious and magnificent I could create in my wild imagination — all this was brought into play in these daydreams. I fancied that we should at once become rich; I should not have to go on errands to the shops (which was very hard for me, because the children living in the next house tormented me whenever I went out, and I was dreadfully afraid particularly when I was carrying milk or oil and knew that if I spilt it I should be severely punished); then in my dreams I decided that my father would at once get new clothes, that we should go to live in a splendid house. And here the grand house with the red curtains, and my meeting near it with my father who wanted to show me something in it, came to the assistance of my imagination, and it followed immediately in my conjectures that we should move into that house and should live in it in perpetual bliss, keeping a sort of perpetual holiday. From that time forth I used to look out of window in the evenings with intense curiosity at that house which seemed to me enchanted, recalling the crowd of visitors more grandly dressed than I had ever seen before; I imagined those strains of sweet music floating out of the windows, and watched the shadows flitting on the window curtains, and kept trying to guess what was going on there, and it always seemed to me that over there it was paradise and a perpetual holiday. I grew to hate our poor abode, the rags in which I went about; and one day when my mother scolded me and told me to get down from the window, to which I had climbed up as usual, the idea came into my head at once that she did not want me to look at that house, that she did not want me to think of it, that she disliked the thought of our happiness, that she wanted to prevent it... I looked at my mother intently and suspiciously all that evening.

And how could such unfeeling callousness in regard to a creature so continually suffering as my mother have arisen in me? It is only now that I understand what a

misery her life was, and I cannot think of her martyrdom without pain. Even then in the dark period of my strange childhood, in the period of this unnatural development, my heart often ached from pain and pity — and uneasiness, bewilderment and doubt lay heavily on my soul. Even then conscience was rising up within me, and often with distress and misery I felt my injustice towards my mother. But we had somehow become estranged from one another, and I cannot remember ever being affectionate to her. Now even the most trifling recollection lacerates and tears at my heart.

I remember once (of course what I am describing now is trivial, paltry, coarse, but it is just such reminiscences which torture me especially, and are imprinted upon my memory more poignantly than anything), one evening when my father was not at home, my mother sent me to the shop to buy her tea and sugar, but she kept hesitating, unable to decide, and counting over her coppers — the pitiful sum she could spend. She was calculating, I think, for half an hour, and seemed still unable to reckon it to her satisfaction. Moreover, there were moments when probably she sank into a sort of stupor. As I remember now, she kept talking on, reckoning in low measured tones, as though dropping her words accidentally; her lips and her cheeks were pale, her hands always trembled, and she always kept shaking her head when she was thinking in solitude.

"No, no need," she said, looking at me. "I had better go to bed. Eh? Are you asleep, Nyetochka?"

I did not answer; then she lifted up my head and looked at me, so gently, so caressingly, her face lighted up and glowed with such a motherly smile, that my heart ached and began beating fast. Besides, she had called me Nyetochka, which meant that she was feeling particularly fond of me. She had invented that name herself, lovingly transforming my name Anna into the diminutive Nyetochka, and when she called me that, it meant that she felt affectionate. I was touched, I longed to hug her, to nestle up to her and weep with her. And for a long time she stroked my head, poor woman, perhaps mechanically in the end, forgetting that she was fondling me, while she kept repeating: "My child, Anneta, Nyetochka." The tears were gushing from my eyes, but I made an effort and controlled myself. I was somehow stubborn in not displaying my feelings before her, though I was inwardly distressed. But that could not have been natural hard-heartedness in me. She could not have so turned me against her simply by her severity to me. No! I was corrupted by my fantastic exclusive love for my father.

I sometimes woke at night in my short little bed under the chilly quilt, and I was always frightened. Half asleep I remembered how, not long ago, when I was smaller, I slept with my mother and was not so frightened when I woke up at night; I had only to nestle up to her, shut my eyes and hug her tight, and I would go to sleep again at once. I still felt as though I could not help loving her in secret. I have noticed since that many children are abnormally unfeeling, and if they love anyone they love that one exclusively. That is how it was with me.

Sometimes there would be a deathlike silence in our garret for a whole week. My father and mother were weary of quarrelling, and I lived between them as before, always

silent, always brooding, always fretting and always struggling to arrive at something in my dreams. Watching them I fully grasped their attitude to one another. I understood the obscure never-ending antagonism between them, understood all the sorrow and all the stupefying influences of the disordered existence which had made our garret its home. Of course, I understood it without grasping cause or effect, I understood it, of course, only as far as I was capable of understanding. Sometimes on the long winter evenings, huddled in some corner, I would watch them eagerly for hours together and gaze into my father's face, trying all the while to guess what he was thinking about, what was interesting him. Then I was impressed and frightened by my mother. She kept walking up and down the room without stopping, for hours at a time, often even at night, in the attacks of sleeplessness from which she suffered; she would walk up and down whispering to herself as though she were alone in the room, flinging wide her arms or folding them across her bosom, or wringing her hands in terrible, never-ending misery. Sometimes tears streamed down her cheeks, tears which perhaps she herself did not understand. She was suffering from a very complicated disease which she neglected entirely.

I remember that I became more and more oppressed by my solitude and the silence I did not dare to break. I had been for a whole year living a conscious life, always thinking, dreaming and tormented in secret by unintelligible, obscure impulses which had suddenly sprung up in me. I was as wild as though I were in a forest. At last my father was the first to notice me; he called me to him and asked me why I stared at him so. I don't remember what answer I made. I remember he seemed to reflect, and said at last that next day he would bring me an alphabet and teach me to read. I looked forward to this alphabet with impatience and dreamed about it all night, with no clear idea what an alphabet was. At last next day my father really did begin to teach me. Grasping in a couple of words what was required of me, I learned rapidly, for I knew I should please him by doing so. This was the happiest time of my life then. When he praised me for my quickness, patted me on the head and kissed me, I began crying with delight at once. Little by little my father began to be fond of me; I grew bold enough to talk to him, and often we talked together for an hour without weariness, though sometimes I did not understand a word of what he said to me. But I was somehow afraid of him, afraid he might think I was dull with him, and so I did my very best to pretend to understand everything. To sit with me in the evenings became at last a habit with him. As soon as it began to get dark and he came home, I went to him at once with my reading-book. He would make me sit down on a little stool facing him, and after the lesson he would begin to read me a book. I did not understand a word of it, but I laughed continually, blinking to please him very much by doing so. I certainly did interest him, and it amused him to see my laughter. About this time, he began one evening telling me a story. It was the first story it had been my lot to hear. I sat as though spellbound, and burning with impatience as I followed the story, I was carried away to some other realm as I listened to him, and by the end of the tale I was in a perfect rapture. It was not that the story affected me so greatly, no; but I took

it all for truth, at once gave full rein to my fertile fancy, and mixed up reality with fiction. The house with the red curtains, too, at once rose before my imagination; then, I don't know in what way, my father who told me the story appeared as a character acting in it, as well as my mother who seemed to be preventing us going, I don't know where, and last, or rather first, I myself, with my marvellous day-dreams, with my fantastic brain full of wild impossible phantoms, took a part in it, too. All this was so muddled together in my head that it soon turned into a formless chaos, and for a time I lost all touch, all feeling of the present, of the actual, and lived in an unreal world. At that time I was dying with impatience to speak to my father of what was awaiting us in the future, what he was himself expecting, and where he would take me with him when at last we should leave our garret. For my part I was convinced that all this would soon come to pass, but how and in what form all this would be I could not tell, and worried myself racking my brains over it. At times — and it would happen particularly in the evenings — it seemed to me that in another minute father would beckon me on the sly, and call me out into the passage; unseen by my mother I would snatch up my reading-book as I went, and also our picture, a wretched lithograph which had been hanging unframed on the wall from time immemorial, and which I was quite determined to take with us, and we should run away in secret and never come back home to mother again. One day when mother was not at home I chose a moment when father was in a particularly good humour — that happened to him when he had just drunk wine — went up to him and began speaking about something with the intention of immediately turning the conversation to my treasured secret; and hugging him tight with a throbbing heart, frightened as though I were going to speak of something mysterious and terrible, I began, speaking disconnectedly and faltering over every word, to ask him: where we were going, whether it would be soon, what we should take with us, how we should live, and finally whether we were going to live in the house with the red curtains?

"House? Red curtains? What do you mean? What nonsense are you talking, silly?"

Then, more frightened than ever, I began explaining to him that when mother died we should not go on living in the garret, that he would take me away somewhere, that we should both be rich and happy, and assured him at last that he had promised me all this. And as I did so I was fully persuaded that my father really had spoken of it before, anyway I fancied it was so.

"Your mother? Dead? When your mother is dead?" he repeated, looking at me in amazement, changing his countenance somewhat, and knitting his thick grizzled eyebrows. "What are you saying, poor, foolish child?"

Then he began scolding me, and told me over and over again that I was a silly child, that I did not understand anything... and I don't remember what else, but he was very much upset.

I did not understand a word of his reproaches, I did not understand how it wounded him that I had listened to what he had said to my mother in anger and intense misery, had remembered his words and had brooded over them by myself. Whatever he was at

that time, however far his own madness had gone, yet all this must naturally have been a shock to him. Yet though I did not understand why he was angry, it made me horribly sad and miserable; I began to cry; it seemed to me that all that was awaiting us was so important that a silly child like me must not dare to talk of it. Moreover, although I did not understand this at the first word, yet I felt in an obscure way that I had wronged my mother. I was overcome by dread and horror, and doubt crept into my heart. Then, seeing that I was crying and miserable, he began comforting me, wiped away my tears with his sleeve, and told me not to cry. We sat for a little time in silence, however; he frowned and seemed to be pondering something, then began speaking to me again; but however much I tried to attend, everything he said seemed to me extremely obscure. From some words of that conversation which I have remembered to this day, I conclude that he explained to me that he was a great artist, that nobody understood him, and that he was a man of great talent. I remember, too, that, asking whether I understood, and receiving, of course, a satisfactory answer, he made me repeat "of talent", at which he laughed a little, for perhaps in the end it struck him as funny that he should have talked with me of a matter so important to him.

Our conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Karl Fyodoritch, and I laughed and grew cheerful again when father, pointing to him, said to me:

"Now Karl Fyodoritch, here, hasn't a ha'p'orth of talent!"

This Karl Fyodoritch was a very interesting person. I had seen so few people at that period of my life that I could not possibly forget him. I can picture him now: he was a German whose surname was Meyer, he was born in Germany and had come to Russia, set upon getting into a ballet. But he was a very poor dancer, so he could not get taken on for any part in which dancing was necessary, and was only employed as a super in the theatres. He played various dumb parts such as one of the suite of Fortinbras, or one of those knights of Verona who to the number of twenty flourish cardboard daggers and shout all at once, "We will die for our king!" But certainly no actor in the world was more passionately devoted to his parts than Karl Fyodoritch. The most dreadful misfortune and sorrow of his life was that he could not get into a ballet. He put the art of the ballet above every other, and was in his way as devoted to it as my father was to the violin. He had made friends with my father when they were both employed at the theatre, and the unsuccessful dancer had never given him up since. They saw each other very often, and together bewailed their hard lot and that their talents were not recognised.

The German was the most sentimental, soft-hearted man in the world, and he cherished for my stepfather the most ardent and disinterested affection; but father, I fancy, was not particularly attached to him, and only put up with his company for lack of any other. Moreover, father was so exclusive that he could not see that the art of the ballet was an art at all, and this wounded the poor German to tears. Knowing his weak spot, he always touched upon it, and laughed at the luckless Karl Fyodoritch when the latter grew hot and excited trying to refute him. I heard a great deal about Karl Fyodoritch later on from B., who always called him the Nuremberg skipjack. B.

told me a great deal about this friendship with my father; more than once they met, and after drinking a little, shed tears over their fate, over the fact that they were not recognised. I remember such interviews, I remember also that, looking at the two eccentric creatures, I began whimpering too, though I did not know why. This always happened when mother was not at home; the German was dreadfully frightened of her, and would always stand outside in the passage waiting till someone went out to him, and if he heard that mother was at home he ran downstairs again at once. He always brought some German poetry with him, and became intensely excited reading it aloud to us; and then recited it, translated into broken Russian for our benefit. This greatly amused father, and I laughed till I cried. But once they got hold of something in Russian over which they were both very enthusiastic, so that they almost always read it over when they met. I remember that it was a drama in verse by some celebrated Russian writer. I knew the first few lines of this drama so well that when I came across it many years afterwards I recognised it without difficulty. This drama treated of the troubles of a great artist, Gennaro or Giacobi, who cried on one page: "I am not recognised!" and on another, "I am famous!" or, "I have no talent!" and a few lines farther on, "I have talent!" All ended very pathetically. The play was, of course, a very poor one; but strange to say, it affected in the most naive and tragic way the two readers, who found in the leading character a great resemblance to themselves. I remember that sometimes Karl Fyodoritch was so ecstatic that he would leap up from his seat, run into the opposite corner of the room, and urgently, insistently, with tears in his eyes, beg father and me, whom he always called "Mademoiselle", at once upon the spot to judge between him and his fate and the public. Thereupon he would fall to dancing and executing various steps, crying out to us to tell him at once whether he was an artist or not, and whether anything could be said to the contrary — that is, that he had no talent. Father would at once grow merry, and wink at me on the sly as though to let me know that he would make fun of the German in a most amusing way. I was immensely diverted, but father would hold up his hand and I would control myself, choking with laughter. I cannot help laughing even now at the mere memory of it. I can see that poor Karl Fyodoritch now. He was a very little, extremely lean, grey-headed man, with a red hooked nose stained with snuff, and grotesque bow-legs; but in spite of that he seemed to be proud of their shape and wore tightly fitting trousers. When he stopped at the last caper in an attitude, holding out his hands to us and smiling as dancers smile on the stage when they have finished their steps, father for some moments remained silent as though he could not make up his mind to pronounce judgment, and purposely left the unrecognised dancer in his attitude so that the latter began swaying from side to side on one leg, doing his utmost to preserve his balance. At last father would glance towards me with a very serious face, as though inviting me to be an impartial witness of his judgment, and at the same time the timid imploring eyes of the dancer were fastened upon me.

"No, Karl Fyodoritch, you haven't done it!" father would say at last, pretending that it grieved him to utter the bitter truth.

Then a genuine groan broke from the chest of Karl Fyodoritch; but he recovered himself instantly, with still more rapid gesticulations begged our attention again, declared that he had been dancing on the wrong system, and besought us to criticise him once more. Then he ran off again to the other corner, and sometimes hopped so zealously that he knocked his head against the ceiling and bruised himself badly, but heroically bore the pain like a Spartan, again stopped in an attitude, again with a smile stretched out trembling hands to us, and again begged us to decide his fate. But father was relentless, and answered gloomily as before:

"No, Karl Fyodoritch, it seems it's your fate: you've not done it!"

Then I could restrain myself no longer and broke into peals of laughter in which my father joined. Karl Fyodoritch noticed at last that we were laughing at him, turned crimson with indignation, and with tears in his eyes, with intense though comic feeling which made me feel miserable afterwards on the poor fellow's account, said to father:

"You are a treacherous friend!"

Then he would snatch up his hat and run away from us, swearing by everything in the world that he would never come again. But these quarrels did not last long. A few days later he would come to see us again, and the reading of the celebrated drama would begin once more, once more tears would be shed, and once more the simple-hearted Karl Fyodoritch would ask us to judge between him and the public and his fate, only he would entreat us this time to judge seriously, as true friends should, and not to laugh at him.

One day mother sent me to the shop to make some purchase, and I came back carrying carefully the small silver change I had been given. As I went up the stairs I met my father, who was coming up from the yard. I laughed to him because I could not restrain my feeling when I saw him, and bending down to kiss me, he noticed the silver money in my hand... I had forgotten to say that I had studied the expression of his face so carefully that I could detect almost all his wishes at the first glance. When he was sad, I was racked with misery. He was most often and most acutely depressed when he had no money, and so could not get a drop of the drink to which he had accustomed himself. But at the moment when I met him on the stairs it seemed to me that something particular was passing in his mind. His lustreless eyes shifted uneasily; for the first moment he did not notice me; but when he saw the shining coins in my hand, he suddenly flushed, then turned pale, stretched out his hand to take the money from me, then at once drew it back. Evidently there was a struggle going on within him. Then apparently he mastered himself, told me to go upstairs, went down a few steps, but suddenly stopped and hurriedly called me. He was very much confused.

"Listen, Nyetochka," he said; "give me that money. I'll give it to you back. You will give it to Daddy, won't you? You are a good little thing, Nyetochka."

I felt that I had known this was coming. But for the first instant, the thought of mother's anger, timidity, and, above all, an instinctive shame on my own account and my father's restrained me from giving him the money. He saw that in a flash, and said hastily:

"Oh, you needn't, you needn't!..."

"No, no, Daddy, take it; I will say I lost it, that the children next door took it."

"Oh, very well, very well; I knew you were a clever girl," he said, smiling with quivering lips, no longer concealing his delight when he felt the money in his hands. "You are a kind girl, you are my little angel! There, let me kiss your hand."

Then he seized my hand and would have kissed it, but I quickly pulled it away. I was overcome by a sort of pity, and began being more and more agonisingly ashamed. I ran upstairs in a sort of panic, abandoning my father without saying good-bye to him. When I went into the room my cheeks were burning and my heart was throbbing with an overwhelming sensation I had never known till then. However, I had the boldness to tell my mother that I had dropped the money in the snow and could not find it. I expected a beating at least, but it did not come off. Mother certainly was beside herself with distress at first, for we were dreadfully poor. She began scolding me, but at once seemed to change her mind and left off, only observing that I was a clumsy careless girl, and that it seemed I did not love her much since I took so little care of her property. This observation hurt me more than a beating would have done. But mother knew me. She had noticed my sensibility, which often reached the pitch of morbid irritability, and thought by bitter reproaches for not loving her to impress me more strongly and make me more careful in the future.

Towards dusk, when father was to come home, I waited for him as usual in the passage. This time I was in a terrible state of mind. My feelings were troubled by something which sickeningly tortured my conscience. At last my father came in, and I was greatly relieved at his coming. I seemed to think it would make me feel better. He had already been drinking, but on seeing me at once assumed a mysterious and embarrassed air; and drawing me aside into a corner, looking timidly towards our door, took out of his pocket a cake he had bought and began in a whisper bidding me never to take money again and hide it from mother, that that was bad and shameful and very wrong; that it had been done this time because Daddy needed the money very much, but that he would give it back; that I could say afterwards I had found it again. And to take from mother was shameful, and that for the future I must not dream of it, and that if I were obedient for the future he would buy me some cakes again. In the end he even added that I must feel for mother, that mother was so ill and so poor, that she worked for us all. I listened in terror, trembling all over, and tears rushed into my eyes. I was so overwhelmed that I could not say a word, and could not move from the spot. At last, he went into the room, told me not to cry nor say anything about it to mother. I noticed that he was fearfully upset himself. All the evening I was in a panic, and did not dare to look at him or go near him. He, too, evidently avoided my eyes. Mother was walking up and down the room and was talking to herself as usual, as though she were in a dream. That day she was feeling worse, she had had some sort of attack. At last my mental sufferings began to make me feverish. When night came on I could not go to sleep. I was tormented by delirious dreams. At last I could not bear it, and began crying bitterly. My sobs wakened my mother; she called to me and asked

me what was the matter. I did not answer, but wept more bitterly. Then she lighted a candle, came up to me and began trying to soothe me, thinking I was frightened by something I had dreamed. "Oh, you silly little thing," she said, "you still cry when you have a bad dream. Come, give over!" And then she kissed me, saying I should sleep with her. But I would not, and dared not hug her or go to her. My heart was torn in unimaginable tortures. I longed to tell her all about it. I was on the point of doing so, but the thought of father and his prohibition restrained me. "Oh, you poor little Nyetochka!" said my mother, tucking me up in my bed and covering me up with her old jacket as she noticed that I was shivering with feverish chilliness. "I am afraid you will be an invalid like me!" Then she looked at me so mournfully that I could not bear her eyes, I frowned and turned away. I don't remember how I fell asleep, but half awake I heard my poor mother trying for a long time to lull me to sleep. I had never suffered such anguish before. My heart ached painfully. Next morning I felt better. I talked to my father without referring to what had happened the day before, for I divined beforehand that this would please him. He immediately became very cheerful, for he had been frowning whenever he looked at me. Now a sort of joy, an almost childish satisfaction came over him at my light-hearted air. My mother soon went out, and then he could restrain himself no longer. He began kissing me, so that I was almost hysterically delighted and laughed and cried together. At last he said that he wanted to show me something very nice, that I should be very much pleased to see, for my being such a good and clever girl. Then he unbuttoned his waistcoat and took out a key, which he had hanging round his neck on a black cord. Then looking mysteriously at me as though he wanted to read in my face all the delight that in his opinion I must be feeling, he opened a chest and carefully took out of it a black box of peculiar shape which I had never seen before. He took up this box with a sort of timidity and was completely transformed; the laughter vanished from his face, and was succeeded by a solemn expression. At last he opened the mysterious box with a key and took out of it a thing which I had never seen before — a thing, at the first glance, of a very queer shape. He took it in his hands carefully, with a look of reverence, and said that this was his violin, his instrument. Then he began saying a great deal to me in a quiet solemn voice; but I did not understand him, and only retained in my memory the phrases I knew already — that he was an artist, that he was a genius, that he would one day play on the violin, and that at last we should all be rich and should attain some great happiness. Tears came into his eyes and ran down his cheeks. I was very much touched. At last he kissed his violin and gave it to me to kiss. Seeing that I wanted to look at it more closely, he led me to my mother's bed and put the violin in my hand, but I saw that he was trembling with fear that I might break it. I took the violin in my hands and touched the strings, which gave forth a faint sound.

"It's music," I said, looking at father.

"Yes, yes, music," he repeated, rubbing his hands joyfully. "You are a clever child, a good child!"

But in spite of his praise and his delight, I saw that he was uneasy over his violin, and I was frightened too — I made haste to give it back to him. The violin was put back in the box with the same precaution, the box was locked up and put back in the chest; father stroked me on the head again, and promised to show me the violin every time I was as now, clever, good and obedient. So the violin dispelled our common sadness. Only in the evening as father was going out he whispered to me to remember what he had told me yesterday.

This was how I grew up in our garret, and little by little my love — no, I should rather say passion, for I do not know a word strong enough to express fully the overwhelming feeling for my father which was an anguish to myself — grew into something like a morbid obsession. I had only one enjoyment — thinking and dreaming of him; only one desire — to do anything that would give him the slightest satisfaction. How often have I waited on the stairs for him to come in, often shivering and blue with cold, simply to know one instant sooner of his arrival and to look at him a little sooner. I used to be almost frantic with delight when he bestowed the slightest caress on me. And meanwhile it often distressed me dreadfully that I was so obstinately cold with my poor mother; there were moments when I was torn by pity and misery as I looked at her. I could not be unmoved by their everlasting hostility, and I had to choose between them. I had to take the side of one or of the other, and I took the side of this half-crazy man, solely from his being so pitiful, so humiliated in my eyes, and from his having so incomprehensibly impressed my imagination from the beginning. But who can tell? Perhaps I attached myself to him because he was very strange even to look at, and not so grave and gloomy as my mother; because he was almost mad, and often there was something of buffoonery, of childish make- believe about him; and lastly, because I was less afraid of him and indeed had less respect for him than for my mother. He was, as it were, more on my level. Little by little I felt that the ascendancy was even on my side, and that I dominated him a little, that I was necessary to him. I was inwardly proud of this, inwardly triumphant, and realising that I was necessary to him, even played with him at times. This strange devotion of mine was indeed not unlike being in love... But it was not destined to last long: a short time afterwards I lost my father and mother. Their life ended in a terrible catastrophe which is deeply and painfully printed upon my memory. This is how it happened.

Chapter III

JUST at the time all Petersburg was excited by a great piece of news. The rumour went about that the famous S. had arrived in the town. The whole musical world of Petersburg was astir. Singers, actors, poets, artists, musical people, and even those who were not at all musical, but with modest pride declared that they did not know one note from another, rushed with eager enthusiasm to buy tickets. The hall could not seat a tenth of the enthusiasts who were able to pay twenty-five roubles for a ticket;

but the European fame of S., his old age crowned with laurels, the unflagging freshness of his talent, the rumours that of late years he rarely took up the bow for the benefit of the public, the assertion that he was making the tour of Europe for the last time and would give up playing altogether afterwards, all produced an effect. In fact, the sensation was immense.

I have mentioned already that the arrival of any new violinist, of a celebrity of any note, had a most unpleasant effect on my stepfather. He was always one of the first to hasten to hear the new arrival, so as to discover quickly the full extent of his merits. He was often made really ill by the applause bestowed upon the newcomer, and was only pacified when he could discover defects in the new violinist's playing, and greedily circulated his opinion wherever he could. The poor madman recognised in the whole world but one musical genius, and that genius was, of course, himself. But the talk about the arrival of S. the musical genius had a shattering effect upon him. I must observe that for the previous ten years Petersburg had not heard a single famous musician, even of less distinction; consequently my father could have no conception of the play of European musicians of the first rank.

I have been told that at the first rumours of S.'s visit, my father was seen again behind the scenes of the theatre. He is said to have seemed extremely agitated, and to have inquired uneasily of S. and the approaching concert. It was a long time since he had been seen behind the scenes, and his appearance there made quite a sensation. Someone wanted to tease him, and with a challenging air said: "Now, Yegor Petrovitch, old man, you are going to hear something very different from ballet music, something that will make your life not worth living, I expect." I am told that he turned pale when he heard that jeer, but answered with an hysterical smile: "We shall see; far-off bells always ring sweet. S., you know, has only been in Paris, and the French have made a fuss of him, and we know what the French are!" And so on. There was a sound of laughter round him; the poor fellow was offended, but, controlling himself, added that he would say nothing; however, that we should see, that we should know, that the day after tomorrow was not long to wait, and that all doubts would soon be solved.

B. tells that just before dusk the same evening he met Prince X., a well-known musical amateur, a man with a deep love and understanding of music. They walked along together, talking of the newly arrived star, when all at once at a street-turning B. caught sight of my father, who was standing before a shop window, looking intently at a placard in it with an announcement in big letters of S.'s concert.

"Do you see that man?" said B., pointing to my father.

"Who is he?" asked Prince X.

"You have heard of him already. That's Yefimov, of whom I have talked to you more than once, and on whose behalf you interested yourself on one occasion."

"Ah, that's interesting," said Prince X. "You talked a great deal about him. I am told he is very interesting. I should like to hear him."

"That's not worth while," answered B., "and it's painful. I don't know how it would be with you, but he always rends my heart. His life is a terrible, hideous tragedy. I feel

for him deeply, and however abject he may be, my sympathy for him is not extinct. You say, prince, that he must be interesting. That is true, but he makes too painful an impression. To begin with, he is mad, and then three crimes lie at his door, for besides his own he has ruined two existences — his wife's and his daughter's. I know him. It would kill him on the spot if he realised his crime. But the whole horror of it is that for the last eight years he has almost realised it, and for eight years he has been struggling with his conscience on the brink of recognising it, not almost, but fully."

"You say he is poor?" said Prince X.

"Yes; but poverty is almost good fortune for him now, because it is an excuse. He can assure everyone now that poverty is the only thing that hinders him, and that if he were rich he would have leisure and no anxiety, and it would be seen at once how far he was a musician. He married with the strange hope that the thousand roubles his wife had could help to give him a standing. He behaved like a dreamer, like a poet, but he has always behaved like that all his life. Do you know what he has been continually saying for the last eight years? He asserts that his wife is responsible for his poverty, that she hinders him. He has folded his hands and won't work. But if you were to take his wife away he would be the most miserable creature on earth. Here, he hasn't touched his violin for several years — do you know why? Because every time he takes the bow in his hand, he is inwardly forced to admit that he is no good, a nonentity, not a musician. Now while his fiddle is laid aside he has a faint remote hope that that is false. He is a dreamer. He thinks that all at once by some miracle he will become the most celebrated man in the world. His motto is: 'Aut Caesar, aut nihil,' as though one could become Caesar all at once, in one minute. He thirsts for fame. And if such a feeling becomes the mainspring of an artist's activity, then he ceases to be an artist; for he has lost the chief instinct of the artist, that is, the love for art simply because it is art and nothing else, not fame. With S., on the other hand, it is quite the contrary: when he takes up his bow nothing in the world exists for him but music. Next to his violin money is the chief thing for him, and fame only comes third, I think. But he hasn't worried himself much about that... Do you know what is absorbing that luckless fellow now?" added B., pointing to Yefimov. "He is engrossed by the most stupid, most trivial, most pitiful and most absurd anxiety in the world — that is, whether he is superior to S. or S. is superior to him — nothing less, for he is still persuaded that he is the foremost musician in the world. Convince him that he is not a musical genius, and I assure you he would die on the spot as though struck down by a thunderbolt; for it is terrible to part with a fixed idea to which one has sacrificed one's whole life, and which anyway rests on a deep and real foundation, for he had a genuine vocation at first."

"But it will be interesting to see what happens to him when he hears S.," observed Prince X.

"Yes," said B. thoughtfully. "But, no; he would recover at once; his madness is stronger than the truth, and he would at once invent some evasion."

"You think so," said Prince X.

At that moment they came up to my father. He was trying to pass them unnoticed, but B. stopped him and began speaking to him. B. asked him whether he would be at S.'s concert. My father answered indifferently that he did not know, that he had business of more importance than any concerts and any foreign celebrities; but, however, he would wait and see, and if he had an hour free — he might perhaps go in. Then he looked rapidly at B. and Prince X. and smiled mistrustfully, then snatched at his hat, nodded, and walked by, saying he was in a hurry.

But even the day before, I was aware of my father's anxiety. I did not know exactly what it was that was worrying him, but I saw that he was terribly uneasy; even mother noticed it. She was extremely ill at the time, and could scarcely put one foot before the other. Father was continually coming in and going out. In the morning three or four visitors, old companions in the orchestra, came to see him; at which I was greatly surprised, as except Karl Fyodoritch we scarcely ever saw anyone, and all our acquaintances had dropped us since father had quite given up the theatre. At last Karl Fyodoritch ran in panting and brought a poster. I listened and watched attentively, and all this troubled me as much as though I alone were responsible for all this commotion and for the uneasiness I read on my father's face. I longed to understand what they were talking about, and for the first time I heard the name of S. Then I grasped that the sum of fifteen roubles at least was necessary in order to see this S. I remember, too, that father could not refrain from saying with a wave of his hand that he knew these foreign prodigies, these unique geniuses, he knew S. too; that they were all Jews running after Russian money, because the Russians in their simplicity would believe in any nonsense, and especially anything the French made a fuss about. I knew already what was meant by the words, not a genius. The visitors began laughing, and soon all of them went away, leaving father thoroughly out of humour. I realised that he was angry with S. for some reason, and to propitiate him and to distract his attention I went up to the table, took up the poster, began spelling it out and read aloud the name of S. Then laughing and looking towards father, who was sitting on a chair brooding, said: "I expect he is another one like Karl Fyodoritch: I expect he won't hit it off either." Father started as though he were frightened, tore the poster out of my hands, shouted at me, stamped, and snatching up his hat was about to go out of the room, but came back at once, called me out into the passage, kissed me, and with uneasiness with some secret dread began saying to me that I was a good, clever child, that he was sure I had not meant to wound him, that he was reckoning on me to do him a great service, but what it was exactly he did not say. Moreover, it was bitter to me to listen to him; I saw that his words and his endearments were not genuine, and all this had a shattering effect on me.

Next day at dinner — it was the day before the concert — father seemed utterly crushed. He was completely changed, and was incessantly looking at mother. At last, to my surprise, he actually began talking to mother. I was surprised, because he hardly ever said anything to her. After dinner he began being particularly attentive to me; he was continually on various pretexts calling me into the passage and, looking about

him as though he were frightened of being caught, he kept patting me on the head, kissing me and telling me that I was a good child, that I was an obedient child, that he was sure I loved my Daddy and would do what he was going to ask me. All this made me unbearably miserable. At last, when for the tenth time he called me out into the passage, the mystery was explained. With a miserable, harassed face, looking away uneasily, he asked me whether I knew where mother had put the twenty-five roubles she had brought in the morning before. I was ready to die with terror when I heard this question. But at that moment someone made a noise on the stairs, and father, alarmed, abandoned me and ran out. It was evening when he came back, confused, sad, and careworn; he sat down in silence and began looking at me with something like joy in his face. A feeling of dread came over me, and I avoided his eyes. At last mother, who had been in bed all day, called me, gave me some coppers and sent me to the shop to buy tea and sugar. We rarely drank tea. Mother permitted herself this luxury, as it was for our means, only when she felt ill and feverish. I took the money, and as soon as I got into the passage set off to run as though I were afraid of being overtaken. But what I had foreseen happened: father overtook me in the street and turned me back to the stairs.

"Nyetochka," he said in a shaking voice. "My darling! Listen: give me that money and to-morrow I'll..."

"Daddy! Daddy!" I cried, falling on my knees and imploring him. "Daddy! I can't! I mustn't! Mother needs the tea... I mustn't take it from mother, I mustn't! I'll get it another time."

"So you won't? you won't?" he whispered in a sort of frenzy. "So you won't love me? Oh, very well. I shall have nothing more to do with you, then. You can stay with mother, and I shall go away and shan't take you with me. Do you hear, you wicked girl? Do you hear?"

"Daddy!" I cried, filled with horror. "Take the money. What can I do now!" I cried, wringing my hands and clutching at the skirts of his coat. "Mother will cry, mother will scold me again."

Apparently he had not expected so much resistance, yet he took the money. At last, unable to endure my sobs and lamentations, he left me on the stairs and ran down. I went upstairs, but my strength failed me at the door of our garret; I did not dare to go in. Every feeling in me was revolted and shattered. I hid my face in my hands and ran to the window, as I had done when first I heard my father say he wished for my mother's death. I was in a sort of stupor, in a state of numbness, and kept starting as I listened to every sound on the stairs. As last I heard someone coming rapidly upstairs. It was he, I recognised his step.

"You are here?" he said in a whisper.

I flew to him.

"There," he said, thrusting the money into my hand; "there! Take it back. I am not your father now, do you hear? I don't care to be your father. You love mother more than me! So go to mother! But I don't want to have anything to do with you!" As he

said this he pushed me away and ran downstairs again. Weeping, I flew to overtake him.

"Daddy! Dear Daddy! I will be obedient," I cried. "I love you more than mother. Take the money back, take it!"

But he did not hear me; he had vanished. All that evening I felt more dead than alive, and shivered as though in a fever. I remember mother said something to me, called me to her; I was hardly conscious, I could hear and see nothing. It ended in violent hysterics; I began crying and screaming; mother was frightened and did not know what to do. She took me into her bed, and I don't remember how I fell asleep, with my arms round her neck, trembling and starting with fright at every instant. The whole night passed like that. In the morning I woke up very late, mother was no longer in the room. At that time she went out every day to her work. There was someone with father, and they were both talking in loud voices. I had to wait till the visitor was gone; and when we were left alone I flew to my father and begged him, sobbing, to forgive me for what had happened the day before.

"But will you be a good girl as you were before?" he asked me grimly.

"Yes, Daddy, yes," I answered. "I will tell you where mother's money is put. It was lying yesterday in a box in the little chest."

"It was? Where?" he cried, starting, and got up from his chair. 'Where was it?"

"It's locked up, Father!" I said. "Wait a little: in the evening when mother goes to get change, for there are not coppers left, I saw."

"I must have fifteen roubles, Nyetochka. Do you hear? Only fifteen roubles! Get it me to-day; I will bring it all back to you to-morrow. And I will go directly and buy you some sugar-candy, I wall buy you some nuts... I will buy you a doll too... and to-morrow again, and I will bring you little treats every day if you will be a good girl."

"You needn't, Daddy, you needn't! I don't want treats. I won't eat them, I shall give them you back!" I cried, choking with tears all of a sudden, for my heart seemed bursting. I felt at that moment that he had no pity for me, and that he did not love me because he saw how I loved him, but thought that I was ready to serve him for the sake of treats. At that moment I, a child, understood him through and through, and felt that that understanding had wounded me for ever, that I could not love him as before, that I had lost the old daddy. He was in a kind of ecstasy over my promise, he saw that I was ready to do anything for him, that I had done everything for him, and Gods knows how much that "everything" was to me then. I knew what that money meant to my poor mother, I knew that she might be ill with distress at losing it, and remorse was crying aloud in me and rending my heart. But he saw nothing; he thought of me as though I were a child of three, while I understood it all. His delight knew no bounds; he kissed me, tried to coax me not to cry, promised that that very day he would leave mother and go off somewhere — meaning, I suppose, to flatter the daydream that never left me. He took a poster out of his pocket, began assuring me that the man he was going to see to-day was his enemy, his mortal enemy, but that his enemies would not succeed. He was exactly like a child himself as he talked to me

about his enemies. Noticing that I was not smiling as usual when he talked to me, and was listening to him in silence, he took up his hat and went out of the room, for he was in a hurry to go off somewhere; but as he went out he kissed me again and nodded to me with a smile, as though he were not quite sure of me, and, as it were, trying to prevent my changing my mind.

I have said already that he was like a madman; but that had been apparent the day before. He needed the money to get a ticket for the concert which was to decide everything for him. He seemed to feel beforehand that this concert was to decide his fate; but he was so beside himself that the day before he had tried to take those few coppers from me as though he could get a ticket with them. His strange condition showed itself even more distinctly at dinner. He simply could not sit still, and did not touch a morsel; he was continually getting up from his seat and sitting down again, as though he were hesitating. At one moment he would snatch up his hat as though he were going off somewhere, then suddenly he became strangely absent-minded, kept whispering something to himself, then suddenly glanced at me, winked, made some sign to me as though impatient to get the money as soon as possible, and was angry with me for not having obtained it yet. My mother even noticed his strange behaviour, and looked at him in surprise. I felt as though I were under sentence of death. Dinner was over; I huddled in a corner and, shivering as though I were in a fever, counted the minutes to the hour when mother usually sent me to the shop. I have never spent more agonising hours in my life; they will live in my memory for ever. What feelings did I not pass through in my imagination! There are moments in which you go through more in your inner consciousness than in whole years of actual life. I felt that I was doing something wicked; he had himself helped my good instincts when, like a coward, he had thrust me into evil-doing the first time, and frightened by it had explained to me that I had done very wrong. How could he fail to see how hard it is to deceive an impressionable nature that had already felt and interpreted much good and evil? I understood, of course, what the horrible extremity was that drove him once more to thrust me into vice, to sacrifice my poor defenceless childhood, and risk upsetting my unstable conscience again. And now, huddled in my corner, I wondered to myself why he had promised me rewards for what I had made up my mind to do of my own accord. New sensations, new impulses, unknown till then, new questions rose up crowding upon my mind, and I was tortured by these questions. Then all at once I began thinking about mother; I pictured her distress at the loss of her last earnings. At last mother laid down the work which she was doing with an effort and called me. I trembled and went to her. She took some money out of the chest of drawers, and as she gave it me, she said: “Run along, Nyetochka, only God forbid that they should give you short change as they did the other day; and don’t lose it, whatever happens.” I looked with an imploring face at my father, but he nodded and smiled at me approvingly, and rubbed his hands with impatience. The clock struck six, and the concert was at seven. He had had much to suffer in those hours of suspense too.

I stopped on the stairs waiting for him. He was so excited and agitated that without any precaution he ran after me at once. I gave him the money; it was dark on the stairs and I could not see his face, but I felt that he was trembling all over as he took the money. I stood as though turned to stone, and did not move from the spot. I only came to myself when he sent me upstairs again to fetch his hat.

"Daddy!... Surely... aren't you coming with me?" I asked in a breaking voice, thinking of my last hope — his protection.

"No... you had better go alone... eh? Wait a minute, wait a minute," he cried, catching himself up. "Wait a minute, I will get you something nice directly, only you go in first and bring my hat here."

I felt as though an icy hand had been laid upon my heart. I shrieked, pushed him away and rushed upstairs. When I went into the room my face was full of horror, and if I had tried to say that I had been robbed of the money mother would have believed me. But I could say nothing at that moment. In a paroxysm of convulsive despair I threw myself across my mother's bed and hid my face in ray hands. A minute later the door creaked timidly and father came in. He had come for his hat.

"Where is the money?" cried my mother, suddenly guessing that something extraordinary had happened. "Where is the money? Speak, speak!" Then she snatched me up from the bed and stood me in the middle of the room.

I stood mute with my eyes on the floor; I scarcely understood what was happening to me and what they were doing to me.

"Where is the money?" she cried again, leaving me and suddenly turning on father, who had caught up his hat. "Where is the money?" she repeated. "Ah! She has given it to you. Godless wretch! You have murdered me! You have destroyed me! So you will ruin her too? A child! Her? Her? No, you shall not go off like that!"

And in one instant she had flown to the door, locked it on the inside and taken the key.

"Speak! Confess!" she said to me in a voice scarcely audible from emotion. "Tell me all about it! Speak! Speak, or I don't know what I shall do to you."

She seized my hands and wrung them as she questioned me. At that instant I vowed to be silent and not say a word about father, but timidly raised my eyes to him for the last time... One look, one word from him, such as I was expecting and praying for in my heart — and I should have been happy, in spite of any agony, any torture... But, my God! With a callous threatening gesture he commanded me to be silent, as though I could be afraid of any other threat at that moment! There was a lump in my throat, my breath failed me, my legs gave way under me, and I fell senseless on the floor... I had a second nervous attack like the one the day before.

I came to myself when there was a sudden knock at the door of our garret. Mother unlocked the door, and saw a man in livery who, coming into the room and looking round in amazement at all three of us, asked for the musician Yefimov. My stepfather introduced himself. Then the footman gave him a note and announced that he came

from B., who was at that moment at Prince X.'s. In the envelope lay an invitation ticket to S.'s concert.

The arrival of a footman in gorgeous livery who mentioned the name of Prince X. as his master, who had sent on purpose to fetch Yefimov, a poor musician — all this instantly made a great impression on my mother. I have mentioned already when describing her character that the poor woman still loved my father. And now in spite of eight years of perpetual misery and suffering her heart was still unchanged, she still could love him! God knows, perhaps at this moment she imagined a complete change in his fortunes. Even the faintest shadow of hope had an influence on her. How can one tell, perhaps she, too, was a little infected by her crazy husband's unshakable self-confidence. And indeed it would have been impossible that his self-confidence should not have had some influence on a weak woman, and on Prince X.'s attention she might instantly build a thousand plans for him. In an instant she was ready to turn to him again; she was ready to forgive him for all her life, even to overlook his last crime, the sacrifice of her only child, and in a rush of renewed enthusiasm, in a rush of new hope, to reduce that crime to an ordinary act, an act of cowardice to which he had been driven by poverty, his degraded life, and his desperate position. Everything with her was impulsive, and in an instant she had forgiveness and boundless compassion for her ruined husband.

My father began bustling about; he, too, was impressed by this attention from Prince X. and B. He turned straight away to mother, whispered something to her, and she went out of the room. She came back two minutes later, having changed the money, and father immediately gave a silver rouble to the messenger, who went away with a polite bow. Meanwhile mother, after going out for a minute, brought an iron, got out her husband's best shirt-front and began ironing it. She herself tied round his neck a white cambric cravat which had been preserved from time immemorial in his wardrobe, together with his black — by now very shabby — dress-coat which had been made for him when he was in the orchestra of a theatre. When his toilet was complete, father took his hat, but as he was going out asked for a glass of water; he was pale, and sat down on a chair for a minute, feeling faint. I had recovered sufficiently to hand him the water; perhaps the feeling of hostility had stolen back again into mother's heart and cooled her first enthusiasm.

Father went away; we were left alone. I crouched in the corner, and for a long time watched my mother in silence. I had never before seen her in such excitement; her lips were quivering, her pale cheeks suddenly glowed, and from time to time she trembled all over. At last her misery began to find an outlet in complaining, in stifled sobs and lamentation.

"It is all my fault, my fault, wretched mother that I am!" she said, talking to herself. "What will become of her? What will become of her when I die?" she went on, standing still in the middle of the room, as though thunderstruck by the very thought. "Nyetochka! my child! My poor little child! Unhappy child!" she said, taking me by the hand and embracing me convulsively. "How will you be left after I am dead, when even

now I can't educate you, look after you and watch over you as I ought? Ah, you don't understand me! Do you understand? Will you remember what I have just said to you, Nyetochka? Will you remember it in the future?"

"I will, mother, I will," I said, clasping my hands and beseeching her.

She held me tight in a long embrace, as though trembling at the very thought of parting from me. My heart was bursting.

"Mammy! Mammy!" I said, sobbing. "Why is it... Why is it you don't love Daddy?" and my sobs prevented my finishing.

A groan broke from her bosom. Then in a new rush of terrible misery she began walking up and down the room.

"My poor, poor child! And I did not notice how she was growing up; she knows, she knows all about it! My God! What an impression, what an example!" And again she wrung her hands in despair.

Then she came up to me and with frenzied love kissed me, kissed my hands, bathed them with tears, sought my forgiveness... I have never seen such suffering... At last she seemed exhausted, and fell into apathy. So passed a whole hour. Then she got up, weary and exhausted, and told me to go bed. I went off into my corner, wrapped myself up in the quilt, but could not get to sleep. I was worried about her and I was worried about father. I awaited his return with impatience. I was possessed by a kind of terror at the thought of him. Half an hour later mother took a candle and came up to me to see whether I was asleep. To soothe her I shut my eyes tight and pretended to be asleep. After looking at me she went very quietly to the cupboard, opened it, and poured herself out a glass of wine. She drank it and went to sleep, leaving a candle alight on the table and the door unlocked, as she always did when father might come in late.

I lay in a sort of stupor, but sleep would not come to me.

As soon as I had closed my eyes, I woke up again trembling at some horrible vision. My misery grew more acute every minute. I wanted to cry out, but the scream died away in my breast. At last, late in the night, I heard our door open. I don't remember how long it was afterwards, but when I opened my eyes I saw father. It seemed to me that he was fearfully pale. He was sitting in a chair close to the door, and seemed to be lost in thought. There was a deathly stillness in the room. The guttering candle shed a mournful light over our abode.

I watched him a long time, but still father did not move from his seat; he was sitting motionless, still in the same position, with his head bowed, and his hands pressed rigidly against his knees. Several times I attempted to call to him, but could not. My state of numb stupor persisted. At last he suddenly came to himself, raised his head and got up from his chair. He stood for some minutes in the middle of the room as though he were making some decision; then suddenly went up to my mother's bed, listened, and assuring himself that she was asleep, went to the chest where he kept his violin.

He unlocked the chest, brought out the black violin case and put it on the table; then looked about him again. His eyes had a lustreless and wandering look, such as I had never seen in them before.

He was about to take up the violin, but at once leaving it went back and shut the door; then noticing the open cupboard, went stealthily to it, saw the glass and the wine, poured some out and drank it. Then for the third time he took up the violin, but for the third time put it down and went up to mother's bed. Rigid with terror, I watched to see what would happen.

He listened for a very long time, then put the quilt over her face and began feeling her with his hand. I started. He bent down once more and almost put his head to her, but when he got up the last time there seemed a gleam of a smile on his fearfully white face. He quietly and carefully covered the sleeping figure with the quilt, covered her head, her feet and I began trembling with a terror I did not understand; I felt frightened for mother, I felt terrified by her deep sleep, and I looked with uneasiness at the immovable angular fine of her limbs under the quilt... Like lightning the fearful thought flashed through me!

When he had finished all these preliminaries he went back to the cupboard again and drank off the rest of the wine. He was trembling all over as he went to the table. His face was unrecognisable, it was so white. Then he took up the violin again. I saw the violin and knew what it was, but now I expected something awful, terrible, monstrous... I shuddered at the first note. Father began playing, but the notes came, as it were, jerkily, he kept stopping as though he were recalling something; at last with a harassed agonised face put down his bow and looked strangely at the bed. Something there still troubled him. He went up to the bed again... I did not miss a single movement he made, and almost swooning with a feeling of horror, watched him.

All at once he began hurriedly groping for something, and again the same fearful thought flashed through me like lightning. I wondered why mother slept so soundly. How was it she did not wake when he touched her face with his hand? At last I saw him getting together all the clothes he could. He took mother's pelisse, his old frock-coat, his dressing-gown, even the clothes that I had thrown off when I went to bed, so that he covered mother completely and hid her under the pile thrown on her. She still lay motionless, not stirring a limb.

She was sleeping soundly.

He seemed to breathe more freely when he had finished his task. This time nothing hindered him, but yet he was still uneasy. He moved the candle and stood with his face towards the door, so as not even to look towards the bed. At last he took the violin, and with a despairing gesture drew his bow across it... The music began.

But it was not music... I remember everything distinctly; to the last moment I remembered everything that caught my attention at the time. No, this was not music such as I have heard since. They were not the notes of the violin, but some terrible voice seemed to be resounding for the first time in our room. Either my impressions were abnormal and due to delirium, or my senses had been so affected by all I had

witnessed and were prepared for terrible and agonising impressions — but I am firmly convinced that I heard groans, the cry of a human voice, weeping. Utter despair flowed forth in these sounds; and at the end, when there resounded the last awful chord which seemed to combine all the horror of lamentation, the very essence of torment, of hopeless despair, I could not bear it — I began trembling, tears spurted from my eyes, and rushing at father with a fearful, despairing shriek, I clutched at his hands. He uttered a cry and dropped the violin.

He stood for a minute as though bewildered. At last his eyes began darting and straying from side to side, he seemed to be looking for something; suddenly he snatched up the violin, brandished it above me, and... another minute and he would perhaps have killed me on the spot.

"Daddy!" I shouted at him; "Daddy!"

He trembled like a leaf when he heard my voice, and stepped back a couple of paces.

"Oh, so you are still left! So it's not all over yet! So you are still left with me!" he shouted, lifting me in the air above his shoulders.

"Daddy!" I cried again. "For God's sake don't terrify me! I am frightened! Oh!''

My wail impressed him; he put me down on the ground gently, and for a minute looked at me without speaking, as though recognising and remembering something. At last, as though at some sudden revulsion, as though at some awful thought, tears gushed from his lustreless eyes; he bent down and began looking intently in my face.

"Daddy," I said to him, racked by terror, "don't look like that! Let us go away from here! Let us make haste and go away! Let us go, let us run away!"

"Yes, we'll run away, we'll run away. It's high time. Come along, Nyetochka. Make haste, make haste!" And he rushed about as though he had only now grasped what he must do. He looked hurriedly around, and seeing mother's handkerchief on the ground, picked it up and put it in his pocket. Then he saw her cap, and picked that up too and put it in his pocket, as though preparing for a long journey and putting together everything he would want.

I got my clothes on in an instant, and in haste I too began snatching up everything which I fancied necessary for the journey.

"Is everything ready, everything?" asked my father. "Is everything ready? Make haste! make haste!"

I hurriedly tied up my bundle, threw a kerchief on my head, and we were about to set off when the idea occurred to me that I must take the picture which was hanging on the wall. Father instantly agreed to this. Now he was quiet, spoke in a whisper, and only urged me to make haste and start. The picture hung very high up. Together we brought a chair, put a stool on it, and clambering on it, after prolonged efforts, took it down. Then everything was ready for our journey. He took me by the hand, and we had almost started when father suddenly stopped me. He rubbed his forehead for some minutes as though trying to remember something which had not been done. At last he seemed to find what he wanted; he felt for the key which lay under mother's

pillow and began hurriedly looking for something in the chest of drawers. At last he came back to me and brought me some money he had found in the box.

"Here, take this, take care of it," he whispered to me. Don't lose it, remember, remember!"

At first he put the money in my hand, then took it back and thrust it in the bosom of my dress. I remembered that I shuddered when that silver touched my body, and it seemed that only then I understood what money meant. Now we were ready again, but all at once he stopped me again.

"Nyetochka!" he said to me, as though reflecting with an effort, "my child, I have forgotten... What is it?... I can't remember... Yes, yes, I have found it, I remember!... Come here, Nyetochka!"

He led me to the corner where the holy image stood, and told me to kneel down.

"Pray, my child, pray! You will feel better!... Yes, really it will be better," he whispered, pointing to the ikon, and looking at me strangely. "Say your prayers," he said in an imploring voice.

I dropped on my knees, and clasping my hands, full of horror and despair which by now had gained complete possession of me, I sank on the floor and lay there for some moments without breathing. I strained every thought, every feeling to pray, but tears overwhelmed me. I got up exhausted with misery. I no longer wanted to go with him, I was frightened of him. At last what harassed and tortured me burst out.

"Daddy," I said, melting into tears, "and Mammy?... What's the matter with Mammy? Where is she? Where's my Mammy?"

I could not go on, I wept bitterly.

He shed tears too, as he looked at me. At last he took me by the hand, led me up to the bed, swept away the pile of clothes and turned down the quilt. My God! she lay dead, already cold and blue. Almost senseless, I flung myself on her and threw my arms round her dead body. My father made me kneel down.

"Bow down to her, child!" he said. "Say good-bye to her..."

I bowed down. My father bowed down beside me. He was fearfully pale. His lips were trembling and whispering something.

"It wasn't I, Nyetochka, it wasn't I," he said, pointing at the dead body with a trembling finger. "Do you hear? It was not I, it was not my doing. Remember, Nyetochka!"

"Daddy, let us go," I whispered in terror, "it's time!"

"Yes, it is time now, we ought to have gone long ago!" he said, gripping me tightly by the hand, in haste to get out of the room. "Now let us set off. Thank God, thank God, now it is all over!"

We went down the stairs; the drowsy porter unlocked the gate for us, looking at us suspiciously; and father, as though afraid he would question him, ran out of the gate first, so that I had difficulty in overtaking him. We went down our street and came out on the bank of the canal. Snow had fallen on the pavement overnight, and was coming down in tiny flakes now. It was cold, I was chilled to the bone, and ran along

with father clutching convulsively at the skirts of his coat. His violin was under his arm, and he was continually stopping to prevent its slipping.

We walked for a quarter of an hour; at last he turned along the sloping pavement down to the edge of the canal and sat down on the farthest part. There was a hole cut in the ice two paces from us. There was not a sound around. Oh, God! How I remember to this day the terrible feeling that overpowered me! At last everything of which I had been dreaming for a whole year had come to pass. We had left our poor home. But was this what I was expecting, was it of this I was dreaming, was this the creation of my childish imagination, when I looked into the future for the happiness of him whom I loved with a passion so unlike a child's? Above all, the thought of mother tortured me at that moment. Why had we left her alone, I wondered. We had abandoned her body like some useless thing. I remember that that harassed and tortured me more than anything.

"Daddy," I began, unable to endure my agonising thoughts, "Daddy!"

"What is it?" he said sullenly.

"Why have we left Mammy there, Daddy? Why have we deserted her?" I asked, beginning to cry. "Daddy, let us go home again. Let us fetch someone to her."

"Yes, yes," he said, starting and getting up from the post as though some new idea had come into his mind, which settled all his doubts. "Yes, Nyetochka, it won't do; we must go to Mother, she is cold there. You go to her, Nyetochka. It isn't dark, there's a candle there, don't be frightened. Fetch someone to her and then come back to me; you go alone and I will wait for you here... I won't go away..."

I went at once, but I had scarcely reached the pavement when something seemed to stab me to the heart... I turned round, and saw that he was already running in the opposite direction and was running away from me, leaving me alone, abandoning me at such a moment. I screamed as loud as I could and panic-stricken flew to overtake him. I gasped for breath; he ran faster and faster... I lost sight of him. On the way I came upon his hat which he had lost in his flight. I picked it up and fell to running again. My breath failed me and my legs gave way under me. I felt as though something hideous were happening to me. It kept seeming to me that it was a dream, and at times I had the sensation I had had in dreams that I was running away from someone, but that my legs were giving way under me, that I was being overtaken and was falling senseless. An agonising sensation was rending my heart; I was sorry for him, my heart ached when I realised that he was running without an overcoat, without a hat away from me, away from his beloved child... I wanted to overtake him simply to kiss him warmly once more, to tell him not to be afraid of me, to soothe him, to assure him that I would not run after him if he did not wish it, but would go back alone to mother. I made out at last that he had turned down a street. Running to it and turning down it I could still discern him before me. Then my strength failed me; I began crying and screaming. I remember that as I ran I knocked up against two passers-by, who stopped in the middle of the pavement and looked after us in amazement.

"Daddy, Daddy!" I cried for the last time, but I slipped on the pavement and fell at the gateway of a house. I felt my whole face bathed in blood. A moment later I lost consciousness.

I came to myself in a soft warm bed, and saw beside me kind welcoming faces which greeted my recovery with delight.

I made out an old woman with spectacles on her nose, a tall gentleman who looked at me with deep compassion, then a lovely young lady, and last of all a grey-headed old man who held my hand and looked at his watch. I woke up to a new life. One of the people I had rushed up against in my flight was Prince X., and I had fallen down at the gate of his house. When after long investigations it was found out who I was, the prince who had sent my father the ticket for S.'s concert, impressed by the strangeness of the coincidence, resolved to take me into his house and bring me up with his own children. Search was made to discover what had become of my father, and it was ascertained that he had been apprehended outside the town, suffering from an attack of acute mania. He was taken to the hospital, where he died two days later.

He died because such a death was a necessity to him, the natural consequence of such a life. He was bound to die like that, when everything that had supported him in life crumbled away at once and faded away like a phantom, like an insubstantial empty dream. He died when his last hope vanished, when in one instant everything with which he had deceived himself and sustained himself through life fell to pieces before his eyes. The truth blinded him with its unbearable light, and what was false was recognised as false by himself. At his last hour he had heard a marvellous genius, who had revealed to him himself and condemned him for ever. With the last sound that floated from the strings of the master's violin the whole mystery of art was revealed to him, and genius, ever youthful, powerful and true, had crushed him by its truth. It seemed as though all that had weighed upon him his whole life in mysterious unfathomable agonies, all that had hitherto tortured him impalpably, elusively, only in dreams, that had taken clear shape at times though he had run from it in horror, screening himself with a He all his life, all of which he had had a presentiment though he had feared to face it — all this had suddenly flashed upon him at once, had been laid bare to his eyes which had till then stubbornly refused to recognise light for light, darkness for darkness. But the truth was more than his eyes could endure when he gazed upon what had been, what was, and what awaited him; it blinded and burnt up his reason. It had struck him down at once inexorably like lightning. What he had been expecting all his life with a tremor and a sinking of his heart had suddenly happened. It seemed as though an axe had been hanging over his head all his life. All his life he had been every moment expecting in unutterable anguish that it would strike him and — at last the axe had struck him! The blow was fatal. He tried to flee from the sentence passed upon him, but there was nowhere for him to flee, his last hope had vanished, his last excuse had disappeared. The woman whose life had weighed upon him so many years, who would not let him live, at whose death as he blindly believed he would suddenly revive again — died. At last he was alone, there was nothing to hamper him; at last he was free! For

the last time in convulsive despair he tried to judge himself, to judge himself sternly and relentlessly, like a partial, disinterested critic; but his enfeebled bow could only faintly repeat the last musical phrase of the genius... At that instant madness, which had been stalking him for ten years, clutched him beyond escape.

Chapter IV

I RETURNED to health slowly; and even when no longer confined to my bed, my brain remained in a sort of stupor, and for a long time I could not quite understand what had happened to me. There were moments when it seemed to me that I was dreaming, and I remember I longed that all that was happening might really turn into a dream! And as I fell asleep at night I hoped that I might somehow wake up in our poor garret and see father and mother... But, at last my position grew clear to me, and little by little I understood that I had become utterly alone and was living with strangers. Then for the first time I felt that I was an orphan.

At first I looked eagerly at all the new things that so suddenly surrounded me. At first everything seemed strange and wonderful, everything bewildered me — the new faces, the new habits, and the rooms of the old princely mansion, large, lofty and richly furnished as I see now, but so gloomy and forbidding that I remember I was genuinely afraid to make my way across the long, long drawing-room in which I felt that I should be utterly lost. My illness had not yet quite passed off and my impressions were gloomy, oppressive, in perfect keeping with this solemnly dignified gloomy abode. Moreover, a depression I did not myself understand grew stronger and stronger in my little heart. I would stop in amazement before a picture, a looking-glass, a fireplace of cunning workmanship, or a statue which seemed to be hiding in some secluded niche on purpose to keep better watch on me and frighten me. I would stop and suddenly forget why I had stopped, what I wanted, what I had begun thinking about, and only when I came to myself I was sometimes overwhelmed by dread and perplexity.

Of those who from time to time came to see how I was when I was lying ill in bed, besides the old doctor, the one who impressed me most was a man, rather elderly, very serious, but very kind, who looked at me with deep compassion. I liked his face better than all the others. I longed to speak to him, but was afraid. He always looked depressed, spoke in brief snatches, and there was never a trace of a smile on his lips. This was Prince X., who had found me and was caring for me in his house. When I began to get better his visits became less and less frequent. The last time he came he brought me sweets, a child's picture-book, kissed me, made the sign of the cross over me, and begged me to be more cheerful. To comfort me he told me that I should soon have a companion, his daughter Katya, a little girl like me who was now in Moscow. Then after saying something to a middle-aged Frenchwoman, his children's nurse, and to the maid who looked after me, he commended me to them, went out, and from that time I did not see him for three weeks. The prince lived in complete solitude in

his house. The princess lived in the larger part of the house; she, too, sometimes saw nothing of the prince for weeks together. Later on I noticed that all the members of the household hardly spoke of him, as though he were not in the house at all. They all respected him and loved him too, one could see that, and yet looked upon him as a strange and queer man. It seemed as though he realised himself that he was very odd, somehow not like other people, and so tried to keep out of their sight as much as possible. I shall have occasion to say a great deal and in much more detail about him.

One morning they dressed me in fine white linen, put me into a black woollen frock with white pleureuses at which I gazed with a sort of dejected wonder, combed my hair, and took me downstairs to the princess's apartments. I stood petrified with wonder when I was taken in to her; I had never before seen such wealth and magnificence around me. But that impression was momentary, and I turned pale when I heard the princess's voice bidding them bring me nearer. Even while I was being dressed I thought that I was being prepared for some painful ordeal, though God only knows how such an idea was suggested to me. Altogether I entered upon my new life with a strange distrust of everything surrounding me. But the princess was very gracious with me and kissed me. I looked at her a little more boldly. It was the same lovely lady whom I had seen when I regained consciousness. But I was trembling all over when I kissed her hand, and could not pluck up courage enough to answer her questions. She told me to sit down on a low stool near her. I think this place had been assigned me beforehand. One could see that the princess wished for nothing better than to care for me with her whole heart, to pet me and to take the place of a mother to me completely. But I was utterly unable to understand my good fortune, and did nothing to gain her good opinion. I was given a fine picture-book and told to look at it. The princess was writing a letter; from time to time she put down her pen and talked to me again; but I was confused and perplexed and said nothing sensible. In fact, though my story was very exceptional, and fate, moving in all sorts of mysterious ways, undoubtedly played a great part in it, and in fact there was much in it that was interesting, inexplicable, and even fantastic, yet I myself turned out, as though in despite of these melodramatic surroundings, a most ordinary child, scared, as it were crushed, and even rather stupid. The last characteristic the princess disliked particularly, and I think she was thoroughly sick of me in a little while, for which I blame myself entirely, of course! Between two and three o'clock visitors began to arrive, and the princess suddenly became more attentive and affectionate to me. To the questions asked about me she answered that it was an extremely interesting story, and then began to tell it in French. As she told the story, her visitors looked at me, shook their heads and exclaimed. One young man eyed me through his lorgnette, one grey-headed and scented old gentleman would have kissed me; while I turned pale and red and sat with my eyes cast down, afraid to stir, and trembling in every limb. My heart ached. My mind went back to the past, to our garret. I thought of my father, our long silent evenings, mother; and when I thought of mother, tears welled up into my eyes, there was a lump in my throat, and I longed to run away, to disappear, to be alone... Then when the visitors had gone, the

princess's face became noticeably colder. She looked at me more crossly, spoke more abruptly, and I was particularly frightened by her piercing black eyes, sometimes fixed on me for a quarter of an hour at a stretch, and her tightly compressed lips. In the evening I was taken upstairs. I fell asleep in a fever, woke up in the night miserable and crying at delirious dreams. Next morning there was the same business, and I was taken to the princess again. At last she seemed herself tired of telling her visitors about my adventures, and the visitors tired of commiserating me. Besides, I was such an ordinary child, "entirely without simplicity", as I remember the princess herself expressed it in a tête-à-tête to a middle-aged lady who asked her whether she was not bored with me. And behold, one evening I was taken away not to be brought back again. So ended my career as favourite. I was allowed, however, to go about the house freely wherever I liked. I could not sit still in the same place, I was so intensely, morbidly miserable, and I was very, very glad when at last I could get away from everyone into the big rooms downstairs. I remember that I had a great longing to talk to the servants, but I was so afraid of annoying them that I preferred to remain alone. The way I liked best to pass my time was to retreat into some corner where I was more out of sight, to stand behind some piece of furniture and there at once begin recalling and imagining all that had happened. But strange to say, I seemed to have forgotten the ending of my life with my parents and all that terrible time. Pictures flitted before my eyes, facts stood out. I did remember it all really — the night, the violin and father, I remembered how I had got him the money; but somehow I could not interpret, could not explain all that had happened... Only there was a weight on my heart, and when in my memories I came to the moment when I said my prayers beside my dead mother a cold shiver ran all over me; I trembled, uttered a faint scream, and then my breathing felt choked, my whole chest ached, and my heart thumped so that I ran out of my corner in a panic. I was wrong, however, in saying that they left me alone, I was zealously and watchfully looked after; and the instructions of the prince, who had directed that I should be given complete freedom and not be restricted in any way, but not be lost sight of for a moment, were scrupulously carried out. I used to notice that from time to time someone of the household would glance into the room in which I was, and go away again without saying a word to me. I was much surprised and rather troubled by this attention; I could not understand why this was done. It seemed to me that I was being taken care of for some purpose, and that they meant to do something with me later on. I remember that I was always trying to get farther away, that I might know in case of need where to hide.

Once I strayed out on to the front staircase. It was wide, made of marble and covered with carpet, decorated with flowers and beautiful vases. Two tall men, very gaily dressed, and wearing gloves and the whitest of cravats, sat in silence on each landing. I gazed at them in amazement, and could not explain to myself why they sat there and did not speak, but simply stared at one another and did nothing.

I liked these solitary expeditions more and more. There was, besides, another reason for my running away from upstairs. The prince's old aunt lived on the upper floor,

scarcely ever going out. This old lady has left a vivid impression on my memory. She was almost the most important person in the house. Everyone observed a ceremonious etiquette with her, and even the princess, who looked so proud and imperious, had on fixed days twice a week to go upstairs and pay a personal visit to the prince's aunt. She usually went in the morning; a frigid conversation began, frequently interrupted by solemn pauses, during which the old lady either murmured a prayer or counted her reckoning beads. The visit did not end till desired by the aunt, who rose from her seat and kissed the princess on the lips, and thereby gave her to understand that the interview was at an end. In the past the princess had had to visit her husband's aunt every day; but of late at the old lady's desire the severity of this rule had been relaxed, and the princess was only obliged on the other five days of the week to send every morning to inquire after her health. In fact, the old lady lived like a hermit. She was unmarried, and when she was five-and-thirty had retired to a convent, where she spent seventeen years but did not take the veil; then she had left the convent and gone to Moscow to live with her widowed sister, Countess L., who was growing frailer in health year by year, and to be reconciled with her second sister, another unmarried Princess X. with whom she had been on bad terms for over twenty years. But the old ladies are said never to have spent a single day without quarrelling; thousands of times they were on the point of parting and could not bring themselves to do so, because they realised at last that each one of them was necessary to the other two, to ward off boredom and the infirmities of old age. But in spite of the unattractiveness of their manner of life, and the ceremonial boredom that reigned in their Moscow mansion, the whole town looked upon it as a duty not to discontinue visiting the three recluses. They were looked upon as the guardians of all the sanctities and traditions of aristocracy, and as living relics of the old nobility. Countess L. was an excellent woman, and many good things were remembered of her. People called on them first on arriving from Petersburg. Anyone who was received in their house was received everywhere. But the countess died and the remaining sisters parted; the elder princess remained in Moscow, to inherit her share of the fortune of the countess, who died without children, while the younger settled with her nephew Prince X. in Petersburg. On the other hand, the prince's two children, Katya and Alexandra, were visiting their great-aunt at Moscow, to entertain and console her in her solitude. Their mother, who loved her children passionately, did not dare to utter a word of protest at being parted from them for the whole period assigned for mourning. I have forgotten to mention that the prince's whole house was still in mourning when I came to live in it; but the time for it was soon over.

The old princess was dressed always in black, always in gowns of plain woollen stuff, and wore starched pleated collars which made her look like an inmate of an almshouse. She did not give up wearing the rosary, drove out in solemn state to mass, observed all the fasts, received visits from various ecclesiastical dignitaries and pious personages, read holy books, and altogether led the life of a nun. The stillness on the upper floor was terrible, one dared not let a door creak. The old lady's senses were as keen as

though she were a girl of fifteen, and she sent immediately to find out the cause of any noise, even the faintest creak. Everyone spoke in a whisper, everyone walked on tiptoe, and the poor Frenchwoman, herself an old lady, was obliged to give up her favourite footgear — shoes with high heels. Heels were banished. A fortnight after my arrival the old princess sent to inquire who I was, what I was like, how I had come into the house, and so on. Her curiosity was immediately and respectfully gratified. Then a second messenger was sent to the French lady to inquire why she, the old princess, had not yet seen me? At once there was a great to-do; they began combing my hair, washing my face and hands, which were already very clean, showing me how to walk in, how to bow, how to look more good-humoured and gracious, how to speak — in fact, I was regularly tormented.

Then an envoy was sent from our part of the house to inquire whether the great lady cared to see the little orphan. The answer that followed was in the negative, but another time, the following day after mass, was fixed. I did not sleep all night, and I was told afterwards that I was light-headed all night, and raving of going to the old princess and begging her forgiveness for something. At last my presentation arrived. I saw a spare little old lady sitting in a huge easy-chair. She nodded her head to me, and put on her spectacles to look at me more closely. I remember that she did not like me at all. It was observed that I was quite a savage, that I did not know how to curtsy, nor kiss hands. Questions followed and I scarcely answered them; but when allusion was made to my father and mother, I began to cry. The old lady was much displeased at my display of feeling; however, she began trying to console me, telling me to put my trust in God. Then she asked me when I had last been to church; and as I scarcely understood her question, for my education had been greatly neglected, the old princess was horrified. She sent for her niece. A consultation followed, and it was settled that I should be taken to church on the following Sunday. Till then the old princess undertook to pray for me, but told them to take me away as, in her own words, I had made a very painful impression on her. There was nothing strange in that, it was bound to be so. But it was evident that she did not like me at all; the same day word was sent that I was too noisy in my play and could be heard all over the house, though, as I sat all day long without moving, this must have been the old lady's fancy. Yet the same message came next day. It happened about that time that I dropped a cup and broke it. The French governess and all the servants were in despair, and I was immediately sent to a room at the farther end of the house, where they all followed me in a state of panic.

I don't know how the incident ended: this was why I was glad to get downstairs and wander about the great rooms, knowing that there I should disturb no one.

I remember I was sitting one day in a big drawing-room downstairs. I hid my face in my hands, bowed my head, and sat like that I don't remember how many hours. I kept thinking and thinking; my immature mind was unable to analyse my misery, and I felt more dreary and sick at heart every day. Suddenly a soft voice rang out over me.

"What's the matter with you, my poor child?"

I raised my head; it was the prince. His gaze expressed deep sympathy and compassion; but I gazed at him with such a crushed, unhappy air that tears came into his big blue eyes.

"Poor little orphan!" he said, patting me on the head.

"No, no, not an orphan, no!" I said, and a moan broke from me and everything surged up in me and rose to the surface. I got up from my seat, clutched at his hand, and kissing it and wetting it with my tears, repeated in an imploring voice:

"No, no, not an orphan, no!"

"My child, what is the matter with you, my dear? What is it, poor Nyetochka?"

"Where is my mother? where is my mother?" I cried, sobbing loudly, unable to conceal my misery any longer, and helplessly falling on my knees before him. "Please tell me where my mother is?"

"Forgive me, my child!... Oh, poor little thing, I have reminded her... What have I done? Come, come along with me, Nyetochka, come along with me."

He took me by the hand and led me along with him quickly. He was moved to the depths of his soul. At last we reached a room which I had not seen before.

It was the ikon room. It was dusk. The lamps gleamed brightly, with their lights reflected on the golden settings and precious stones of the ikons. The faces of the saints looked out dimly from the gold mountings. Everything here was so unlike the other rooms, so mysterious and gloomy, that I was much impressed and overcome by a sort of terror. Besides, I was in such a morbid condition. The prince quickly made me kneel down before the ikon of the Mother of God, and knelt down beside me...

"Pray, my child, pray; we will both pray," he said in a soft, broken voice.

But I could not pray; I was overwhelmed, even terrified; I remembered my father's words that last night beside my mother's body, and I had a nervous seizure. I lay in bed ill, and in this second period of my illness I almost died. This was how it happened.

One day a familiar name sounded in my ears. I heard the name of S. Someone of the household pronounced the name by my bedside. I started; memories came rushing upon me, and overwhelmed by recollections, dreams, and distress, I lay for I don't know how many hours in real delirium. I woke up very late, it was dark all round me; the night-light had gone out, and the girl who used to sit in my room was not there. All at once I heard the sound of far-away music. At times the music died away entirely, at times grew more and more distinct as though it were coming nearer. I don't remember what feeling came over me, what project sprang up in my sick brain. I got out of bed, and I don't know how I found strength to do it, but I dressed in my mourning and went groping through the rooms. I found no one in the next room nor in the room beyond. At last I made my way into the corridor. The sounds were becoming more and more distinct. In the middle of the corridor there was a staircase leading down; that was the way by which I always went down to the big rooms. The staircase was brightly lighted up; people were walking about below. I hid in a corner to avoid being seen, and only when it was possible went downstairs to the second corridor. The music was coming from the drawing-room near; in it there was noise and talk as though

thousands of people were assembled. One of the drawing-room doors leading out of the corridor was draped with two curtains of crimson velvet. I raised the outer one and stood between the two. My heart beat so violently that I could hardly stand. But a few minutes later, mastering my agitation, I ventured to move a little aside the border of the second curtain... My goodness! the immense gloomy room which I was so afraid to enter was gleaming now with a thousand lights. It was like a sea of light flowing upon me, and my eyes, accustomed to the darkness, were at first painfully dazzled. The perfumed air fanned my face like a hot wind. Masses of people were walking to and fro; it seemed as though all had gay and joyful faces. The women were in such rich, such light dresses. On all sides I saw eyes sparkling with delight. I stood as though spellbound. It seemed to me as though I had seen all this somewhere, in a dream... There came back into my mind the dusk, our garret, the high window, the street far down below with the glittering lampposts, the windows of the house opposite with the red curtains, the carriages densely packed at the doors; the stamping and snorting of the proud horses, the shouts, the noise, the shadows at the windows, and the faint, distant music... So here, here was that paradise! flashed through my mind. This was where I wanted to go with my poor father... So it was not a dream... Yes, I had seen it all before in my dreams, in my fancies! My imagination, inflamed by illness, took fire, and tears of inexplicable rapture streamed from my eyes. I looked about for my father: "he must be here, he is here," I thought, and my heart beat with anticipation... I could hardly breathe... But the music ceased, a hum of voices began, and a murmur arose from all parts of the room. I gazed eagerly into the faces that flashed by me, and tried to recognise someone. All at once an extraordinary excitement was apparent in the room, I saw a tall lean old man on a raised platform. His pale face was smiling, he bent his angular figure, bowing in all directions. A profound silence followed as though all these people were holding their breath. All eyes were fixed on the old man, all were expectant. He raised his violin and touched the strings with his bow. The music began, and I felt all at once as though something were clutching my heart. In intense anguish, holding my breath, I listened to those sounds; something familiar was sounding in my ears, as though I had somewhere heard this before, some foreboding of something awful, horrible was reflected in my heart. At last the violin vibrated more loudly; the notes resounded faster and more shrilly. It was like a despairing wail, a pitiful lamentation, as though some prayer were being uttered in vain in all that crowd, and dying away, ceasing in despair. Something more and more familiar was taking shape in my heart, but my heart refused to believe it. I clenched my teeth to keep back a moan of pain, I clutched at the curtain that I might not fall. From time to time I closed my eyes and suddenly opened them, expecting that it was a dream, that I should wake up at some terrible moment I knew already, and that I was dreaming of that last night and bearing those same sounds. Opening my eyes, I tried to reassure myself, I looked eagerly into the crowd — no, these were different people, different faces. It seemed as though they were all, like me, expecting something — all, like me, suffering agony; that they all wanted to scream at those fearful moans and wails to stop, not to tear their hearts. But

the wails and moans flowed on, more agonising, more plaintive, more prolonged. Then the last fearful prolonged cry rang out, and everything in me was shaken... I had no doubt. It was the same, the same cry! I recognised it, I had heard it before, it stabbed me to the heart as it had on that night. "Father! father!" flashed like lightning through my brain; "he is here, it's he, he is calling me, it is his violin!" A groan seemed to rise from all that crowd, and terrific applause shook the room. I could restrain myself no longer, threw back the curtain and dashed into the room.

"Daddy, Daddy! it is you! Where are you?" I cried, almost beside myself.

I don't know how I reached the tall old man; people let me pass, they stood aside to make way for me. I rushed to him with an agonising shriek; I thought that I was embracing my father... All at once I saw that long bony hands had seized me and were lifting me up in the air. Black eyes were fixed upon me, and seemed as though they would scorch me with their fire. I looked at the old man. No, this was not my father, it was his murderer, was the thought that flashed through my brain. I was overwhelmed by frenzy, and all at once it seemed to me as though there were a shout of laughter at me, that that laughter was re-echoed in the room in a unanimous roar. I lost consciousness.

Chapter V

THIS was the second and last period of my illness. When I opened my eyes again I saw bending over me the face of a child, a girl of my own age, and my first movement was to hold out my hands to her. From my first glance at her, a feeling of happiness like a sweet foreboding filled my soul. Picture to yourself an ideally charming face, startling, dazzling beauty — beauty before which one stops short as though stabbed in delighted amazement, shuddering with rapture, and to which one is grateful for its existence, for one's eyes having fallen upon it, for its passing by one. It was the prince's daughter Katya, who had only just returned from Moscow. She smiled at my gesture, and my weak nerves ached with a sweet ecstasy.

The little princess called her father, who was only two paces away talking to the doctor.

"Well, thank God, thank God," said the prince, taking my hand, and his face beamed with genuine feeling. "I am glad, very glad," he said, speaking rapidly, as he always did. "And this is Katya, my little girl; you must make friends, here is a companion for you. Make haste and get well, Nyetochka. Naughty girl, what a fright she gave me!"

My recovery followed very quickly. A few days later I was up and about. Every morning Katya came to my bedside, always with a smile, always with laughter on her lips. I awaited her coming as a joyful event; I longed to kiss her. But the naughty child never stayed for more than a few minutes, she could not sit still. She always wanted to be on the move, to be running and jumping, making a noise and an uproar all over the house. And so she informed me from the first that she found it horribly dull to sit

with me, and she would not come very often, and only came because she was so sorry for me that she could not help coming, and that we should get on better when I was well again. And every morning her first word was:

"Well, are you all right now?" And as I was still pale and thin, and as the smile seemed to peep out timorously on my mournful face, the little princess frowned at once, shook her head, and stamped her foot in vexation.

"But I told you yesterday to get better, you know! I suppose they don't give you anything to eat?"

"A little," I answered timidly, for I was already overawed by her. I wanted to do my utmost to please her, and so I was timid over every word I uttered, over every movement I made. Her arrival moved me to more and more delight. I could not take my eyes off her, and when she went away I used to go on gazing at the spot where she had stood as though I were spellbound. I began to dream of her. And when I was awake I made up long conversations with her in her absence — I was her friend, played all sorts of pranks with her, wept with her when we were scolded. In short, I dreamed of her like a lover. I was desperately anxious to get well and grow fat, as she advised me.

Sometimes when Katya ran in to me in the morning and her first words were, "Aren't you well yet? As thin as ever," I was as downcast as though I were to blame. But nothing could be more genuine than Katya's astonishment that I could not get well in twenty-four hours, so that at last she began to be really angry with me.

"Well, I will bring you a cake to-day if you like," she said to me one day. "You must eat, and that will soon make you fatter."

"Do bring it," I said, delighted that I should see her a second time.

When she came to inquire after my health, Katya usually sat on a chair opposite me and began scrutinising me with her black eyes. And when first she made my acquaintance, she was continually looking me up and down from head to foot with the most naive astonishment. But conversation between us made little progress. I was intimidated by Katya and her abrupt sallies, though I was dying with desire to talk to her.

"Why don't you talk?" Katya began after a brief silence.

"What is your father doing?" I asked, delighted that there was a sentence with which I could always begin a conversation.

"Nothing. Father's all right. I had two cups of tea this morning instead of one. How many did you have?"

"One."

Silence again.

"Falstaff tried to bite me to-day."

"Is that the dog?"

"Yes, the dog. Haven't you seen him?"

"Yes, I have seen him."

And as again I did not know what to say, Katya stared at me in amazement.

"Well? Does it cheer you up when I talk to you?"

"Yes, very much; come oftener."

"They told me that it would cheer you up for me to come and see you. But do make haste and get up. I will bring you a cake to-day... Why are you always silent?"

"I don't know."

"I suppose you are always thinking?"

"Yes, I think a lot."

"They tell me I talk a lot and don't think much. There is no harm in talking, is there?"

"No. I am glad when you talk."

"H'm, I will ask Madame Leotard, she knows everything. And what do you think about?"

"I think about you," I answered after a brief pause.

"Does that cheer you up?"

"Yes."

"So you like me, then?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't like you yet. You are so thin. But I will bring you some cakes. Well, good-bye."

And Katya, kissing me almost in the act of darting away, vanished from the room.

But after dinner the cake really did make its appearance. She ran in as though she were crazy, laughing with glee at having brought me something to eat which was forbidden.

"Eat more, eat well. That's my cake, I did not eat it myself. Well, good-bye!" And she was gone in a flash.

Another time she suddenly flew in to see me after dinner, not at her usual hour. Her black curls were flying in all directions, her cheeks glowed crimson, her eyes were sparkling; she must have been racing and skipping about for the last hour.

"Can you play battledore and shuttlecock?" she cried, panting for breath, and speaking quickly in haste to be off again.

"No," I answered, deeply regretting that I could not say yes.

"What a girl! Get well and I'll teach you. That's all I came for. I am just having a game with Madame Leotard. Good-bye, they are waiting for me."

At last I got up for good, though I was still weak and frail. My first idea was never to be parted from Katya again. Some irresistible force seemed to draw me to her. I could not take my eyes off her, and that surprised Katya. The attraction to her was so powerful, I became so increasingly ardent in my new feeling, that she could not avoid noticing it, and at first it struck her as incredibly strange. I remember that once, in the middle of some game, I could not refrain from throwing myself on her neck and kissing her. She extricated herself from my arms, caught hold of my hands, and frowning at me as though I had offended her in some way, asked me:

"What is the matter with you? Why are you kissing me?"

I was confused as though I were in fault, started at her sudden question and made no answer. Katya shrugged her shoulders in token of perplexity (a gesture that was habitual with her), compressed her pouting lips, gave up the game and sat down on die sofa in the corner, whence she scrutinised me for a long time, pondering over something as though considering a new question which had suddenly arisen in her mind. That was her habit, too, when any difficulty arose. On my side, too, I could not for a long while get used to these harsh and abrupt traits of her character.

At first I blamed myself, and thought that there really must be much that was strange in me. But though that was true, yet I was worried by not understanding why I could not be friends with Katya from the first, and make her like me once and for all. My failure to do so mortified me bitterly, and I was ready to shed tears at every hasty word from Katya, at every mistrustful glance she bent upon me. But my trouble grew not from day to day, but from hour to hour, for with Katya everything moved quickly. A few days later I began to notice that she had not taken to me at all, and was even beginning to feel an aversion for me. Everything in that child took place quickly, abruptly — some might have said roughly, if there had not been a genuine and noble grace in the rapid manifestations of her direct, naively open nature. It began by her feeling at first mistrust and then contempt for me. I think it arose from my complete inability to play any kind of game. Katya was fond of frolicking and racing about, she was strong, lively, agile; I was just the opposite. I was still weak from illness, quiet and dreamy; I did not enjoy playing. In short, I was entirely without the qualities that Katya liked. Moreover, I could not bear people to be displeased with me for anything, I became sad and dispirited at once, so that I had not the energy to smoothe over my offence and alter for the better the unfavourable impression I had made; in fact, I was in a hopeless plight. That Katya could not understand. At first she frightened me; in fact, she would stare at me in amazement, as her habit was after she had sometimes been struggling for a whole hour with me, showing me how to play battledore and shuttlecock without making any progress. And as I immediately became dejected, as tears were ready to gush from my eyes, she would, after considering me two or three times without arriving at any explanation either from me or her reflections, abandon me altogether and begin playing alone, and would give up asking me to join her, and not even say a word to me for days together. This made such an impression on me that I could hardly endure her scorn. My new sort of loneliness seemed almost more unbearable than the old, I began to be sad and brooding, and dark thoughts clouded my soul again.

Madame Leotard, who looked after us, noticed this change in our relations. And as first of all she noticed me and was struck by my enforced loneliness, she went straight to the little princess and scolded her for not treating me properly. Katya scowled, shrugged her little shoulders, and declared that there was nothing she could do with me — that I didn't know how to play, that I was always thinking about something, and that she had better wait till her brother Sasha came back from Moscow, and then it would be much livelier for both of them.

But Madame Leotard was not satisfied with such an answer, and said that Katya was leaving me alone, though I was still ill; that I could not be as merry and playful as Katya; that that was all the better, however, since Katya was too full of mischief; that she was always up to some prank; that the day before yesterday the bulldog had almost bitten her — in fact, Madame Leotard gave her a merciless scolding. She ended by sending her to me, bidding her make it up with me at once.

Katya listened to Madame Leotard with great attention, as though she really understood something new and just from her observations. Abandoning a hoop which she had been trundling about, she came up to me and, looking at me gravely, asked wonderingly —

"Do you want to play?"

"No," I answered. I had been frightened for myself and for Katya while Madame Leotard was scolding her.

"What do you want to do?"

"I will sit still a little; it's tiring for me to run. Only don't be cross with me, Katya, for I like you very much."

"Well, then, I will play alone," said Katya slowly and deliberately, seeming surprised that, after all, it appeared, she was not to blame. "Well, good-bye. I won't be cross with you."

"Good-bye," I said, getting up and giving her my hand.

"Perhaps you would like to kiss me?" she asked after a moment's thought, probably remembering what had happened recently, and desiring to do what would please me best in order to finish with me agreeably and as quickly as possible.

"As you like," I answered with timid hope.

She came up to me and very gravely, without a smile, kissed me. So, having accomplished all that was expected of her, having even done more than was necessary to give complete satisfaction to the poor child to whom she had been sent, she ran away from me gay and content, and her shouts and laughter were soon resounding through all the rooms again, till exhausted and out of breath she threw herself on the sofa to rest and recover. She kept looking at me suspiciously all the evening; most likely I seemed to her very queer and strange. It was evident that she wanted to talk to me, to find out the explanation of something that puzzled her about me; but on this occasion she restrained herself, I don't know why. As a rule, Katya's lessons began in the morning. Madame Leotard taught her French. The lessons consisted of repetition of grammar rules and the reading of La Fontaine. She was not taught much, for they could hardly get her to agree to sit still at her books for two hours in the day. She had at last been brought to agree to do so much, by her father's request and her mother's commands, and kept to her compact scrupulously because she had given her word. She had rare abilities; she was very quick of understanding. But she had some little peculiarities on that side too; if she did not understand anything she would at once begin thinking about it by herself, and could not endure asking for explanations — she seemed ashamed to do it. I have been told that she would for days at a time be struggling over

some problem which she could not solve, and be angry that she could not master it by herself unaided; and only in the last extremity, when quite tired out, she would go to Madame Leotard and ask for her help to solve the problem which had baffled her. It was the same with everything she did. She thought a great deal, though that was not at all apparent at first sight. At the same time she was naive for her age; sometimes she would ask quite a foolish question, while at other times her answers would betray the most far-sighted subtlety and ingenuity.

When at last I was fit to have lessons too, Madame Leotard examined me as to my attainments, and finding that I read very well but wrote very badly, considered it a matter of the first necessity to teach me French.

I made no objections, so one morning I sat down to lessons at the same table with Katya. It happened, as luck would have it, she was particularly dense and inattentive that morning, so much so that Madame Leotard was surprised at her. At one sitting I almost mastered the whole French alphabet, wishing to do my utmost to please Madame Leotard by my diligence. Towards the end of the lesson Madame Leotard was really angry with Katya.

"Look at her!" she said, indicating me. "The child is ill and is having her first lesson, and yet she has done ten times as much as you. Aren't you ashamed?"

"Does she know more than I do?" Katya asked in astonishment.

"How long did it take you to learn the alphabet?"

"Three lessons."

"And she has learnt it in one. So she learns three times as quickly as you do, and will soon catch you up."

Katya pondered a little and turned suddenly fiery red, as she recognised that Madame Leotard's observation was just. To flush crimson and grow hot with shame was the first thing she did if she failed in anything, if she were vexed or her pride were wounded, or she were caught in some piece of mischief — on almost every occasion, in fact. This time tears almost came into her eyes; but she said nothing, merely looked at me as though she would burn me with her eyes. I guessed at once what was wrong. The poor child's pride and amour-propre were excessive. When we left Madame Leotard I began to speak, hoping to soften her vexation and to show that I was not to blame for the governess's words, but Katya remained mute as though she had not heard me.

An hour later she came into the room where I was sitting over a book, thinking all the while of Katya, and feeling upset and frightened at her refusing to talk to me again. She looked at me from under her brows, sat down as usual on the sofa, and for half an hour did not take her eyes off me. At last I could bear it no longer, and glanced at her inquiringly.

"Can you dance?" asked Katya.

"No, I can't."

"I can."

Silence.

"And can you play the piano?"

"No, I can't do that, either."

"I can. That's very difficult to learn."

I said nothing.

"Madame Leotard says you are cleverer than I am."

"Madame Leotard is angry with you," I said.

"And will father be angry too?"

"I don't know," I answered.

Silence again; Katya tapped the floor with her little foot in her impatience.

"So you are going to laugh at me because you are quicker at learning than I am?" she asked at last, unable to restrain her annoyance.

"Oh, no, no," I cried, and I jumped up from my place to rush and hug her.

"And aren't you ashamed to imagine such a thing and ask about it, princess?" we suddenly heard the voice of Madame Leotard, who had been watching us for the last five minutes and listening to our conversation. "For shame! You are envious of the poor child, and boast to her that you can dance and play the piano. For shame! I shall tell the prince all about it."

Katya's cheeks glowed like a fire.

"It's a bad feeling. You have insulted her by your questions. Her parents were poor people and could not engage teachers for her; she has taught herself because she has a kind good heart. You ought to love her, and you want to quarrel with her. For shame, for shame! Why, she is an orphan. She has no one. You will be boasting next that you are a princess and she is not. I shall leave you alone. Think over what I have said to you, and improve."

Katya did think for exactly two days. For two days her laughter and shouts were not heard. Waking in the night, I heard her even in her sleep still arguing with Madame Leotard. She actually grew a little thinner during those two days, and there was not such a vivid flush of red on her bright little face. At last on the third day we met downstairs in the big rooms. Katya was on her way from her mother's room, but seeing me, she stopped and sat not far off, facing me. I waited in terror for what was coming, trembling in every limb.

"Nyetochka, why did they scold me because of you?" she asked at last.

"It was not because of me, Katenka," I said in haste to defend myself.

"But Madame Leotard said that I had insulted you."

"No, Katenka, no; you did not insult me."

Katya shrugged her shoulders to express her perplexity.

"Why is it you are always crying?" she asked after a brief silence.

"I won't cry if you want me not to," I answered through my tears.

She shrugged her shoulders again.

"You were always crying before."

I made no answer.

"Why is it you are living with us?" Katya asked suddenly.

I gazed at her in bewilderment, and something seemed to stab me to the heart.

"Because I am an orphan," I answered at last, pulling myself together.

"Used you to have a father and mother?"

"Yes."

"Well, didn't they love you?"

"No... they did love me," I answered with an effort.

"Were they poor?"

"Yes."

"They didn't each you anything?"

"They taught me to read."

"Did you have any toys?"

"No."

"Did you have any cakes?"

"No."

"How many rooms had you?"

"One."

"And had you any servants?"

"No, we had no servants."

"Who did the work?"

"I used to go out and buy things myself."

Katya's questions lacerated my heart more and more. And memories and my loneliness and the astonishment of the little princess — all this stabbed and wounded my heart, and all the blood seemed to rush to it. I was trembling with emotion, and was choking with tears.

"I suppose you are glad you are living with us?"

I did not speak.

"Did you have nice clothes?"

"No."

"Nasty ones?"

"Yes."

"I have seen your dress, they showed me it."

"Why do you ask me questions?" I said, trembling all over with a new and unknown feeling, and I got up from my seat. "Why do you ask me questions?" I went on, flushing with indignation. "Why are you laughing at me?"

Katya flared up, and she, too, rose from her seat, but she instantly controlled her feeling.

"No... I am not laughing," she answered. "I only wanted to know whether it was true that your father and mother were poor."

"Why do you ask me about father and mother?" I said, beginning to cry from mental distress. "Why do you ask such questions about them? What have they done to you, Katya?"

Katya stood in confusion and did not know what to answer. At that moment the prince walked in.

"What is the matter with you, Nyetochka?" he asked, looking at me and seeing my tears. "What is the matter with you?" he asked, glancing at Katya, who was as red as fire. "What were you talking about? What have you been quarrelling about? Nyetochka, what have you been quarrelling about?"

But I could not answer. I seized the prince's hand and kissed it with tears.

"Katya, tell the truth. What has happened?"

Katya could not lie.

"I told her that I had seen what horrid clothes she had when she lived with her father and mother."

"Who showed you them? Who dared to show them?"

"I saw them myself," Katya answered resolutely.

"Well, very well! You won't tell tales, I know that. What else?"

"And she cried and asked why I was laughing at her father and mother.

"Then you were laughing at them?"

Though Katya had not laughed, yet she must have had some such feeling when for the first time I had taken her words so. She did not answer a word, which meant that she acknowledged that it was the fact.

"Go to her at once and beg her forgiveness," said the prince, indicating me.

The little princess stood as white as a handkerchief and did not budge.

"Well?" said the prince.

"I won't," Katya brought out at last in a low voice, with a most determined air.

"Katya!"

"No, I won't, I won't!" she cried suddenly, with flashing eyes, and she stamped. "I won't beg forgiveness, papa. I don't like her. I won't live with her... It's not my fault she cries all day. I don't want to. I don't want to!"

"Come with me," said the prince, taking her by the hand. "Nyetochka, go upstairs." And he led her away into the study.

I longed to rush to the prince to intercede for Katya, but the prince sternly repeated his command and I went upstairs, turning cold and numb with terror. When I got to our room I sank on the sofa and hid my head in my hands. I counted the minutes, waited with impatience for Katya, I longed to fling myself at her feet. At last she came back, and without saying a word passed by me and sat down in a corner. Her eyes looked red and her cheeks were swollen from crying. All my resolution vanished. I looked at her in terror, and my terror would not let me stir.

I did my utmost to blame myself, tried my best to prove to myself that I was to blame for everything. A thousand times I was on the point of going up to Katya, and a thousand times I checked myself, not knowing how she would receive me. So passed one day and then a second. On the evening of the second day Katya was more cheerful, and began bowling her hoop through the rooms, but she soon abandoned this pastime and sat down alone in her corner. Before going to bed she suddenly turned to me, even took two steps in my direction, and her lips parted to say something to me; but she stopped, turned away and got into bed." After that another day passed, and Madame

Leotard, surprised, began at last asking Katya what had happened to her, and whether it was because she was ill she had become so quiet. Katya made some answer and took up the shuttlecock, but as soon as Madame Leotard turned away, she reddened and began to cry. She ran out of the room that I might not see her. And at last it was all explained: exactly three days after our quarrel she came suddenly, after dinner, into my room and shyly drew near me.

"Papa has ordered me to beg your forgiveness," she said. "Do you forgive me?"

I clutched Katya by both hands quickly, and breathless with excitement, I said —

"Yes, yes."

"Papa ordered me to kiss you. Will you kiss me?"

In reply I began kissing her hands, wetting them with my tears. Glancing at Katya, I saw in her an extraordinary change. Her lips were faintly moving, her chin was twitching, her eyes were moist; but she instantly mastered her emotion and a smile came for a second on her lips.

"I will go and tell father that I have kissed you and begged your forgiveness," she said softly, as though reflecting to herself. "I haven't seen him for three days; he forbade me to go in to him till I had," she added after a brief pause.

And saying this, she went timidly and thoughtfully downstairs, as though she were uncertain how her father would receive her.

But an hour later there was a sound of noise, shouting, and laughter upstairs, Falstaff barked, something was upset and broken, several books flew on to the floor, the hoop went leaping and resounding through all the rooms — in short, I learned that Katya was reconciled with her father, and my heart was all aquiver with joy.

But she did not come near me, and evidently avoided talking with me. On the other hand, I had the honour of exciting her curiosity to the utmost. More and more frequently she sat down opposite in order to scrutinise me the more conveniently. Her observation of me became even more naive; the fact was that the spoilt and self-willed child, whom everyone in the house petted and cherished as a treasure, could not understand how it was that I had several times crossed her path when she had no wish at all to find me on it. But she had a noble, good little heart, which could always find the right path, if only by instinct. Her father, whom she adored, had more influence over her than anyone. Her mother doted on her, but was extremely severe with her; and it was from her mother that Katya got her obstinacy, her pride and her strength of will. But she had to bear the brunt of all her mother's whims, which sometimes reached the point of moral tyranny. The princess had a strange conception of education, and Katya's education was a strange mixture of senseless spoiling and ruthless severity. What was yesterday permitted was suddenly for no sort of reason forbidden to-day, and the child's sense of justice was wounded... But I am anticipating. I will only observe here that the child already realised the difference between her relations with her mother and with her father. With the latter she was absolutely herself, always open, and nothing was kept back. With her mother it was quite the opposite — she was reserved, mistrustful, and unquestioningly obedient. Her obedience

was not, however, due to sincere feeling and conviction, but was the result of a rigid system. I will explain this more fully later on. However, to the peculiar honour of my Katya, she did in fact understand her mother, and when she gave in to her it was with a full recognition of her boundless love, which at times passed into morbid hysteria — and the little princess magnanimously took that into her reckoning. Alas! that reckoning was of little avail to the headstrong girl later on!

But I scarcely understood what was happening to me. Everything within me was in a turmoil from a new and inexplicable sensation, and I am not exaggerating if I say that I suffered, that I was torn by this new feeling. In short — and may I be forgiven for saying so — I was in love with my Katya. Yes, it was love, real love, love with tears and bliss, passionate love. What was it drew me to her? What gave rise to such a love? It began from my first sight of her, when all my feelings were joyfully thrilled by the angelic beauty of the child. Everything about her was lovely; not one of her defects was innate — they were all derived from her surroundings, and all were in a state of conflict. In everything one could see a fine quality taking for the time the wrong form; but everything in her, from that conflict upwards, was radiant with joyous hope, everything foretold a reassuring future. Everyone admired her, everyone loved her — not only I. When at three o'clock we were taken out for a walk, passers-by would stop as though in amazement as soon as they saw her, and often an exclamation of admiration followed the fortunate child. She was born to be happy, she must be born to be happy — that was one's first impression on meeting her. Perhaps my aesthetic sense, my sense of the artistic, was for the first time excited; it took shape for the first time, awakened by beauty, and that was the source from which my love arose.

The little princess's chief defect, or rather the leading element in her character, which was incessantly seeking expression in its true form, and naturally was continually misdirected and in a state of conflict — was pride. This pride was carried to such a pitch that it showed itself in the simplest trifles and passed into vanity. For instance, contradiction of any sort did not annoy her or anger her, but merely surprised her. She could not conceive that anything could be different from what she wanted. But the feeling of justice always gained the upper hand in her heart. If she were convinced that she had been unjust she at once accepted her punishment without repining or hesitation. And if till then she had not in her relation to me been true to herself, I set it down to an unconquerable aversion for me which for a time disturbed the grace and harmony of her whole being. It was bound to be so. She was carried away too passionately by her impulses, and it was always only by experience that she was brought into the right path. The results of all her undertakings were fine and true, but were gained only at the cost of incessant errors and mistakes.

Katya very soon satisfied her curiosity about me, and finally decided to let me alone. She behaved as though I were not in the house; she bestowed not an unnecessary word, scarcely a necessary one, upon me. I was banished from her games, and banished not by force, but so cleverly that it seemed as though I agreed to it. The lessons took their course, and if I was held up to her as an example of quickness of understanding and

gentleness of disposition, I no longer had the honour of mortifying her vanity, though it was so sensitive that it could be wounded even by the bulldog, Sir John Falstaff. Falstaff was lethargic and phlegmatic, but fierce as a tiger when he was teased, so fierce that even his master could not make him obey. Another characteristic of the beast was that he had no affection for anyone whatever. But his greatest enemy was undoubtedly the old princess... I am anticipating again, however. Katya's vanity made her do her utmost to overcome Falstaff's unfriendliness. She could not bear to think that there was even an animal in the house which did not recognise her authority, her power, did not give way to her, did not like her. And so Katya made up her mind to try and conquer Falstaff. She wanted to rule and dominate everyone; how could Falstaff be an exception? But the stubborn bulldog would not give in.

One day, when we were both sitting downstairs in one of the big drawing-rooms after dinner, the bulldog was lying stretched out in the middle of the room, enjoying his after- dinner siesta. It was at this moment that Katya took it into her head to conquer him. And so she abandoned her game and began cautiously on tiptoe to approach him, coaxing him, calling him the most endearing names, and beckoning to him ingratiatingly. But even before she got near him, Falstaff showed his terrible teeth; the little princess stood still. All she meant to do was to go up to Falstaff and stroke him — which he allowed no one to do but her mother, whose pet he was — and to make him follow her. It was a difficult feat, and involved serious risks, as Falstaff would not have hesitated to bite off her hand or to tear her to pieces if he had thought fit. He was as strong as a bear, and I watched Katya's manoeuvres from a distance with anxiety and alarm. But it was not easy to make her change her mind all at once, and even Falstaff's teeth, which he displayed most uncivilly, were not a sufficient argument. Seeing that she could not approach him all at once, Katya walked round her enemy in perplexity. Falstaff did not budge. Katya made another circle, considerably diminishing its diameter, then a third, but when she reached a spot which Falstaff seemed to regard as the forbidden limit, he showed his teeth again. The little princess stamped her foot, walked away in annoyance and hesitation, and sat down on the sofa.

Ten minutes later she devised a new method of seduction, she went out and returned with a supply of biscuits and cakes — in fact, she changed her tactics. But Falstaff was indifferent, probably because he already had had enough to eat. He did not even look at the piece of biscuit which was thrown; when Katya again reached the forbidden line which Falstaff seemed to regard as his boundary there followed even more show of hostility than at first. Falstaff raised his head, bared his teeth, gave a faint growl and made a slight movement, as though he were preparing to leap up. Katya tinned crimson with anger, threw down the cakes, and sat down on the sofa again.

She was unmistakably excited as she sat there. Her little foot tapped on the carpet, her cheeks were flaming, and there were actually tears of vexation in her eyes. She chanced to glance at me — and the blood rushed to her head. She jumped up from her seat resolutely, and with a firm step went straight up to the fierce dog.

Perhaps astonishment had a powerful effect on Falstaff this time. He let his enemy cross the boundary, and only when Katya was two paces away greeted her with the most malignant growl. Katya stopped for a minute, but only for a minute, and resolutely advanced. I was almost fainting with terror. Katya was roused as I had never seen her before, her eyes were flashing, with victory, with triumph. She would have made a wonderful picture. She fearlessly faced the menacing eyes of the furious bulldog, and did not flinch at the sight of his terrible jaws. He sat up, a fearful growl broke from his hairy chest; in another minute he would have torn her to pieces. But the little princess proudly laid her little hand upon him, and three times stroked his back in triumph. For one instant the bulldog hesitated. That moment was the most awful; but all at once he moved, got up heavily, stretched, and probably reflecting that it was not worth while having anything to do with children, walked calmly out of the room. Katya stood in triumph on the field of battle and glanced at me with an indescribable look in her eyes, a look full of the joy and intoxication of victory. I was as white as a sheet; she noticed it with a smile. But a deathly pallor overspread her cheeks too. She could scarcely reach the sofa, and sank on it almost fainting.

But my infatuation over her was beyond all bounds. From the day when I had suffered such terror on her account, I could not control my feelings. I was pining away in misery. A thousand times over I was on the point of throwing myself on her neck, but fear riveted me motionless to my seat. I remember I tried to avoid her that she might not see my emotion, but she chanced to come into the room where I was in hiding. I was so upset, and my heart began beating so violently that I felt giddy. I fancy that the mischievous girl noticed it, and for a day or two was herself somewhat disturbed. But soon she grew used to this state of affairs too. So passed a month, during the whole course of which I suffered in silence. My feelings were marked by an unaccountable power of standing a strain, if I may so express it; my character is distinguished by an extreme capacity for endurance, so that the outbreak, the sudden manifestation of feeling only comes at the last extremity. It must be remembered that all this time Katya and I did not exchange more than half a dozen words; but little by little I noticed from certain elusive signs that it was not due to forget- fullness nor indifference on her part, but to intentional avoidance, as though she had inwardly vowed to keep me at a certain distance. But I could not sleep at night, and by day could not conceal my emotion even from Madame Leotard. My love for Katya approached the abnormal. One day I stealthily took her handkerchief, another time the ribbon that she plaited in her hair, and spent whole nights kissing it and bathing it in my tears. At first Katya's indifference wounded and mortified me, but then everything grew misty and I could not have given myself an account of my own feelings. In this way new impressions gradually crowded out the old, and memories of my sorrowful past lost their morbid power and were replaced by new life.

I remember I used sometimes to wake up at night, get out of bed, and go on tiptoe to the little princess in the dim light of our nightlight. I would gaze for hours at Katya sleeping; sometimes I would sit on her bed, bend down to her face and feel her

hot breath on my cheeks. Softly, trembling with fear, I would kiss her little hands, her shoulders, hair, and feet if her foot peeped out from under the quilt. little by little I began to notice — for I never took my eyes off Katya all that month — that Katya was growing more pensive from day to day; she had begun to lose the evenness of her temper: sometimes one would not hear her noise all day, while another time there would be such an uproar as never before. She became irritable, exacting, grew crimson and angry very often, and was even guilty of little cruelties in her behaviour to me. At one time she would suddenly refuse to have dinner with me, to sit beside me, as though she felt aversion for me; or she would go off to her mother's apartments and stay there for whole days together, knowing perhaps that I was pining in misery without her. Then she would suddenly begin staring for an hour at a stretch, so that I did not know what to do with myself from overwhelming confusion, turned red and pale by turns, and yet did not dare to get up and go out of the room. Twice Katya complained of feeling feverish, though she had never been known to feel ill before. All of a sudden one morning a new arrangement was made; at Katya's urgent desire she moved downstairs to the apartments of her mother, who was ready to die with alarm when Katya complained of being feverish. I must observe that Katya's mother was by no means pleased with me, and put down the change in Katya, which she, too, observed, to the influence of my morose disposition, as she expressed it, on her daughter's character. She would have parted us long before, but put off doing so for a time, knowing that she would have to face a serious dispute with the prince, who, though he gave way to her in nearly everything, sometimes became unyielding and immovably obstinate. She understood her husband thoroughly.

I was overwhelmed by Katya's removal, and spent a whole week in anguish of spirit. I was in desperate misery, racking my brains to discover the cause of Katya's dislike. My heart was torn with grief and indignation, and a sense of injustice began to rise up in my wounded heart. A certain pride began to stir within me, and when I met Katya at the hour when we were taken out for a walk, I looked at her with such independence, such gravity, so differently from ever before, that even she was struck by it. Of course this change continued only by fits and starts, and my heart ached more and more afterwards, and I grew weaker, and more faint-hearted than ever. At last one morning, to my intense astonishment and joyful confusion, the little princess came back upstairs. At first she threw herself on Madame Leotard's neck with a wild laugh and announced that she had come back to live with us again, then she nodded to me, asked to be excused lessons that morning, and spent the whole morning frolicking and racing about. I had never seen her livelier and merrier. But towards evening she grew quiet and dreamy, and again a sort of sadness seemed to overshadow her charming little face. When her mother came in the evening to have a look at her, I saw that Katya made an unnatural effort to seem gay. But after her mother had gone she suddenly burst into tears. I was much impressed. Katya noticed my attention and went out of the room. In short, she was working up to some sudden crisis. Her mother was consulting doctors, and every day sent for Madame Leotard to question her minutely about Katya, and

told her to watch over all her actions. Only I had a foreboding of the truth, and my heart beat with hope.

In short, my little romance was reaching its denouement. The third day after Katya's return to our floor, I noticed that she was looking at me all the morning with a wonderful light 290

in her eyes, with a long persistent gaze... Several times I met that gaze, and each time we both blushed and cast down our eyes as though we were ashamed. At last the little princess burst out laughing and walked away. It struck three, and we had to dress to go out.

"Your shoe's untied," she said to me, "let me tie it."

I was bending down to tie it up myself, turning as red as a cherry, at Katya's having at last spoken to me.

"Let me do it," she said impatiently, and she laughed. She bent down on the spot, took my foot by force, set it on her knee and tied the lace. I was breathless; I did not know what to do from a sort of sweet terror. When she had finished tying the shoe, she stood up and scrutinised me from head to foot.

"Your neck is too open," she said, touching the bare skin of my neck with her little finger. "There, let me wrap it up."

I did not oppose her. She untied my neckerchief and retied it in her own fashion.

"Or you may get a cough," she said, with a sly smile, flashing her black, shining eyes upon me.

I was beside myself, I did not know what was happening to me and what was happening to Katya. But, thank goodness, our walk was soon over or I should not have been able to restrain myself, and should have rushed to kiss her in the street. As we went up the stairs, however, I succeeded in stealthily kissing her on the shoulder. She noticed it, started, but said nothing. In the evening she was dressed up and taken downstairs. Her mother had visitors. But there was a strange commotion in the house that evening.

Katya had a nervous attack. Her mother was beside herself with alarm. The doctor came and did not know what to say. Of course it was all put down to Katya's age, but I thought otherwise. Next morning Katya made her appearance the same as ever, rosy and in good spirits, full of inexhaustible health, but of whims and caprices such as she had never had before.

In the first place, all that morning she disregarded Madame Leotard altogether. Then she suddenly wanted to go and see her old aunt. Contrary to her usual practice, the old lady, who could not endure her niece, was in continual conflict with her, and did not care to see her, on this occasion for some reason consented to see her. At first everything went well, and for the first hour they got on harmoniously. At first the little rogue asked her aunt's forgiveness for all her misdeeds, for her noisy play, for her shouting and disturbing her aunt. The old lady solemnly and with tears in her eyes forgave her. But the mischievous girl would go too far. She took it into her head to tell her aunt about pranks which were so far only in the stage of schemes and projects.

Katya affected to be very meek and penitent, and to be very sorry for her sins; in short, the old fanatic was highly delighted, and her vanity was greatly flattered at the prospect of dominating Katya, the treasure and idol of the whole house, who could make even her mother gratify her whims. And so the naughty chit confessed in the first place that she had intended to pin a visiting card on her aunt's dress; then that she had planned to hide Falstaff under her bed; and then to break her spectacles, to carry off all her aunt's books, and put French novels from her mother's room in place of them, and to throw bits of flock all over the floor; then to hide a pack of cards in her aunt's pocket, and so on. In fact, she told her aunt of prank after prank each worse than the last. The old lady was beside herself, she turned pale and then red with anger. At last Katya could not keep it up any longer, she burst out laughing and ran away from her aunt. The old lady promptly sent for the child's mother. There was a fearful to-do, and the princess spent a couple of hours imploring her aunt with tears in her eyes to forgive Katya, to allow her not to be punished, and to take into consideration that the child was ill. At first the old lady would listen to nothing; she declared that next day she should leave the house, and was only softened when the princess promised that she would only put off punishment till her daughter was well again, and then would satisfy the just indignation of the old lady. Katya, however, received a stern reprimand. She was taken downstairs to her mother.

But the rogue positively tore herself away after dinner. Making my way downstairs, I met her on the staircase. She opened the door and called Falstaff. I instantly guessed that she was plotting a terrible vengeance. The fact was that her old aunt had no more irreconcilable enemy than Falstaff. He was not friendly with anyone, he liked no one, but he was proud, haughty, and conceited in the extreme. He did not like anyone, but unmistakably insisted on being treated with due respect by all. Everyone felt it for him indeed, mixed with a not uncalled-for terror. But all at once with the arrival of the old lady everything was changed; Falstaff was cruelly insulted, in other words he was definitely forbidden to go upstairs.

At first Falstaff was frantic with resentment, and spent the whole day scratching at the door at the bottom of the stairs that led to the upper storey; but he soon guessed the cause of his banishment, and the first Sunday that the old lady went out to church, Falstaff dashed at the poor lady, barking shrilly. It was with difficulty that they rescued her from the furious vengeance of the offended dog, for he had been banished by the orders of the old princess, who declared that she could not endure the sight of him. From that time forward Falstaff was sternly forbidden to go upstairs, and when the old lady came downstairs he was chased into the farthest room. The sternest injunctions were laid upon the servants. But the revengeful brute found means on three occasions to get upstairs As soon as he reached the top he ran through the whole chain of apartments till he came to the old princess's bedroom. Nothing could restrain him. Fortunately the old lady's door was always closed, and Falstaff confined himself to howling horribly before it till the servants ran up and chased him downstairs. During the whole time of the terrible bulldog's visit, the old lady screamed as though she were

being devoured by him, and each time became really ill from terror. She had several times sent an ultimatum to the princess, and even came to the point of saying that either she or Falstaff must leave the house; but Katya's mother would not consent to part with Falstaff.

The princess was not fond of many people and, after her children, Falstaff was dearer to her than anyone in the world, and the reason was this. One day, six years before, the prince had come back from a walk bringing with him a sick and muddy puppy of the most pitiful appearance, though he was a bulldog of the purest breed. The prince had somehow saved him from death. But as this new-comer was extremely rude and unmannerly in his behaviour, he was at the instance of the princess banished to the backyard and put on a cord. The prince did not oppose this.

Two years later, when all the family were staying at a summer villa, little Sasha, Katya's younger brother, fell into the Neva. His mother uttered a shriek, and her first impulse was to fling herself into the water after her son. She was with difficulty kept back from certain death. Meanwhile the child was being rapidly carried away by the current, and only his clothes kept him afloat. They began hurriedly unmooring a boat, but to save him would have been a miracle. All at once a huge, gigantic bulldog leapt into the water across the path of the drowning child, caught him in his teeth, and swam triumphantly with him to the bank. The princess flew to kiss the wet and muddy dog. But Falstaff, who at that time bore the prosaic and plebeian name of Frix, could not endure caresses from anyone, and responded to the lady's kisses and embraces by biting her shoulder. The princess suffered all her life from the wound, but her gratitude was unbounded. Falstaff was taken into the inner apartments, cleansed, washed, and decorated with a silver collar of fine workmanship. He was installed in the princess's study on a magnificent bearskin, and soon the princess was able to stroke him without risk of immediate punishment. She was horrified when she learned that her favourite was called Frix, and immediately looked out for a new name as ancient as possible. But such names as Hector, Cerberus, etc., were too hackneyed; a name was sought which would be perfectly suitable for the pet of the family. At last the prince proposed calling the dog Falstaff, on the ground of his preternatural voracity. The name was accepted with enthusiasm, and the bulldog was always called that. Falstaff behaved well. Like a regular Englishman, he was taciturn, morose, and never attacked anyone till he was touched; he only insisted that his place on the bearskin should be regarded as sacred, and that he should be shown fitting respect in general. Sometimes he seemed to have something like an attack of hysterics, as though he were overcome by the spleen, and at such moments Falstaff remembered with bitterness that his foe, his irreconcilable foe, who had encroached upon his rights, was still unpunished. Then he made his way stealthily to the staircase that led to the upper storey, and finding the door, as usual, closed, lay down somewhere not far from it, hid in a corner, and craftily waited till someone should be careless and leave the door open. Sometimes the revengeful beast would lie in wait for three days. But strict orders had been given to keep watch over the door, and for three months Falstaff had not got upstairs.

"Falstaff! Falstaff!" cried Katya, opening the door and coaxingly beckoning the dog to come to us on the stairs. At that very time Falstaff, with an instinctive feeling that the door would be opened, was preparing to leap across his Rubicon, but Katya's summons seemed to him so impossible that for some time he resolutely refused to believe his ears. He was as sly as a cat, and not to show that he noticed the heedless opening of the door, went up to the window, laid his powerful paws on the window-sill and began gazing at the building opposite — behaved, in fact, like a man quite uninterested who has gone out for a walk and stopped for a minute to admire the fine architecture of a neighbouring building. Meanwhile his heart was throbbing and swooning in voluptuous expectation. What was his amazement, his joy, his frantic joy, when the door was flung wide open before him, and not only that, but he was called, invited, besought to go upstairs and wreak his just vengeance. Whining with delight, he showed his teeth, and terrible, triumphant, darted upstairs like an arrow. His impetus was so great that a chair that happened to be in his way was sent flying and overturned seven feet away. Falstaff flew like a cannon-ball. Madame Leotard uttered a shriek of horror. But Falstaff had already dashed to the forbidden door, was beating upon it with both paws, but could not open it, and howled like a lost soul. He was answered by a fearful scream from the old maid within. But a whole legion of enemies was flocking from all quarters, the whole household was moving upstairs, and Falstaff, the ferocious Falstaff, with a muzzle deftly popped over his jaws, with all his four limbs tied up, was ingloriously withdrawn from the field of battle and led downstairs with a noose round him.

An envoy was sent to his mistress.

On this occasion the princess was in no mood for forgiving and showing mercy; but whom could she punish? She guessed at once, in a flash; her eyes fell upon Katya... That was it: Katya stood pale and trembling with fear. It was only now that she realised, poor child, the results of her mischief. Suspicion might fall upon the servants, on innocent people, and Katya was already preparing to tell the whole truth.

"Are you responsible?" her mother asked sternly.

I saw Katya's deadly pallor and, stepping forward, I pronounced in a resolute voice —

"It was I let Falstaff in... by accident," I added, for all my courage vanished before the princess's threatening eyes.

"Madame Leotard, give her an exemplary punishment!" said the princess, and she walked out of the room.

I glanced at Katya: she stood as though thunder-struck; her hands hung down at her sides; her little blanched face was looking down.

The only punishment that was made use of for the prince's children was being shut up in an empty room. To stay for two hours in an empty room was nothing. But when a child is put there by force against its will and told that it is deprived of freedom, the punishment is considerable. As a rule, Katya and her brother were shut up for two hours. In view of the enormity of my offence, I was shut up for four. Faint with

delight I entered my black hole. I thought about Katya. I knew that I had won her. But instead of being there four hours, I was there till four o'clock in the morning. This is how it happened.

Two hours after I had been put in confinement, Madame Leotard learned that her daughter had arrived from Moscow, had been taken ill and wanted to see her. Madame Leotard went off, forgetting me. The maid who looked after us probably took for granted that I had been released. Katya was sent for downstairs, and obliged to stay with her mother till eleven o'clock in the evening. When she came Lack she was very much surprised that I was not in bed. The maid undressed her and put her to bed, but Katya had her reasons for not inquiring about me. She got into bed expecting me to come, knowing for a fact that I had been shut up for four hours, and expecting me to be brought by our nurse. But Nastya forgot me entirely, the more readily as I always undressed myself. And so I was left to spend the night in prison.

At four o'clock in the night I heard someone knocking and trying to break in. I was asleep, lying anyhow on the floor. When I awoke, I cried out with terror, but at once recognised Katya's voice which rang out above all the rest, then the voice of Madame Leotard, then of the frightened Nastya, then of the housekeeper. At last the door was opened, and Madame Leotard hugged me with tears in her eyes, begging me to forgive her for having forgotten me. I flung myself on her neck in tears. I was shivering with cold, and all my bones ached from lying on the bare floor. I locked for Katya, but she had run into our bedroom, leapt into bed, and when I went in she was already asleep — or pretending to be. She had accidentally fallen asleep while waiting for me in the evening, and had slept on till four o'clock in the morning. When she woke, she had made a fuss, a regular uproar in fact, wakened Madame Leotard, who had returned, our nurse, all the maids, and released me.

In the morning the whole household knew of my adventure; even the princess said that I had been treated too severely. As for the prince, I saw him that day, for the first time, moved to anger. He came upstairs at ten o'clock in the morning in great excitement.

"Upon my word," he began to Madame Leotard, "what are you about? What a way to treat the poor child. It's barbarous.

simply barbarous! Savage! A delicate, sick child, such a dreamy, timid little girl, so imaginative, and you shut her in a dark room all night! Why, it is ruining her! Don't you know her story? It's barbarous, it's inhuman, I tell you, madam! And how is such a punishment possible? Who invented, who could have invented such a punishment?"

Poor Madame Leotard, with tears in her eyes, began in confusion explaining how it had all happened, how she had forgotten me, how her daughter had arrived; but that the punishment in itself was good if it did not last too long, and that Jean Jacques Rousseau indeed said something of the sort.

"Jean Jacques Rousseau, madam! But Jean Jacques could not have said that. Jean Jacques is no authority. Jean Jacques Rousseau should not have dared to talk of

education, he had no right to do so. Jean Jacques Rousseau abandoned his own children, madam! Jean Jacques was a bad man, madam!"

"Jean Jacques Rousseau! Jean Jacques a bad man! Prince! Prince! What are you saying?"

And Madame Leotard flared up.

Madame Leotard was a splendid woman, and above all things disliked hurting anyone's feelings; but touch one of her favourites, trouble the classic shades of Corneille, or Racine, insult Voltaire, call Jean Jacques Rousseau a bad man, call him a barbarian and — good heavens! Tears came into Madame Leotard's eyes, and the old lady trembled with excitement.

"You are forgetting yourself, prince!" she said at last, beside herself with agitation.

The prince pulled himself up at once and begged her pardon, then came up to me, kissed me with great feeling, made the sign of the cross over me, and left the room.

"Pauvre prince!" said Madame Leotard growing sentimental in her turn. Then we sat down to the schoolroom table.

But Katya was very inattentive at her lessons. Before going in to dinner she came up to me, looking flushed, with a laugh on her lips, stood facing me, seized me by the shoulders and said hurriedly as though ashamed:

"Well? You were shut up for a long time for me, weren't you? After dinner let us go and play in the drawing-room."

Someone passed by, and Katya instantly turned away from me.

In the dusk of evening we went down together to the big drawing-room, hand in hand. Katya was much moved and breathless with excitement. I was happy and joyful as I had never been before.

"Would you like a game of ball?" she said. "Stand here."

She set me in one corner of the room, but instead of walking away and throwing the ball to me, she stopped three steps from me, glanced at me, flushed crimson and sank on the sofa, hiding her face in both hands. I made a movement towards her; she thought that I meant to go away.

"Don't go, Nyetochka, stay with me," she said. "I shall be all right in a minute."

But in a flash she had jumped up from her place, and flushed and in tears flung herself on my neck. Her cheeks were wet, her lips were swollen like cherries, her curls were in disorder. She kissed me as though she were frantic, she kissed my face, eyes, lips, neck and hands, she sobbed as though she were in hysterics; I hugged her tight and we embraced each other sweetly, joyfully, like friends, like lovers who had met after a long separation. Katya's heart beat so violently that I could hear every throb.

But we heard a voice in the next room. Katya was called to go to her mother. She kissed me for the last time, quietly, silently, warmly, and flew from me at Nastya's call. I ran upstairs as though I had risen from the dead, flung myself on the sofa, hid my face in the pillow and sobbed with rapture. My heart was thumping as though it would burst my chest. I don't know how I existed until the night. At last it struck eleven and

I went to bed. Katya did not come back till twelve; she smiled at me from a distance but did not say a word. Nastya began undressing her slowly as though on purpose.

"Make haste, make haste, Nastya," Katya muttered.

"What's the matter with you, princess? Have you been running upstairs that your heart beats so?..." Nastya inquired.

"Oh, dear, how tiresome you are, Nastya! Make haste, make haste!" And Katya stamped on the floor in her vexation.

"Ah, what a little heart!" said Nastya, kissing the little foot from which she was taking off the shoe.

At last everything was done, Katya got into bed and Nastya went out of the room. Instantly Katya jumped out of bed and flew to me. I cried out as she came to me.

"Get into my bed, sleep with me!" she said, pulling me out of bed. A minute later I was in her bed. We embraced and hugged each other eagerly. Katya kissed and kissed me.

"Ah, I remember how you kissed me in the night," she said, flushing as red as a poppy.

I sobbed.

"Nyetochka!" whispered Katya through her tears, "my angel, I have loved you for so long, for so long! Do you know since when?''

"Since when?"

"Ever since father told me to beg your pardon that time when you stood up for your father, Nyetochka... my little for — lorn one," she said, showering kisses on me again. She was crying and laughing together.

"Oh, Katya!"

"Oh, what — oh, what?"

"Why have we waited so long... so long..," and I could not go on. We hugged each other and said nothing for three minutes.

"Listen, what did you think of me?" asked Katya.

"Oh, what a lot I thought about you, Katya. I have been thinking about you all the time, I thought about you day and night."

"And at night you talked about me."

"Really?"

"You cried ever so many times."

"I say, why were you so proud all the time?"

"I was stupid, you know, Nyetochka. It comes upon me, and then it's all over with me. I was angry with you."

"What for?"

"Because I was horrid. First, because you were better than I was; and then because father loves you more than me! And father is a kind man, Nyetochka, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes," I said, thinking with tears of the prince.

"He's a good man," said Katya gravely. "But what am I to do with him? He's always so... Well, then I asked your forgiveness, and I almost cried, and that made me cross again."

"And I saw, I saw that you wanted to cry."

"Well, hold your tongue, you little silly, you're a cry-baby yourself," Katya exclaimed, putting her hand over my mouth. "Listen. I very much wanted to like you, and then all at once began to want to hate you; and I did hate you so, I did hate you so!..."

"What for?"

"Oh, because I was cross with you. I don't know what for! And then I saw that you couldn't live without me, and I thought, 'I'll torment her, the horrid thing!'"

"Oh, Katya!"

"My darling!" said Katya, kissing my hand. "Then I wouldn't speak to you, I wouldn't for anything. But do you remember how I stroked Falstaff?"

"Ah, you fearless girl!"

"Wasn't I fri-ight-ened!" Katya drawled. "Do you know why I went up to him?"

"Why?"

"Why, you were looking at me. When I saw that you were looking... Ah, come what may, I would go up to him. I gave you a fright, didn't I? Were you afraid for me?"

"Horribly!"

"I saw. And how glad I was that Falstaff went away! Goodness, how frightened I was afterwards when he had gone, the mo-on-ster!''

And the little princess broke into an hysterical laugh; then she raised her feverish head and looked intently at me. Tears glistened like little pearls on her long eyelashes.

"Why, what is there in you that I should have grown so fond of you? Ah, you poor little thing with your flaxen hair; you silly little thing, such a cry-baby, with your little blue eyes; my little orphan girl!"

And Katya bent down to give me countless kisses again. A few drops of her tears fell on my cheeks. She was deeply moved.

"How I loved you, but still I kept thinking, 'No, no! I won't tell her.' And you know how obstinate I was! What was I afraid of, why was I ashamed of you? See how happy we are now!"

"Katya! How it hurt me!" I said in a frenzy of joy. "It broke my heart!"

"Yes, Nyetochka, listen... Yes, listen: who gave you your name Nyetochka?"

"Mother."

"You must tell me about your mother."

"Everything, everything," I answered rapturously.

"And where have you put those two handkerchiefs of mine with lace on them? And why did you carry off my ribbon? Ah, you shameless girl! I know all about it."

I laughed and blushed till the tears came.

"'No,' I thought, 'I will torment her, let her wait.' And at other times I thought, 'I don't like her a bit, I can't bear her.' And you are always such a meek little thing, my

little lamb! And how frightened I was that you would think me stupid. You are clever, Nyetochka, you are very clever, aren't you?"

"What do you mean, Katya?" I answered, almost offended.

"No, you are clever," said Katya, gravely and resolutely. "I know that. Only I got up one morning and felt awfully fond of you. I had been dreaming of you all night. I thought I would ask mother to let me live downstairs. 'I don't want to like her, I don't want to!' And the next night I woke up and thought, 'If only she would come as she did last night!' And you did come! Ah, how I pretended to be asleep... Ah, what shameless creatures we are, Nyetochka?"

"But why did you want not to like me?"

"I don't know. But what nonsense I am talking, I liked you all the time, I always liked you. It was only afterwards I could not bear you; I thought, 'I will kiss her one day, or else I will pinch her to death.' There's one for you, you silly!"

And the little princess pinched me.

"And do you remember my tying up your shoe?"

"Yes, I remember."

"I remember. Were you pleased? I looked at you. 'What a sweet darling,' I thought. 'If I tie up her shoe, what will she think?' But I was happy too. And do you know, really I wanted to kiss you... but I didn't kiss you. And then it seemed so funny, so funny! And when we were out on our walk together, all the way I kept wanting to laugh. I couldn't look at you it was so funny. And how glad I was that you went into the black hole for me."

The empty room was called the "black hole".

"And were you frightened?"

"Horribly frightened."

"I wasn't so glad at your saying you did it, but I was glad that you were ready to be punished for me! I thought, 'She is crying now, but how I love her! To-morrow how I will kiss her, how I will kiss her!' And I wasn't sorry, I really wasn't sorry for you, though I did cry."

"But I didn't cry, I was glad!"

"You didn't cry? Ah, you wicked girl!" cried Katya, fastening her little lips upon me.

"Katya, Katya! Oh, dear! how lovely you are!"

"Yes, am I not? Well, now you can do what you like to me. My tyrant, pinch me. Please pinch me! My darling, pinch me!"

"You silly!"

"Well, what next?"

"Idiot!"

"And what next?"

"Why, kiss me."

And we kissed each other, cried, laughed, and our lips were swollen with kissing.

"Nyetochka! To begin with, you are always to sleep with me. Are you fond of kissing? And we will kiss each other. Then I won't have you be so depressed. Why were you so depressed? You'll tell me, won't you?"

"I will tell you everything, but I am not sad now, but happy!''

"No, you are to have rosy cheeks like mine. Oh, if tomorrow would only come quickly! Are you sleepy, Nyetochka?"

"No."

"Well, then let's talk."

And we chattered away for another two hours. Goodness knows what we didn't talk about. To begin with, the little princess unfolded all her plans for the future, and explained the present position of affairs; and so I learned that she loved her father more than anyone, almost more than me. Then we both decided that Madame Leotard was a splendid woman, and that she was not at all strict. Then we settled what we would do the next day, and the day after, and, in fact, planned out our lives for the next twenty years. Katya decided that we should live in this way: one day she would give me orders and I should obey, and the next day it should be the other way round, I should command and she would obey unquestioningly, and so we should both give orders equally; and that if either disobeyed on purpose we would first quarrel just for appearances and then make haste to be reconciled. In short, an infinity of happiness lay before us. At last we were tired out with prattling, I could not keep my eyes open. Katya laughed at me and called me sleepy-head, but she fell asleep before I did. In the morning we woke up at the same moment, hurriedly kissed because someone was coming in, and I only just had time to scurry into my bed.

All day we did not know what to do for joy. We were continually hiding and running away from everyone, dreading other people's eyes more than anything. At last I began telling her my story. Katya was distressed to tears by what I told her.

"You wicked, wicked girl! Why didn't you tell me all this before? I should have loved you so. And did the boys in the street hurt you when they hit you?"

"Yes, I was so afraid of them."

"Oh, the wretches! Do you know, Nyetochka, I saw a boy beating another in the street. To-morrow I'll steal Falstaff's whip, and if I meet one like that, I'll give him such a beating!"

Her eyes were flashing with indignation.

We were frightened when anyone came in. We were afraid of being caught kissing each other. And we kissed each other that day at least a hundred times. So that day passed and the next. I was afraid that I should die of rapture, I was breathless with joy. But our happiness did not last long.

Madame Leotard had to report all the little princess's doings. She watched us for three days, and during those three days she gathered a great deal to relate. At last she went down to Katya's mother and told her all that she had observed — that we both seemed in a sort of frenzy; that for the last three days we had been inseparable; that we were continually kissing, crying and laughing like lunatics, and that like lunatics we

babbled incessantly; that there had been nothing like this before, that she did not know to what to attribute it, but she fancied that the little princess was passing through some nervous crisis; and finally that she believed that it would be better for us to see each other more seldom.

"I have thought so for a long time," answered the princess. "I knew that queer little orphan would give us trouble. The things I have been told about her, about her life in the past! Awful, really awful! She has an unmistakable influence over Katya. You say that Katya is very fond of her?"

"Absolutely devoted."

The princess crimsoned with annoyance. She was already jealous of her daughter's feeling for me.

"It's not natural," she said. "At first they seemed to avoid each other, and I must confess I was glad of it. Though she is only a little girl, I would not answer for anything. You understand me? She has absorbed her bringing up, her habits and perhaps principles from infancy, and I don't understand what the prince sees in her. A thousand times I have suggested sending her to a boarding-school."

Madame Leotard attempted to defend me, but the princess had already determined to separate us. Katya was sent for at once, and on arriving downstairs was informed that she would not see me again till the following Sunday — that is, for just a week.

I learned all this late in the evening and was horror-stricken; I thought of Katya, and it seemed to me that she would not be able to bear our separation. I was frantic with misery and grief and was taken ill in the night; in the morning the prince came to see me and whispered to me words of hope. The prince did his utmost, but all was in vain, the princess would not alter her intention. Little by little I was reduced to despair, I could hardly breathe for misery.

On the morning of the third day Nastya brought me a note from Katya. Katya wrote a fearful scrawl in pencil:

"I love you. I am sitting with mamma and thinking all the time how I can escape to you. But I shall escape, I have said so, and so I don't cry. Write and tell me how you love me. And I was hugging you in my dreams all night, and was very miserable, Nyetochka. I am sending you some sweets. Farewell."

I answered in the same style. I spent the day crying over Katya's letter. Madame Leotard worried me with her caresses. In the evening she went to the prince and told him I should certainly be ill for the third time if I did not see Katya, and that she regretted having told the princess. I questioned Nastya about Katya. She told me that Katya was not crying but was very pale.

In the morning Nastya whispered to me:

"Go down to his Excellency's study. Go down by the staircase on the right."

My whole being revived with a presentiment. Breathless with expectation, I ran down and opened the study door. She was not there. Suddenly Katya clutched me from behind and kissed me warmly. Laughter, tears... In a flash Katya tore herself from my arms, clambered on her father, leapt on his shoulders like a squirrel, but

losing her balance, sprang off on to the sofa. The prince fell on the sofa after her. Katya was shedding tears of joy.

"Father, what a good man you are!"

"You madcaps! What has happened to you? What's this friendship? What's this love?"

"Be quiet, father, you know nothing about it."

And we rushed into each other's arms again.

I began looking at her more closely. She had grown thinner in three days. The red had begun to fade from her little face, and pallor was stealing into its place. I shed tears of grief.

At last Nastya knocked, a signal that Katya had been missed and was being asked for. Katya turned deathly pale.

"That's enough, children. We'll meet every day. Good-bye, and may God bless you," said the prince.

He was touched as he looked at us; but his words did not come true. In the evening the news came from Moscow that little Sasha had fallen ill and was almost on the point of death. The princess decided to set off next day. This happened so suddenly that I knew nothing about it till the moment of saying good-bye to Katya. The prince himself had insisted on our being allowed to say good-bye, and the princess had only reluctantly consented. Katya looked shattered. I ran downstairs hardly knowing what I was doing, and threw myself on her neck. The travelling coach was already at the door. Katya uttered a shriek when she saw me, and sank unconscious. I flew to kiss her. The princess began trying to restore her. At last she came to herself and hugged me again.

"Good-bye, Nyetochka," she said to me suddenly, laughing, with an indescribable expression on her face. "Don't mind me; it's nothing; I am not ill. I shall come back in a month, then we will not part again."

"That's enough," said the princess calmly. "Let us start."

But Katya came back once more. She squeezed me convulsively in her arms.

"My life," she succeeded in whispering, hugging me. "Good-bye till we meet again."

We kissed each other for the last time and Katya vanished — for a long, long time. Eight years passed before we met again.

* * *

I have purposely described so minutely this episode of my childhood, Katya's first appearance in my life. But our story is inseparable. Her romance was my romance. It was as though it were fated that I should meet her; that she should find me. And I could not deny myself the pleasure of going back once more in memory into my childhood... Now my story will go more quickly. My life passed all at once into a dead calm, and I seemed only to wake up again when I had reached my sixteenth year...

But a few words of what became of me on the departure of the prince's family to Moscow.

I was left with Madame Leotard.

A fortnight later a messenger arrived with the news that their return to Petersburg was postponed indefinitely. As for family reasons Madame Leotard could not go to Moscow, her duties in the prince's household were at an end; but she remained in the same family and entered the house of Alexandra Mihalovna, the princess's elder daughter.

I have said nothing yet about Alexandra Mihalovna, and indeed I had only seen her once. She was the daughter of the princess by her first husband. The origin and family of the princess was somewhat obscure. Her first husband was a contractor. When the princess married a second time she did not know what to do with her elder daughter. She could not hope that she would make a brilliant marriage. Her dowry was only a moderate one; at last, four years before, they had succeeded in marrying her to a wealthy man of a very decent grade in the service. Alexandra Mihalovna passed into a different circle and saw a different world around her. The princess used to visit her twice a year; the prince, her stepfather, visited her once a week with Katya. But of late the princess had not liked letting Katya go to see her sister, and the prince took her on the sly. Katya adored her sister, but they were a great contrast in character. Alexandra Mihalovna was a woman of twenty-two, quiet, soft and loving; it was as though some secret sorrow, some hidden heartache had cast a shade of austerity on her lovely features. Gravity and austerity seemed out of keeping with the angelic candour of her face, it was like mourning on a child. One could not look at her without feeling greatly attracted. She was pale and was said to be inclined to be consumptive when I saw her for the first time. She led a very solitary life, and did not like receiving many guests or paying visits; she was like a nun. She had no children. I remember she came to see Madame Leotard, and coming up to me, kissed me with much feeling. She was accompanied by a lean, rather elderly man. Tears came into his eyes as he looked at me. This was the violinist B. Alexandra Mihalovna put her arms round me and asked whether I would like to live with her and be her daughter. Looking into her face, I recognised my Katya's sister, and hugged her with a dull pain in my heart which set my whole chest aching... as though someone had once more pronounced over me the word "orphan". Then Alexandra Mihalovna showed me a letter from the prince. In it were a few lines addressed to me, and I read them with smothered sobs. The prince sent his blessing and wished me long life and happiness, and begged me to love his other daughter. Katya wrote me a few lines too. She wrote to me that she would not now leave her mother.

And so that evening I passed into another family, into another house, to new people, for a second time tearing my heart away from all that had become so dear, that by now had become like my own. I arrived exhausted and lacerated by mental suffering... Now a new story begins.

Chapter VI

MY new life was as calm and unruffled as though I had been living among hermits... I lived more than eight years with my new guardians, and I remember only very few occasions in which there were evening parties, dinners, or gatherings of friends and relations. With the exception of two or three people who came from time to time, the musician B., who was the friend of the family, and the people who came to see Alexandra Mihalovna's husband, almost always on business, no one came to see us. Alexandra Mihalovna's husband was always occupied with business and the duties of his office, and could only with difficulty contrive to get even a little free time, and that was divided between his family and social life. The necessity of maintaining important connections which it was impossible to neglect led him to show himself fairly frequently in society. People talked on all hands of his boundless ambition; but as he enjoyed the reputation of a businesslike and serious man, as he had a very prominent post, and as happiness and success seemed to dog his path, public opinion by no means denied its approval. It went beyond that, in fact. People always felt a special liking for him which they never felt for his wife. Alexandra Mihalovna lived in complete isolation; but she seemed to be glad of it. Her gentle character seemed created for seclusion.

She was devoted to me with her whole heart, and loved me as though I had been her own child; and with the tears not yet dry from parting with Katya, with a still aching heart, I threw myself eagerly into the motherly arms of my kind benefactress. From that time forward my warm love for her has been uninterrupted. To me she was mother, sister, friend, she replaced all the world for me and cherished my youth. Moreover, I soon noticed by instinct, by intuition, that her lot was by no means so rosy as might be imagined at first sight from her quiet and apparently serene life, from the show of freedom, from the unclouded brightness of the smile which so often lighted up her face; and so every day of my development made clear to me something new in the life of my benefactress, something which my heart slowly and painfully surmised, and together with this sorrowful knowledge my devotion to her grew greater and greater.

She was of a timid disposition and weak will. Looking at the candid and serene features of her face, one would never have supposed that any agitation could trouble her upright heart. It was unthinkable that she could dislike anyone; compassion in her always got the upper hand even of repulsion — and yet there were few friends she was devoted to, and she lived in almost complete solitude... She was passionate and impressionable by temperament, but at the same time she seemed afraid of her own impressionability, as though she were continually guarding her heart, not allowing it to forget itself even in dreams. Sometimes even at her sunniest moments I noticed tears in her eyes as though a sudden painful memory of something rankling in her conscience had flamed up in her soul, as though something were keeping hostile watch on her happiness and seeking to trouble it. And it seemed as though the happier she were, the calmer and serener the moment of her life, the nearer was this depression, the more likely to appear the sudden melancholy, the tears, as though some sudden crisis

came over her. I don't remember one calm month in all the eight years. Her husband appeared to be very fond of her; she adored him. But at the first glance it seemed as though there were something unuttered between them. There was some secret in her life; at least I began to suspect it from the first moment...

Alexandra Mihalovna's husband made a forbidding impression on me from the first. This impression arose in childhood and was never effaced. In appearance he was a tall, thin man, who seemed intentionally to conceal the look in his eyes behind green spectacles. He was dry and uncommunicative, and even tête-à-tête with his wife seemed unable to find anything to talk about. He was obviously oppressed by society. He took no notice of me, and every time when we all three met in Alexandra Mihalovna's drawing-room for tea I felt ill at ease in his presence. I would glance stealthily at Alexandra Mihalovna, and notice with pain that she seemed to be hesitating over every movement she made, turning pale if she fancied her husband was becoming particularly cross and severe, or suddenly flushing as though she heard or divined some hint in something her husband said. I felt that she was oppressed in his presence, and yet it seemed as though she could not live without him for a minute. I was struck by her extraordinary attentiveness to him, to every word he uttered, to every movement he made; as though her whole soul longed to please him in some way, as though she felt that she did not succeed in doing what he desired. She seemed to be entreating his approbation; the slightest smile on his face, half a word of kindness — and she was happy; as though she had been at the first stage of still timorous, still hopeless love. She waited on her husband as though he were dangerously ill. When he went off into his study after pressing the hand of Alexandra Mihalovna, at whom he always looked, as I fancied, with a compassion that weighed upon her, she was completely changed. Her movements, her talk, instantly became more light-hearted, and more free. But a sort of embarrassment remained for a long time after every interview with her husband. She began at once recalling every word as though weighing every sentence he had uttered. Frequently she turned to me with the question: had she heard right? Was that the expression Pyotr Alexandrovitch had used? as though looking for some other meaning in what he had said; and it was perhaps not for another hour that she quite regained her spirits, as though convinced that he was quite satisfied with her, and that she had no need to worry herself. Then she would suddenly become sweet, gay, and joyful; would kiss me, laugh with me, or go to the piano and improvise on it for an hour or two. But not infrequently her joy would be suddenly interrupted; she would begin to shed tears, and when I looked at her in agitation, in trouble and in anxiety, she would at once assure me in a whisper, as though afraid of being overheard, that her tears meant nothing, that she was happy, and that I must not worry about her. It would sometimes happen when her husband was away that she would suddenly begin to be agitated, would begin inquiring about him, would show anxiety, would send to find out what he was doing, would find out from the maid why the carriage was ordered and where he meant to drive, would inquire whether he were ill, in good spirits or depressed, what he said, and so on. It seemed as though she did not dare to speak to him herself about

his business and pursuits. When he gave her some advice or asked her some question, she listened to him as quietly and was as overawed as though she were his slave. She very much liked him to praise something of hers, anything, a book or her needlework. She seemed flattered by this, and seemed to be made happy by it at once. But her joy was boundless when he chanced (which happened very rarely) to fondle one of their two tiny children. Her face was transformed, and beamed with happiness. And at such moments she sometimes let herself be too much carried away by joy in her husband's presence. She would be so emboldened as suddenly, without any invitation from him, to suggest, of course timidly and with a trembling voice, that he should listen to some new piece of music she had just received, or would give his opinion about some book, or even that he would let her read him a page or two of some author who had made a special impression upon her that day. Sometimes her husband would graciously fall in with her wishes and even smile condescendingly at her, as people smile at a spoilt child whom they do not want to check in some strange whim for fear of prematurely troubling its simplicity. But, I don't know why, I was revolted to the depths of my being by those smiles, that supercilious condescension, that inequality between them. I said nothing. I restrained myself and only watched them diligently with childish curiosity, but with prematurely harsh criticism. Another time I would notice that he suddenly seemed to pull himself up, seemed to recollect himself, as though he suddenly, painfully, and against his will were reminded of something disagreeable, awful, inevitable; instantly the condescending smile would vanish from his face, and his eyes would fasten on his nervously fluttered wife with a look of compassion which made me shudder, which, as I now realise, would have made me wretched if it had been turned upon me. At the same minute the joy vanished from Alexandra Mihalovna's face. The music or the reading was interrupted. She turned white, but controlled herself and was silent. There followed unpleasant moments, moments of anguish which sometimes lasted a long time. At last the husband put an end to them. He would get up from his seat, as though with an effort suppressing his emotion and vexation, and pacing two or three times up and down the room in gloomy silence would press his wife's hand, sigh deeply, and in undisguised perturbation would utter a few disconnected words in which the desire to comfort his wife was evident, and would go out of the room; while Alexandra Mihalovna would burst into tears, or would sink into a terrible prolonged melancholy. Often he blessed her and made the sign of the cross over her as though she were a child saying good-night to him, and she received his blessing with reverence and gratitude. But I cannot forget certain evenings in the house (two or three only, during those eight years) when Alexandra Mihalovna seemed suddenly transformed. An anger, an indignation, was reflected in her usually gentle face, instead of her invariable self-abasement and reverence for her husband. Sometimes the storm would be gathering for a whole hour; the husband would become more silent, more austere and more surly than usual. At last the poor woman's sore heart could bear no more. In a voice breaking with emotion she would begin talking, at first jerkily, disconnectedly, with hints and bitter pauses; then as though unable to endure her anguish she would suddenly break into tears and

sobs, and then would follow an outburst of indignation, of reproaches, of complaints, of despair, as though she were passing through a nervous crisis. And then it was worth seeing with what patience the husband bore it, with what sympathy he bent down to comfort her, kissed her hands, and even at last began weeping with her; then she would seem to recollect herself, her conscience would seem to cry out and convict her of crime. Her husband's tears would have a shattering effect on her and, wringing her hands in despair, with convulsive sobs she would fall at his feet and beg the forgiveness that was instantly vouchsafed her. But the agonies of her conscience, the tears and the entreaties for forgiveness went on a long time, and she would be still more timid, still more tremulous in his presence for whole months. I could comprehend nothing of these reproaches and upbraidings; I was sent out of the room on these occasions and always very awkwardly. But they could not keep their secret from me entirely." I watched, I noticed, I divined, and from the very beginning a vague suspicion took shape in me that there was some mystery in all this, that these sudden outbreaks of an exasperated heart were not simply a nervous crisis; that there was some reason for the husband's always being sullen, that there was some reason for his double-edged compassion for his poor sick wife, that there was some reason for her everlasting timidity and trepidation before him, and this meek, strange love which she did not even dare to display in her husband's presence, that there was some reason for her isolation, her nunlike seclusion, that sudden flush and deathly pallor on her face in the presence of her husband.

But since such scenes with her husband were very rare, since life was very monotonous and I saw her from so close at hand, since indeed I was developing and growing very rapidly and much that was new was beginning to stir unconsciously in me, distracting me from my observations, I grew accustomed at last to the life, and to the habits and characters surrounding me. I could not, of course, help wondering at times as I looked at Alexandra Mihalovna, but my doubts so far reached no solution. I loved her warmly, respected her sadness, and so was afraid of troubling her over-sensitive heart by my curiosity. She understood me, and how many times she was ready to thank me for my devotion! Sometimes, noticing my anxiety, she would smile through her tears and make a joke herself at her frequent weeping, then suddenly she would begin telling me that she was very contented, very happy, that everyone was so kind to her, that everyone she had known had been so fond of her, that she was very much distressed that Pyotr Alexandrovitch was always so worried about her, about her peace of mind, while she was on the contrary so happy, so happy!... And then she would embrace me with such deep feeling, her face would be lighted up with such love, that my heart, if I may say so, ached with sympathy for her.

Her features were never effaced from my memory. They were regular, and their thinness and pallor only accentuated the severe charm of her beauty. Her thick black hair, combed smoothly down, framed her cheeks in sharp severe shadow; but that seemed to make more sweetly striking the contrast of her soft gaze, her large childishly clear blue eyes, which reflected at times so much simplicity, timidity, as it were defencelessness, as though fearful over every sensation, over every impulse of the heart — over the

momentary gladness and over the frequent quiet sorrow. But at some happy unruffled moments there was so much that was serene and bright as day, so much goodness and tranquillity in the glance that penetrated to the heart The eyes, blue as the heavens, shone with such love and gazed so sweetly, and in them was reflected so deep a feeling of sympathy for everything that was noble, for everything that asked for love, that besought compassion — that the whole soul surrendered to her, was involuntarily drawn to her, and seemed to catch from her the same serenity, the same calm of spirit and peacemaking and love. So sometimes one gazes up at the blue sky and feels that one is ready to spend whole hours in secret contemplation, and that the soul is growing more free and calm, as though the vast vault of heaven were reflected in it as in a still sheet of water. When — and this happened often — exaltation sent the colour rushing to her face and her bosom heaved with emotion, then her eyes flashed like lightning and seemed to give forth sparks, as though her whole soul, which had chastely guarded the pure flame of beauty now inspiring her, had passed into them. At such moments she was as though inspired. And in this sudden rush of inspiration, in the transition from a mood of shrinking gentleness to lofty spiritual exaltation, to pure stern enthusiasm, there was at the same time so much that was naive, so much that was childishly impulsive, so much childlike faith, that I believe an artist would have given half his life to portray such a moment of lofty ecstasy and to put that inspired face upon canvas.

From my first days in that house I noticed that she was positively delighted to have me in her solitude. She had only one child then, and had only been twelve months a mother. But I was quite like a daughter to her, and she was incapable of making any distinction between me and her own children. With what warmth she set about my education! She was in such a hurry at first that Madame Leotard could not help smiling as she looked at her. Indeed we set about everything at once, so that we could not understand each other. For instance, she undertook to teach me many things at once, but so many that it ended in more excitement, more heat, and more loving impatience on her part than in real benefit to me. At first she was disappointed at finding herself so incapable, but after a good laugh we started again from the beginning, though Alexandra Mihalovna, in spite of her first failure, still boldly declared herself opposed to Madame Leotard's system. They kept up a laughing argument, but my new instructress was absolutely opposed to every system, declaring that we should find the true method as we went along, that it was useless to stuff my head with dry information, and that success depended on understanding my instincts and on arousing my interest — and she was right, for she was triumphantly successful. To begin with, from the first the parts of pupil and teacher entirely disappeared. We studied like two friends, and sometimes it seemed as though I were teaching Alexandra Mihalovna, all unconscious of the subtlety of the method. So, too, arguments often sprung up between us, and I exerted myself to the utmost to prove that the thing was as I saw it, and imperceptibly Alexandra Mihalovna led me into the right way. But in the end when we reached the truth we were pursuing, I would guess how it was, would detect Alexandra Mihalovna's strategy, and pondering over all her efforts with me, sometimes whole hours sacrificed

for my benefit, I fell on her neck and embraced her after every lesson. My sensibility touched and perplexed her. She began inquiring with interest about my past, wishing to hear it from me; and every time I told her anything, she grew more tender and more earnest with me, more earnest because through my unhappy childhood I aroused in her not only compassion, but a feeling as it were of respect. After I had told her about myself we usually fell into long conversations in which she explained my past experiences to me, so that I seemed really to live through them again and learnt a great deal that was new. Madame Leotard often thought such talk too serious and, seeing the tears I could not restrain, thought them quite unsuitable. I thought the very opposite, for after such lessons I felt as light-hearted and glad as though there had been nothing unhappy in my life. Moreover, I felt too grateful to Alexandra Mihalovna for making me love her more and more every day. Madame Leotard had no idea that all that had hitherto surged up from my soul fitfully with premature violence was gradually in this way being smoothed out and brought into tuneful harmony. She did not know that my childish, lacerated heart had suffered such agonising pain that it was unjust in its exasperation and resented its sufferings, not understanding whence they came.

The day began by our meeting in the nursery beside her baby; we woke him, washed and dressed him, fed him, played with him and taught him to talk. At last we left the baby and sat down to work. We studied a great deal, but they were strange lessons. There was everything in them, but nothing definite. We read, discussed our impressions, put aside the book and went to music, and whole hours flew by unnoticed. In the evenings B., who was a friend of Alexandra Mihalovna's, would come, and Madame Leotard would come too; often a very lively heated conversation would begin, about art, about life (which we in our little circle knew only by hearsay), about reality, about ideals, about the past and the future, and we would sit up till after midnight. I listened intently, grew enthusiastic with the others, laughed or was touched, and it was at this time that I learned in full detail everything concerning my father and my early childhood. Meanwhile I was growing up; teachers were engaged for me from whom I should have learned nothing but for Alexandra Mihalovna. With my geography teacher I should have simply gone blind hunting for towns and rivers on the map. With Alexandra Mihalovna we set off on such voyages, stayed in such countries, saw such wonders, spent such delightful, such fantastic hours; and so great was the ardour of both of us that the books she had read were not enough for us, we were obliged to have recourse to new ones. Soon I was equal to teaching my geography teacher, though I must do him the justice to say he kept to the end his superiority in exact knowledge of the degrees of latitude and longitude in which any town was situated, and the thousands, hundreds and even tens of inhabitants living in it. Our teacher of history was paid his fees regularly also, but when he went away Alexandra Mihalovna and I learnt history in our own way; we took up our books and were often reading them till far into the night, or rather Alexandra Mihalovna read, for she exercised some censorship. I never felt so enthusiastic as I did after this reading. We were both excited as though we had been ourselves the heroes. Of course we read more between

the lines than in the words themselves; moreover, Alexandra Mihalovna was splendid at describing things, so that it seemed that all we read about had happened in her presence. It may perhaps have been absurd that we should have been so excited and sat up beyond midnight, I a child and she a stricken heart weighed down by the burden of life! I knew that she found, as it were, a rest from life beside me. I remember that at times I pondered strangely, looking at her. I was divining much before I had begun to live, I had already divined much in life.

At last I was thirteen. Meanwhile Alexandra Mihalovna's health grew worse and worse. She had become more irritable, her attacks of hopeless melancholy were more severe. Her husband's visits began to be more frequent, and he used to sit with her, as before, of course, gloomy, austere and almost silent, for longer and longer periods. I became more intensely absorbed in her lot.

I was growing out of childhood, a great number of new impressions, observations, enthusiasms, conjectures were taking shape in me. Certainly, the secret of this family began to worry me more and more. There were moments when it seemed to me that I understood something of that secret. At other times I would relapse into indifference, into apathy, even into annoyance, and forgot my curiosity as I found no answer to any question. At times — and this happened more and more frequently — I experienced a strange craving to be alone and to think, to do nothing but think. My present stage was like the time when I was living with my parents and when, before I had made friends with my father, I spent a whole year, thinking, imagining, looking out from my corner into God's world, so that at last I became like a wild creature, lost among the fantastic phantoms I had myself created. The difference was that now there was more impatience, more wretchedness, more new unconscious impulses, more thirst for movement, for thrills, so that I could not concentrate myself on one thing as in the past. On her side Alexandra Mihalovna seemed to hold herself more aloof from me. At that age I could hardly be her friend. I was not a child, I asked too many questions, and at times looked at her so that she was obliged to drop her eyes before me. These were strange moments. I could not bear to see her tears, and often tears rose into my own eyes as I looked at her. I flung myself on her neck and kissed her warmly. What answer could she make me? I felt that I was burdensome to her. But at other times — and they were sad and terrible times — she would convulsively embrace me as though in despair, as though seeking my sympathy, as though she were unable to endure her isolation, as though I understood her, as though we were suffering together. But yet the secret remained between us, that was unmistakable, and I began at such moments myself to feel aloof from her. I felt ill at ease with her. Moreover, there was little now we had in common, nothing but music. But the doctors began to forbid her music. And books were a greater difficulty than anything, she did not know how to read with me. We should, of course, have stopped at the first page; every word might have been a hint, every insignificant phrase an enigma. We both avoided warm, sincere conversation tête-à-tête.

And it was at this time that fate suddenly and unexpectedly gave a new turn to my life in a very strange way. My attention, my feelings, my heart, my brain were all at once suddenly turned with intense energy amounting almost to enthusiasm into another, quite unexpected channel and, without realising the fact, I was carried along into a new world. I had no time to turn round, to look about me, to think things over; I might be going to ruin, I felt that indeed; but the temptation was too great for my fear, and I took my chance shutting my eyes. And for a long time I was diverted from the real life which was beginning to weigh upon me, and from which I had so eagerly and so uselessly sought an escape. This was what it was, and this is how it happened.

There were three doors leading out of the dining-room — one leading to the sitting-room, another to my room and the nursery, and the third to the library. From the library there was another way out, only separated from my room by a study in which Pyotr Alexandrovitch's assistant, his copyist, who was at the same time his secretary and his agent, was installed. The key of the bookcases and of the library was kept in his room. After dinner one day, when he was not in the house, I found the key on the floor. I was seized with curiosity, and arming myself with my find I went into the library. It was rather a large, very light room, furnished with eight large bookcases filled with books. There were a great number of books, most of which had come to Pyotr Alexandrovitch by inheritance. The rest of the books had been added by Alexandra Mihalovna, who was continually buying them. Great circumspection had been exercised hitherto in giving me books to read, so that I readily guessed that a great deal was forbidden me, and that many things were a secret from me. That was why I opened the first bookcase and took out the first book with irresistible curiosity, with a rush of terror and joy and of a peculiar un- definable feeling. The bookcase was full of novels. I took one of them, shut the bookcase and carried the book off to my room with as strange a sensation, with as much throbbing and fluttering of my heart, as though I foresaw that a great transformation would take place in my life. Going into my room, I locked myself in and opened the book. But I could not read it, my mind was full of another preoccupation; I had first to plan securely and finally my access to the library in such a way that no one would know, and that I should retain the possibility of getting any book at any time. And so I postponed my enjoyment to a more convenient moment; I took the book back, but hid the key in my room. I hid it, and that was the first evil action in my life. I awaited the results; they were extremely satisfactory: Pyotr Alexandrovitch's secretary, after looking for the key the whole evening and part of the night, searching on the floor with a candle, decided in the morning to send for a locksmith, who from the bunch of keys he had brought with him made a new one to fit. So the matter ended, and no one heard anything more about the loss of the key. I was so cautious that I did not go into the library till a week later, when I felt perfectly secure from all suspicion. At first I chose a moment when the secretary was not at home; afterwards I took to going into the library from the dining-room, for Pyotr Alexandrovitch's secretary merely kept the key in his pocket, and never entered

into closer relations with the books, and therefore did not even go into the room in which they were kept.

I began reading greedily, and soon I was entirely absorbed in reading. All my new cravings, all my recent yearnings, all the still vague impulses of my adolescence, which had surged up with such restless violence in my soul, prematurely stimulated by my too early development — all this was suddenly turned aside into a new channel that unexpectedly presented itself, as though fully satisfied by its new food, as though it had found its true path. Soon my heart and my head were so enchanted, soon my imagination was developing so widely, that I seemed to forget the whole world which had hitherto surrounded me. It seemed as though fate itself had stopped me on the threshold of a new life, into which I longed to plunge, and about which I spent my days and nights conjecturing; and before letting me step into the unknown path, had led me up on to a height, showing me the future in a magic panorama, in dazzling and alluring perspective. I was destined to live through that future by getting to know it first in books, to live through it in dreams, in hopes, in passionate impulses, in the voluptuous emotion of a youthful spirit." I began reading indiscriminately the first book that came into my hands, but fate watched over me; what I had learned and experienced so far was so noble, so austere, that no evil unclean page could attract me. I was guarded by my childish instinct, my youth, my past. It was now that awakened intelligence suddenly, as it were, lighted up my whole past life. Indeed almost every page I read seemed to me as though it were already familiar, as though all these passions, all this life presented to me in such unexpected forms, in such enchanting pictures, was already familiar to me. And how could I help being carried away to the point of forgetting the present, of almost becoming estranged from reality, when in every book I read I found embodied the laws of the same destiny, the same spirit of adventure which dominates the life of man, yet is derived from some chief law of human life which is the condition of safety, preservation and happiness? This law which I suspected I strove my utmost to divine, with every instinct awakened in me almost by a feeling of self-preservation It was as though I had been forewarned, as though someone were prompting me. It was as though something were stirring prophetically in my heart. And every day hope grew stronger and stronger in my breast, though at the same time my longings, too, grew stronger for that future, for that life which impressed me in what I had read each day with all the power of art, with all the fascination of poetry. But as I have said already, my imagination dominated my impatience, and I was, in fact, bold only in my dreams, while in reality I was instinctively timid of the future. And therefore, as though by previous compact with myself, I unconsciously decided to be satisfied, for the time being, with the world of imagination, the world of dreams, in which I was the sole sovereign, in which there was nothing but fascination, nothing but delights; and unhappiness itself, if it were admitted, played a passive part, a transitory part, essential for the sake of contrast and for the sudden turn of destiny that was to give a happy ending to the rapturous romances in my brain. That is how I interpret now my state of mind at that time.

And such a life, a life of the imagination, a life absolutely estranged from everything surrounding me, actually lasted for three whole years!

This life was my secret, and at the end of three years I did not know whether to be afraid of its suddenly being discovered or not. All that I had lived through in those three years was too precious, too close to me. I was myself too closely reflected in all my imaginings, so much so that I might have been confused and frightened if any eye, no matter whose, had carelessly peeped into my soul. Moreover we all, the whole household, led such an isolated life, so remote from society, in such monastic stillness, that each one of us must have become self- concentrated and have developed a craving for seclusion. That was what happened to me. Nothing about me was changed during those three years, everything remained as before. Dreary monotony reigned as before among us, which, I believe, if I had not been distracted by my secret hidden life, would have been an agony to my soul and would have driven me into some unknown and perilous path to escape from that spiritless and dreary circle, a path that might, perhaps, have led to my ruin. Madame Leotard had grown older, and was almost always shut up in her room; the children were still too little; B. was always the same; and Alexandra Mihalovna's husband was as austere, as unapproachable and as self-absorbed as ever. Between him and his wife there still persisted the same mysterious relation, which had begun to take a more and more grim and sinister aspect to my imagination. I felt more and more alarmed for Alexandra Mihalovna. Her joyless, colourless life was visibly wasting away before my eyes. Her health was growing weaker almost day by day. Despair, it seemed, had entered into her soul at last. She was obviously weighed down by something unknown, indefinite, of which she could not herself give an account — of something awful, though it was to her unintelligible; and she took it as an inevitable cross laid upon her life as a punishment. Her heart grew embittered at last in this mute anguish; even her intelligence took a different direction, dark and melancholy. One thing I observed struck me particularly: it seemed to me that, as I grew older, she held herself more aloof from me, so much so that her reserve with me took the form indeed of a sort of impatient annoyance. It even seemed to me, at some moments, that she did not like me; it seemed as though I were in her way. I have mentioned that I had purposely taken to holding myself aloof from her, and once apart from her I seemed as though I had caught the secretiveness of her character. That was how it was that all I passed through in those three years, all that was taking shape in my soul, in my dreams, in the knowledge I acquired, in my hopes and in my passionate transports — all was stubbornly kept to myself. Having once put up a screen between us we never came together again, though it seemed to me that I loved her more every day. I cannot recall without tears how devoted she was to me, and how deeply she felt in her heart the obligation to lavish upon me all the treasures of her love, and to keep her vow — to be a mother to me. It is true that her own sorrow often distracted her from me; for long intervals she seemed to forget me, the more readily as I tried not to remind her of my existence; so that my sixteenth year arrived and no one seemed aware of it. But in her moments of lucidity, when she took a clearer view of what was

going on around her, Alexandra Mihalovna seemed suddenly to be troubled about me; she would impatiently send for me from my room, would shower questions upon me about my lessons and my pursuits, as it were testing me, examining me, would not part from me for days together, would divine all my yearnings, all my desires, evidently thinking anxiously of my age, of my present and my future, and with inexhaustible love, with a sort of reverence, making ready to come to my help. But she was too much out of touch with me, and hence sometimes set to work too naively, so that I could too easily understand and see through it. It happened, for instance, when I was sixteen that, after looking through my books and questioning me as to what I was reading, she seemed suddenly to take fright at finding that I had not yet got beyond the childish books suitable for a girl of twelve. I guessed what she was feeling, and watched her attentively. For a whole fortnight she seemed to be preparing me, trying me, trying to find out how far I was developed, and how much I needed. At last she made up her mind to begin, and Walter Scott's Ivanhoe, which I had already perused at least three times, made its appearance on our table At first with timid expectation she kept watch on my impressions, seemed to be weighing them, as though she were apprehensive of them. At last this strained attitude between us, of which I was only too well aware, vanished; we both grew excited, and I felt so happy, so overjoyed that I could be open with her! By the time we finished the novel, she was delighted with me. Every observation I made during our reading was true, every impression was correct. In her eyes my development had made strides already. Impressed by this, delighted with me, she was gladly intending to undertake my education once more — she did not want to part from me again; but this was not in her power. Fate soon parted us, and prevented us from being close friends again. The first attack of illness, the first attack of her everlasting depression was enough to do this; and then followed again estrangements, reserves, mistrustfulness, and perhaps even exasperation.

Yet even at such periods there were moments when we were carried away. Reading, a few sympathetic words passing between us, music, and we forgot ourselves, spoke freely, spoke sometimes too freely, and afterwards felt ill at ease with each other. When we thought it over, we looked at each other as though we were frightened, with suspicious curiosity and with mistrustfulness. Each of us had a line up to which our intimacy could go, but which we did not dare to overstep even if we had wished.

One day in the evening, just as it was getting dusk, I was reading inattentively in Alexandra Mihalovna's study. She was sitting at the piano, improvising variations on an Italian air which was a favourite of hers. When she passed at last to the tune itself, I was so carried away by the music that I began timidly in a low voice to hum the tune to myself. Soon completely carried away, I got up and went to the piano; as though she saw what I wanted, Alexandra Mihalovna began playing the accompaniment and lovingly followed every note of my voice. She seemed struck by its richness. I had never sung in her presence before, and indeed I scarcely knew my powers myself. Now we were both stirred. I raised my voice more and more; I was roused to energy, to passion, intensified by Alexandra Mihalovna's delighted wonder which I perceived in

every touch of her accompaniment. At last the singing ended so successfully, with such fire and power, that she seized my hands in delight and looked at me joyfully.

"Anneta! But you have got a beautiful voice," she cried. "My goodness, how is it that I haven't noticed it?"

"I have only just noticed it myself," I answered, beside myself with joy.

"God bless you, my sweet, precious child! You must thank Him for this gift. Who knows... Oh, my God, my God!"

She was so touched by this surprise, in such a state of delight, that she did not know what to say to me, how to make enough of me. It was a moment of openness, mutual sympathy and close intimacy such as we had not had for a long while. Within an hour it seemed as though the house were keeping holiday. B. was sent for at once. While we were waiting for him to come we opened some other music-books at random which I knew better, and began a new air. This time I was shaking with nervousness. I did not want to spoil the first impression by failure. But soon my voice grew steadier and encouraged me. I was myself more and more astonished at its strength, and this second trial dispelled all doubts. In her impatient delight Alexandra Mihalovna sent for her children and their nurse; and at last, completely carried away, went to her husband and summoned him from his study, which she would hardly have dared to dream of doing at other times. Pyotr Alexandrovitch received the news graciously, congratulated me, and was the first to declare that I ought to have singing lessons. Alexandra Mihalovna, as delighted and grateful as though something wonderful had been done for her, flew to kiss his hand. At last B. arrived. The old man was delighted. He was very fond of me. He talked of my father and of the past, and when I had sung before him two or three times, with a grave and anxious air, even with a certain mysteriousness in his tone, pronounced that I certainly had a voice and perhaps talent, and that it was out of the question to leave me untrained. Then, as though on second thoughts, Alexandra Mihalovna and he decided that it was risky to praise me too much at first; and I noticed how they exchanged glances and plotted together on the sly, so that their whole conspiracy against me was exceedingly naive and awkward. I was laughing to myself all the evening, seeing how they tried to restrain themselves later on when I had sung again, and how they even went out of their way to remark on my defects. But they did not keep it up for long, and B. was the first to betray himself, growing sentimental again in his delight. I had never suspected that he was so fond of me. We had the warmest, the most affectionate conversation all the evening. B. told us of the lives of some celebrated singers and musicians, speaking with the enthusiasm of an artist, with reverence, with emotion. Then after touching upon my father, he passed to me, to my childhood, to Prince X., to his family, of whom I had heard so little since my parting from them. But Alexandra Mihalovna did not know much about them herself. B. knew more than the rest of us, for he had paid more than one visit to Moscow; but at that point the conversation took a somewhat mysterious turn that was a puzzle to me, and several circumstances, particularly affecting Prince X., were unintelligible to me. Alexandra Mihalovna spoke of Katya; but B. could tell us nothing

particular about her, and seemed as though intentionally desirous of saying nothing about her. That struck me. Far from having forgotten Katya, far from having lost my old feeling for her, I did not even dream that Katya could have changed. The effect of separation and of the long years lived apart, in the course of which we had sent each other no news, and of the difference of bringing-up and of the difference of our' characters, escaped my notice. Katya was, in fact, never absent from my thoughts. She seemed to be still living with me; in my dreams particularly, in my romancings, and in my imagined adventures, we always went hand in hand. While I imagined myself the heroine of every story I read, I immediately put beside me my friend Katya and immediately made the novel into two, of which one, of course, was my creation, though I cribbed unsparingly from my favourite authors. At last it was settled in our family council that a teacher of singing should be engaged for me. B. recommended someone very well known, one of the best. Next day an Italian called D. arrived; after hearing me, he confirmed his friend B.'s opinion, but declared that it would be far better for me to go to him for lessons, together with his other pupils, that emulation, imitation, and the various resources which would be at my disposal there would assist the development of my voice. Alexandra Mihalovna gave her consent, and from that time forth I used to go three times a week, at eight o'clock in the morning, to the Conservatoire.

Now I will describe a strange adventure which had a very great influence upon me, and with an abrupt transition began a new stage in my development. I had just reached my sixteenth year, and with it an incomprehensible apathy all at once came over my soul; I was sunk in an insufferable, miserable stagnation, incomprehensible to myself. All my dreams, all my yearnings seemed suddenly numb, even my dreaminess vanished as though from impotence. A cold indifference replaced the former ardour of my inexperienced heart. Even my gift, greeted with such enthusiasm by all whom I loved, lost its interest for me, and I callously neglected it. Nothing interested me, so much so that I felt even for Alexandra Mihalovna a cold indifference; for which I blamed myself, since I could not help recognising it. My apathy was interrupted from time to time by unaccountable melancholy and sudden tears. I sought solitude. At this strange moment a strange adventure shook my soul to its depths and transformed the dead calm into a real tempest. My heart was bitterly wounded. This was how it happened.

Chapter VII

I WENT into the library (it is a moment that I shall always remember) and took a novel of Walter Scott's, St. Ronan's Well, the only one of his novels I had not read. I remember that a poignant, indefinite misery made my heart ache as though with foreboding of trouble. I wanted to cry. There was a bright light in the room from the slanting rays of the setting sun which was streaming in at the high windows on to the parquetted floor; it was still; there was not a soul in the adjoining rooms. Pyotr

Alexandrovitch was not at home, while Alexandra Mihalovna was in bed ill. I was actually crying, and, opening the second part of the book, was aimlessly turning over its pages, trying to discover some meaning in the disconnected phrases that flitted before my eyes. I was, as it were, trying my fortune, as people do, by opening a book at random. There are moments when all the intellectual and spiritual faculties, morbidly overstrained as it were, suddenly flare up in a bright flame of consciousness; and at such an instant the troubled soul, as though languishing with a foreboding of the future, with a foretaste of it, has something like prophetic vision. And your whole being so longs for life, so begs for life; and aflame with the most burning, blindest hope, your heart seems to summon the future with all its mystery, with all its uncertainty, even with its storms and upheavals, if only it brings life. Such was that moment.

I remember that I had just taken the book to open it at random again, and, reading the first page that presented itself, to divine the future from it. But as I opened it I noticed a piece of notepaper, covered with writing, folded into four and pressed as flat as though it had been laid in the book years ago and forgotten in it. With extreme curiosity I began examining my find; it was a letter with no address on it, signed with the two capital letters S. O. My interest was redoubled; I opened the paper, which almost stuck together, and from long lying between the pages left a clear imprint upon them. The folds of the letter were worn and frayed; one could see that it had at one time been read and re-read, and kept as a precious treasure. The ink had turned blue and faded — it had been written so long ago! A few words caught my eye by chance, and my heart began beating with expectation. In confusion I turned the letter over and over in my hands, as though purposely postponing the moment of reading. I took the letter to the light: yes! tears had dried, had dropped on those lines; the stain remained on the paper; here and there whole letters had been washed away by tears. Whose tears were they? At last, breathless with suspense, I read half of the first page, and a cry of astonishment broke from me. I shut the bookcase, put the book back in its case, and hiding the letter under my shawl ran to my room, locked myself in, and began reading the letter again from the beginning. But my heart was thumping so that the words and letters danced and flitted before my eyes. For a long while I could make out nothing. In the letter there was a discovery, the beginning of a mystery; it struck me like a flash of lightning, for I learned to whom it was written. I knew that I was committing almost a crime in reading the letter; but the moment was too strong for me! The letter was to Alexandra Mihalovna. This was the letter; I will reproduce it here. I vaguely understood what was in it, and long after was haunted by conjectures and painful surmises. My heart was stirred and troubled for a long time, almost for ever, for much was called forth by this letter. I had truly divined the future.

It was a farewell letter, the last, and terrible. As I read it I felt a painful tightening of the heart, as though I had myself lost everything, as though everything had been taken from me for ever, even my dreams and my hopes, as though nothing more were left me but a life no longer wanted. Who was he, the writer of this letter? What was his life like afterwards? There were so many hints in the letter, so many facts, that

one could not make a mistake; so many riddles, too, that one could not but be lost in conjectures. But I was scarcely mistaken; besides, the style of the letter, which implied so much, implied the whole character of the tie through which two hearts had been broken. The feelings, the thoughts of the writer were laid bare. They were of too special a character and, as I have said already, implied too much. But here is the letter; I am copying it word for word.

"You will not forget me, you have said it — I believe it and all my life henceforth is in those words of yours. We must part, our hour has struck! I have known this for a long while, my gentle, my sad beauty, but only now I understand it. Through all our time, through all the time that you have loved me, my heart has yearned and ached over our love, and — would you believe it? — my heart is easier now! I knew long ago that this would be the end, and that this was destined from the first! It is fate! Let me tell you, Alexandra: we are not equals; I always felt that, always! I was not worthy of you, and I, I alone ought to bear the punishment for the happiness I have known! Tell me, what was I beside you till the time when you came to know me? My God! here two years have passed and I seem to have been unconscious of it till now; to this day I cannot grasp that you have loved me! I don't understand how we came to that point, how it began. Do you remember what I was compared with you? Was I worthy of you? In what did I excel, in what way was I particularly distinguished?

Till I knew you, I was coarse and common, I looked sullen and dejected. I desired no other life, did not dream of it, I did not invite it and did not want to invite it. Everything in me was somehow crushed, and I knew nothing in the world of more importance than my regular daily work. My only care was the morrow; and I was indifferent even to that. In the past, it was long ago, I had a dream of something like this, and I gave way to day-dreams like a fool. But a long, long time had passed since then, and I had begun living in solitude, calmly, gloomily, I actually did not feel the cold that froze my heart. And it slept. I knew and made up my mind that no other sun would ever rise for me, and believed it and did not repine at anything because I knew that so it was bownd to be. When you crossed my path, I did not understand that I could dare to raise my eyes to you. I was like a slave beside you. There was no tremor, no ache in my heart when I was by you, it told me nothing; it was unmoved. My soul did not recognise yours, though it found new light beside its fair sister soul. I know that; I felt it dimly. That I could feel, since the light of God's day is shed on the lowest blade of grass and warms and cherishes it even as the gorgeous flower beside which it meekly grows. When I learned all — do you remember? — after that evening, after those words, which stirred my soul to its depth, I was dazed, shattered, everything in me was troubled, and — do you know? — I was so overwhelmed, and had so little faith in myself, that I did not understand you! I have never spoken to you of that. You knew nothing of that; I was not in the past the same as you have found me. If I had been able, if I had dared to speak, I should have confessed it to you all long ago. But I was silent, and I am telling you everything now that you may know the man you are leaving, the man from whom you are parting! Do you know how I understood you at

first? Passion caught me like fire, flowed in my veins like poison; it confused all my thoughts and feelings, I was intoxicated, I was as though possessed, and responded to your pure compassionate love not as equal to equal, not as one worthy of your pure love, but without understanding, heartlessly. I did not recognise what you were. I responded to you as to one who in my eyes had forgotten herself to my level, and not one who wanted to raise me to hers. Do you know of what I suspected you, what is meant by those words, forgotten herself to my level? But no, I will not insult you with my confession; only one thing I will tell you: you have been cruelly mistaken in me! I could never rise to your level, never. I could only contemplate you in boundless love without ever coming near you. My passion, exalted by you, was not love, I was afraid of love; I dared not love you; love implies reciprocity, equality, and I was not worthy of them... I don't know how it was with me! Ah! how can I tell you that, how can I make myself understood?... I did not believe it at first... Oh! do you remember when my first excitement had subsided, when I could see things clearer, when nothing was left but a pure feeling purged of all that was gross, my first emotion was one of wonder, confusion, alarm, and — do you remember — how all at once I fell sobbing at your feet? Do you remember how, troubled and frightened, you kept asking with tears: what was I feeling? I said nothing, I could not answer you, but my heart was rent; my happiness weighed upon me like an unbearable burden, and my sobs seemed to whisper to me: 'Why is this? How have I deserved it? How am I deserving of bliss? My sister, my sister!' Oh! how many times — you did not know it — how many times I have in secret kissed your dress, in secret because I knew I was not worthy of you — and I could hardly breathe at such times, and my heart beat slowly, as though it meant to stop and swoon for ever. When I took your hand I turned pale and trembled all over; you confounded me by the purity of your soul. Ah, I cannot tell you all that has been accumulating in my heart and craving utterance! Do you know that at times your compassionate, everlasting tenderness was a burden and a torture to me? When you kissed me (it happened once and I shall never forget it), there was a mist before my eyes, and my whole spirit swooned in one instant. Why did I not die at that moment at your feet? Will you understand what I am trying to say? I want to tell you everything and I tell you this: yes, you love me very much, you have loved me as a sister loves a brother; you have loved me as your own creation, because you have raised my heart from the dead, awakened my mind from its slumber, and have instilled sweet hope into my breast. I could not, I dared not, I have not till now called you my sister, because I could not be your brother, because we were not equal, because you are mistaken in me!

"But, you see, I am writing all the while of myself; in this moment of fearful misery, I am thinking only of myself, though I know that you are worrying about me. Oh, do not worry about me, my dear one! If you only knew how humiliated I am in my own eyes! It has all been discovered, what a fuss there has been! You will be an outcast on my account. Contempt, jeers will be showered upon you, because I am so low in their eyes! Oh, how greatly I am to blame for being unworthy of you! If only I had had

consequence, personal value in their eyes, if I had inspired more respect in them, they would have forgiven you; but I am low, I am insignificant, I am absurd, and nothing is lower than to be absurd. Who is it that is making a fuss? Because they have begun to make a fuss I have lost heart; I have always been weak. Do you know the state I am in now: I am laughing at myself, and it seems to me that they are right, because I am absurd and hateful even to myself. I feel that; I hate even my face, my figure, all my habits, all my ignoble ways; I have always hated them. Oh, forgive me my crude despair. You have taught me yourself to tell you everything. I have ruined you, I have brought anger and contempt upon you because I was below you.

"And this thought, too, tortures me; it is hammering at my brain the whole time, and poisons and lacerates my heart. And I keep fancying that you have not loved the man you thought you found in me, that you were deceived in me. That is what hurts, that is what tortures me, and will torture me to death if I do not go out of my mind!

"Farewell, farewell! Now when all has been discovered, after their outcry and their tittle-tattle (I have heard them), when I have been humiliated, degraded in my own eyes, made ashamed of myself, ashamed even of you for your choice, when I have cursed myself, now I must run away and disappear for the sake of your peace. They insist on it, and so you will never see me again, never! It must be so, it is fated. Too much has been given me; fate has blundered, now she will correct her mistake and take it all away again. We came together, learnt to know each other, and now we are parting till we meet again. When will that be, where will that be? Oh, tell me, my own, where shall we meet again? Where am I to find you, how am I to know you, will you know me then? My whole soul is full of you. Oh, why is it, why should this happen to us? Why are we parting? Teach me — I don't understand, I shall never understand it — teach me how to tear my life in two, how to tear my heart out of my bosom and to live without it. Ah, when I think that I shall never see you again, never, never!...

"My God, what an uproar they have made! How afraid I feel for you now! I have only just met your husband; we are both unworthy of him, though we have neither of us sinned against him. He knows all; he sees us, he understands it all, and even beforehand everything was as clear as day to him. He has championed you heroically, he will save you, he will protect you from this tittle-tattle and uproar; his love and respect for you are boundless; he is your saviour, while I am running away!... I rushed up to him, I wanted to kiss his hand!... He told me that I must go at once. It is settled! I am told that he has quarrelled with them, with everyone on your account; they are all against you. They blame him for weakness and laxity. My God! What are they not saying about you! They don't know, they cannot understand, they are incapable of it. Forgive them, forgive them, my poor darling, as I forgive them; and they have taken from me more than from you!

"I am beside myself, I don't know what I am writing to you. Of what did I talk to yon last night at parting? I have forgotten it all. I was distracted, you were crying... Forgive me those tears! I am so weak, so faint-hearted!

"There was something else I wanted to tell you... Oh, if only I could once more bathe your hands in tears, as I am bathing this letter now! If I could be once more at your feet! If only they knew how noble was your feeling! But they are blind; their hearts are proud and haughty; they do not see it and will never see it. They have no eyes to see! They will not believe that you are innocent even according to their standards, not though everything on earth should swear it. As though they could understand! How can they fling a stone at you? Whose hand will throw the first? Oh, they will feel no shame, they will fling thousands of stones. They will fling them boldly, for they know how to do it. They will all throw them at once, and will say that they are without sin and will take the sin on themselves. Oh, if they knew what they are doing! If only one could tell them everything without concealment, so that they might see, might hear, might understand and be convinced! But no, they are not so spiteful... I am in despair now, I am perhaps unjust to them. I am perhaps frightening you with my terror. Don't be afraid, don't be afraid of them, my own! They will understand you; one at least understands you already: have hope — it is your husband.

"Good-bye, good-bye. I will not thank you. Good-bye for ever.

"S. O."

My confusion was so great that for a long time I did not know what was happening to me. I was shaken and terrified. Reality had fallen upon me unawares in the midst of the easy life of dreams on which I had lived for three years. I felt with horror that there was a great secret in my hands, and that that secret was binding my whole existence... How? I did not know that yet myself. I felt that from that moment a new future was beginning for me. I had now, not of my own choice, become too close a participator in the life and relations of the people who had hitherto made up the whole world surrounding me, and I was afraid for myself. How should I enter their life, I, unbidden, I, a stranger to them? What should I bring them? How would these fetters which had so suddenly riveted me to another person's secret be loosened? How could I tell? Perhaps my new part would be painful both for me and for them. I could not be silent, I could not refuse the part, and lock what I had learned in my heart for ever. But how would it be, and what would become of me? What was I to do? And what was it that I had found out, indeed? Thousands of questions, still vague and confused, rose up before me, and were already an unbearable weight upon my heart. I felt utterly lost.

Then, I remember, came another phase with new strange impressions I had not experienced before; I felt as though something were loosened in my bosom, as though my old misery had suddenly fallen off my heart and something new had begun to fill it, something such as I did not know yet whether to grieve or rejoice at. The moment was like that when a man leaves his home for ever, and a life hitherto calm and unruffled, for a far unknown journey, and for the last time looks round him, inwardly taking leave of his past, and at the same time feels a bitterness at heart from a mournful foreboding of the unknown future, perhaps gloomy and hostile, which awaits him on his new path. At last convulsive sobs broke from my bosom, and relieved my heart with hysterical weeping. I wanted to see someone, to hear someone, to hold someone

tight, tight. I could not remain alone, I did not want solitude now; I flew to Alexandra Mihalovna and spent the whole evening with her. We were alone. I asked her not to play, and refused to sing in spite of her asking me. Everything seemed irksome to me, and I could not settle to anything. I believe we both shed tears. I only remember that I quite frightened her. She besought me to be calm, not to be agitated. She watched me in alarm, telling me that I was ill and that I did not take care of myself. At last, utterly exhausted and shattered, I left her; I was as though in delirium, I went to bed in a fever.

Several days passed before I could recover myself and consider my position more clearly. At this time Alexandra Mihalovna and I were living in complete isolation. Pyotr Alexandrovitch was not in Petersburg. He had gone to Moscow on business, and spent three weeks there. Though the separation was so short, Alexandra Mihalovna sank into terrible depression. At times she grew more serene, but she shut herself up alone, so that even my society must have been a burden to her. Moreover, I tried to be alone myself. My brain was working with feverish activity; I was like one possessed. At times hours of long agonisingly disconnected reverie came upon me; it was as though I were dreaming that someone was laughing at me on the sly, as though something had taken possession of me that poisoned and confounded every thought. I could not shake off the distressing images that were continually appearing before me and giving me no peace. I was haunted by pictures of prolonged hopeless suffering, martyrdom, sacrifice endured submissively, unrepiningly and fruitlessly. It seemed to me that he for whom the sacrifice was made scorned it and laughed at it. It seemed to me that I had seen a criminal forgiving the sins of the righteous, and my heart was torn! At the same time I longed to be rid of my suspicion; I cursed it, I hated myself because all my convictions were not convictions but simply intuitions, because I could not justify my impressions to myself.

Then I went over in my mind those phrases, those last shrieks of terrible farewell. I pictured that man — not her equal; I tried to grasp all the agonising meaning of those words, "not her equal". That despairing farewell made an agonising impression upon me: "I am absurd and am myself ashamed of your choice." What did that mean? What people were these? What were they grieving over? What were they miserable about? What had they lost? Mastering myself with an effort, I read again with strained attention the letter which was so full of heart-rending despair, though its meaning was so strange, so difficult for me to understand. But the letter fell from my hands, and my heart was more and more overcome by violent emotion. All this was bound to end in some way, but I did not see the way out, or was afraid of it.

I was almost seriously ill when the carriage rumbled one day into the courtyard bringing Pyotr Alexandrovitch, who had returned from Moscow. Alexandra Mihalovna flew to meet her husband with a cry of joy, but I stood as though rooted to the spot. I remember that I was struck myself by my own sudden emotion. I could not control myself, and rushed to my room. I did not understand why I was so suddenly alarmed, but I was frightened at this alarm. A quarter of an hour later I was summoned and

given a letter from Prince X. In the drawing- room I found a stranger whom Pyotr Alexandrovitch had brought with him from Moscow, and, from some words which I caught, I learned that he was to stay with us for a long time. He was Prince X.'s agent, who had come to Petersburg about some very important business of the family which Pyotr Alexandrovitch had been looking after for some time. He gave me a letter from Prince X., and told me that the young princess wanted to write to me also, and had assured him to the last moment that the letter would be ready, but had sent him away empty-handed, begging him to tell me that it was absolutely no use for her to write to me, that one could write nothing in a letter, that she had spoilt five sheets of paper and had torn them all up, that to begin writing to each other we should have to make friends over again. Then she charged him to tell me that she would soon be seeing me. The unknown gentleman answered to my impatient questions that the news of our meeting soon was quite correct, and that the whole family was preparing to visit Petersburg shortly. I did not know what to do for joy at this information; I hastened to my room, locked myself in, and dissolved into tears as I opened the prince's letter. The prince promised me that I should soon see him and Katya, and with deep feeling congratulated me on my talent; finally he gave me his blessing and best wishes for the future, which he promised to provide for. I wept as I read this letter, but with those tears of joy was mingled such an insufferable sadness that I remember I was alarmed at myself, I did not know what was happening to me.

Several days passed. The newcomer used now to be working every morning, and often in the evening till after midnight, in the room next to mine, where Pyotr Alexandrovitch's secretary used to be. Often this gentleman and Pyotr Alexandrovitch shut themselves into the latter's study and worked together. One day Alexandra Mihalovna told me to go into her husband's study and ask him whether he would come and have tea with us. Finding no one in the study, and expecting Pyotr Alexandrovitch to come back shortly, I remained waiting for him. His portrait was hanging on the wall. I remember that I shuddered as I looked at the portrait, and with an excitement I could not myself understand I began scrutinising it intently. It was hung rather high up; moreover, it was beginning to get dark, and to see it better, I pushed a chair up and stood on it. I wanted to detect something, as though I hoped to find the solution of my doubts; and I remember what struck me first of all was the eyes in the portrait. It struck me at once that I had never seen the eyes of this man before, he always kept them hidden behind spectacles.

Even in my childhood I had disliked the way he looked at people, through some strange unaccountable prejudice, but now that prejudice seemed to be justified. My imagination was worked up. It suddenly seemed to me as though the eyes of the portrait in confusion turned away from my searching inquisitorial gaze, that they were trying to avoid it, that there was lying and duplicity in those eyes; it seemed to me that I had guessed right, and I cannot explain the secret joy that stirred in me at having guessed right. A faint cry broke from me. At that moment I heard a rustle behind me. I looked

round; Pyotr Alexandrovitch was standing behind me, staring at me. I fancied that he reddened. I turned hot all over, and jumped down from the chair.

"What are you doing here?" he asked in a stern voice. "Why are you here?"

I did not know what to answer. Recovering myself a little, I gave him Alexandra Mihalovna's message after a fashion. I don't know what answer he made me, I don't remember how I got out of the room, but when I reached Alexandra Mihalovna I had completely forgotten the answer for which she was waiting, and said at a venture that he was coming.

"But what is the matter with you, Nyetochka?" she asked. "You are crimson; look at yourself! What's the matter with you?"

"I don't know... I have been running quickly..." I answered.

"What did Pyotr Alexandrovitch say to you?" she interrupted, troubled.

I did not answer. At that moment Pyotr Alexandrovitch's steps were heard, and I immediately walked out of the room. I waited for two full hours in great perturbation. At last I was summoned to Alexandra Mihalovna. I found her silent and preoccupied. As I went in she bent a rapid, searching glance upon me, but at once dropped her eyes. I fancied that some embarrassment was reflected in her face. I soon noticed that she was in low spirits; she spoke little, did not look at me at all, and in reply to B.'s anxious inquiries said she had a headache. Pyotr Alexandrovitch was more talkative than usual, but he talked only to B.

Alexandra Mihalovna went absent-mindedly to the piano.

"Sing something," said B., turning to me.

"Yes, Anneta, sing your new song," Alexandra Mihalovna chimed in, as though catching at the idea.

I glanced at her; she looked at me in uneasy suspense.

But I could not control myself. Instead of going to the piano and singing something, I was overcome with confusion, and in my embarrassment could not even think how to excuse myself; at last annoyance got the upper hand, and I refused point- blank.

"Why don't you want to sing?" said Alexandra Mihalovna, with a significant glance at me and a fleeting one at her husband.

Those two glances drove me out of all patience. I got up from the table in complete confusion; no longer concealing it, but shaking with a feeling of impatience and annoyance, I repeated with heat that I did not want to, I could not, that I was not well. As I said this I looked them all in the face, but God knows how I longed at that moment to be in my own room and to hide myself from them all.

B. was surprised, Alexandra Mihalovna was visibly distressed and did not say a word. But Pyotr Alexandrovitch suddenly got up from his chair and said that he had forgotten some work; and evidently vexed that he had wasted valuable time, went hurriedly out of the room, saying that he would perhaps look in later, but at the same time, in case he did not, he shook hands with B. by way of good-bye.

"What's the matter with you?" B. asked. "You look really ill."

"Yes, I am unwell, very unwell," I answered impatiently.

"Yes, you certainly are pale, and just now you were so flushed," observed Alexandra Mihalovna, and she suddenly checked herself.

"Do stop!" I said, going straight up to her and looking her in the face. The poor thing could not face my eyes, she dropped hers as though she were guilty, and a faint flush suffused her pale cheeks. I took her hand and kissed it. Alexandra Mihalovna looked at me, with a show of naive pleasure.

"Forgive me for having been such an ill-tempered, naughty child to-day," I said with feeling; "but I really aim ill. Let me go, and don't be angry."

"We are all children," she said with a timid smile. "And indeed I am a child too, and worse, much worse than you," she added in my ear. "Good-night, be well. Only for God's sake don't be cross with me."

"What for?" I asked, I was so struck by this naive entreaty.

"What for?" she repeated, greatly confused, and even frightened at herself. "What for? Why, you see what I am like, Nyetochka. What did I say to you? Good-night! You are cleverer than I am... And I am worse than a child."

"Come, that's enough," I answered, much moved, and not knowing what to say to her. Kissing her once more, I went hurriedly out of the room.

I felt horribly vexed and sad. Moreover, I was furious with myself, feeling that I was not on my guard and did not know how to behave. I was ashamed to the point of tears, and fell asleep in the depths of depression. When I woke up in the morning my first thought was that the whole previous evening was a pure creation of the imagination, a mirage, that we had only been mystifying each other, that we had been in a nervous flutter, had made a regular adventure out of a trifle, and that it was all due to inexperience and our not being used to receiving external impressions. I felt that the letter was to blame for it all, that it was disturbing me too much, and that my imagination was overwrought, and I made up my mind for the future that I had better not think about anything. Settling all my trouble with such exceptional ease, and fully convinced that I could as easily act as I had resolved, I felt calmer, and set off to my singing lesson in quite a cheerful mood. The morning air completely cleared away my headache. I was very fond of my morning walks to my lessons. It was so enjoyable going through the town, which was already by nine o'clock full of life, and was busily beginning its daily round. We usually went by the liveliest and busiest streets. And I delighted in this background for the beginning of my artistic life, the contrast between this petty everyday life, these trivial but living cares, and the art which was awaiting me two paces away from this life, on the third storey of a huge house crowded from top to bottom with inhabitants who, as it seemed to me, had nothing whatever to do with any art. These busy cross passers-by, among whom I moved with my music-book under my arm; old Natalya who escorted me and always unconsciously set me trying to solve the riddle of what she was thinking about — then my teacher, a queer fellow, half Italian and half French, at moments a genuine enthusiast, far more often a pedant and most of all a money-grubber — all this intertained me, and made me laugh or ponder. Moreover, I loved music with timid but passionate hope, built castles in the

air, fashioned for myself the most marvellous future, and often as I came back was fired by my own imaginings. In fact, at those hours I was almost happy.

I had just such a moment that day, when at ten o'clock I was coming home from my lesson. I had forgotten everything, and I remember I was absorbed in some joyful dream. But all at once, as I was going upstairs, I started as though I were scalded. I heard above me the voice of Pyotr Alexandrovitch, who at that moment was coming downstairs. The unpleasant feeling that came over me was so intense, the memory of yesterday's incident impressed me so disagreeably, that I could not conceal my discomfort. I made a slight bow to him, but my face was probably expressive at the moment, for he stopped short, facing me in surprise. Noticing his movement, I flushed crimson and went hurriedly upstairs; he muttered something after me and went his way. I was ready to cry with vexation, and could not understand what it was that had happened. I was not myself all the morning, and did not know what course to take in order to make an end of it and be rid of it all as quickly as possible. A thousand times I vowed to myself to be more sensible, and a thousand times I was overwhelmed with dread of what I might do. I felt that I hated Alexandra Mihalovna's husband, and yet at the same time I was in despair over my own behaviour. Continual agitation made me quite unwell on this occasion, and I was utterly unable to control myself. I felt vexed with everyone; I sat in my room all the morning and did not even go to Alexandra Mihalovna. She came to see me. She almost cried out when she glanced at me. I was so pale that I was frightened myself when I looked in the looking-glass. Alexandra Mihalovna stayed a whole hour with me, looking after me as though I were a little child.

But her attention made me so depressed, her kindness weighed upon me so, it was such an agony to look at her, that at last I asked her to leave me alone. She went away in great anxiety about me. At last my misery found a vent in tears and hysterics. Towards evening I felt better...

Better, because I made up my mind to go to her. I made up my mind to fall on my knees before her, to give her the letter she had lost, and to tell her about everything; to tell her about all the agonies I had endured, all my doubts; to embrace her with the boundless love that glowed in my heart, for her, my martyr; to tell her that I was her child, her friend, that my heart was open to her, that she must look into it and see the ardent, steadfast feeling for her in it. My God! I knew, I felt, that I was the last to whom she could open her heart, but it seemed to me that that made the salvation more certain, and would make the effect of my words more powerful... Though vaguely and obscurely, I did understand her sufferings, and my heart boiled with indignation at the thought that she might blush before me, before my judgment... Poor darling, my poor darling, as though you were the sinner! That's what I should say to her, weeping at her feet. My sense of justice was revolted, I was furious. I don't know what I should have done, but I only came to my senses afterwards when an unexpected incident saved me and her from disaster, by checking me at my first step. Then I was horrified. Could her tortured heart have risen to hope again? I should have killed her at one blow!

This is what happened. I was on my way to her study and only two rooms from it, when Pyotr Alexandrovitch came in by a side door and, not noticing me, went on before me. He, too, was going to see her. I stood stock-still; he was the last person I wanted to meet at such a moment. I wanted to get away, but curiosity kept me rooted to the spot.

He stood for a minute before the looking-glass, arranged his hair, and to my intense astonishment I suddenly heard him begin humming a tune. Instantly an obscure far-away incident of my childhood rose to my memory. To understand the strange sensation I felt at that moment, I will describe the incident. It was an incident that made a profound impression upon me in the first year of my living in that house, although only now its significance became clear, for only now, only at this moment, I realised what was the origin of my unaccountable aversion for the man! I have already mentioned that even in those days I always felt ill at ease with him. I have already described the depressing effect on me of his frowning anxious air, and the expression of his face so frequently melancholy and dejected; how unhappy I was after the hours we spent together at Alexandra Mihalovna's tea-table, and what agonising misery rent my heart on the two or three occasions when it was my lot to witness the gloomy, sinister scenes which I have referred to already. It happened that I came upon him then just as I had done now — in the same room, at the same time, when he, like me, was going to see Alexandra Mihalovna. I had been overcome with purely childish shyness of meeting him alone, and so hid in a corner as though I had done something wrong, praying to fate that he might not notice me. Just as now he had stopped before the looking-glass, and I shuddered with a vague unchildlike feeling. It seemed to me as though he were making up his face. Anyway, I had clearly seen a smile on his face before he went to the looking-glass; I saw him laughing, as I had never seen him before, for (I remember that it was this that had struck me most of all) he never laughed in the presence of Alexandra Mihalovna. But as soon as he looked in the looking-glass his face was completely transformed. The smile disappeared as though at the word of command, and his lips were twisted by some bitter feeling, which seemed to spring from the heart spontaneously against his will, a feeling which it seemed beyond human power to disguise in spite of the most magnanimous efforts, a paroxysm of pain brought lines into his forehead and seemed to weigh upon his brow. His eyes were darkly concealed behind spectacles — in short, he seemed as though at a given signal to be changed into a different man. I remember that I, as a little child, shuddered with fear from dread of understanding what I had seen, and from that time an uncomfortable, disagreeable impression was stored away in my heart for ever. After looking at himself for a minute in the looking-glass, he, with bent head and bowed figure, looking as he always did before Alexandra Mihalovna, went on tiptoe to her study. This was the incident that had struck me in the past.

Now, just as then, he stopped before the same looking-glass and thought that he was alone. Just as then I, with a hostile, unpleasant feeling, found myself alone with him; but when I heard that singing (singing from him, from whom it was so impossible

to expect anything of the kind!), which struck me as so unexpected that I stood as though rooted to the spot, when at that very instant I was reminded of the almost exactly similar moment of my childhood, I cannot describe the malignant feeling that went through my heart. All my nerves quivered, and in response to this luckless song I went off into such a peal of laughter that the poor singer, uttering a cry, stepped two paces back from the looking-glass and, pale as death, as though ignominiously caught in the act, looked at me, beside himself with alarm, wonder and fury. His expression affected me nervously. I replied to it with a nervous hysterical laugh right in his face, I walked by him laughing and, still laughing, went in to Alexandra Mihalovna. I knew that he was standing behind the curtains over the door, that he was perhaps hesitating whether to come in or not, that he was rooted to the spot by rage and cowardice, and with a nervous defiant impatience I wanted to see what he would do. I was ready to bet that he would not come in, and I was right. He did not come in till half an hour later. Alexandra Mihalovna looked at me for a long time in the utmost perplexity. But her inquiries as to what was the matter with me were fruitless. I could not answer, I was gasping for breath. At last she understood that I was in hysterics, and looked after me anxiously. When I had recovered I took her hands and began kissing them. Only then I grasped the position, and only then the thought occurred to me that I should have been the death of her if it had not been for the encounter with her husband. I looked at her as one risen from the dead.

Pyotr Alexandrovitch walked in. I took a furtive glance at him; he looked as though nothing had passed between us, that is, he was gloomy and austere as usual. But from his pale face and the faintly twitching corners of his mouth I guessed that he could hardly conceal his perturbation. He greeted Alexandra Mihalovna coldly and sat down in his place without a word. His hand trembled as he took his cup of tea. I expected an explosion, and I was overcome by an exaggerated terror. I should have liked to retreat, but could not bring myself to leave Alexandra Mihalovna. At the sight of her husband, she, too, had a foreboding of trouble. At last, what I was expecting with such terror happened.

In the midst of a profound silence I raised my eyes and met Pyotr Alexandrovitch's spectacles turned straight upon me. This was so unexpected that I started, almost cried out, and dropped my eyes. Alexandra Mihalovna noticed my perturbation.

"What's the matter with you? What are you blushing at?" I heard Pyotr Alexandrovitch's harsh voice.

I was silent; my heart was thumping so that I could not answer a word.

"What is she blushing at? Why is she always blushing?" he asked, addressing Alexandra Mihalovna and rudely pointing towards me.

I could hardly breathe for indignation. I flung an imploring glance at Alexandra Mihalovna. She understood me. Her pale cheeks flushed.

"Anneta," she said to me in a firm voice, such as I should never have expected from her, "go to your own room, I'll come to you in a minute; we will spend the evening together..."

"I asked you a question, did you hear me or not?" Pyotr Alexandrovitch interrupted, raising his voice still higher, and seeming not to hear what his wife had said. "Why do you blush when you meet me? Answer!"

"Because you make her blush and me too," answered Alexandra Mihalovna in a breaking voice.

I looked with surprise at Alexandra Mihalovna. The heat of her retort was quite incomprehensible to me for the first moment.

"I make you blush — I?" answered Pyotr Alexandrovitch, emphasising the word I, and apparently roused to fury too. "You have blushed for me? Do you mean to tell me I can make you blush for me? It's for you to blush, not for me, don't you think?"

This phrase, uttered with such callous biting sarcasm, was so intelligible to me that I gave a cry of horror and rushed to Alexandra Mihalovna. Surprise, pain, reproach and horror were all depicted on her face, which began to turn deathly pale. Clasping my hands with a look of entreaty, I glanced at Pyotr Alexandrovitch. It seemed as though he himself thought he had gone too far; but the fury that had wrung that phrase out of him had not passed. Noticing my mute prayer, he was confused, however. My gesture betrayed clearly that I knew a great deal of what had hitherto been a secret between them, and that I quite understood his words.

"Anneta, go to your room," Alexandra Mihalovna repeated in a weak but firm voice, getting up from her chair. "I want to speak to Pyotr Alexandrovitch..."

She was calm on the surface; but that calm made me more frightened than any excitement would have done. I behaved as though I did not hear what she said, and remained stock-still. I strained every nerve to read in her face what was passing in her soul at that instant. It seemed to me that she had understood neither my gesture nor my exclamation.

"See what you have done, miss!" said Pyotr Alexandrovitch, taking my hand and pointing to his wife.

My God! I have never seen such despair as I read now on that crushed, deathly-looking face. He took me by the hand and led me out of the room. I took one last look at them. Alexandra Mihalovna was standing with her elbows on the mantelpiece, holding her head tight in both hands. Her whole attitude was expressive of unbearable torture. I seized Pyotr Alexandrovitch's hand and squeezed it warmly.

"For God's sake, for God's sake," I brought out in a breaking voice, "spare her!"

"Don't be afraid, don't be afraid," he said, looking at me strangely; "it's nothing, it's nerves. Go along, go along."

Going into my room, I threw myself on the sofa and hid my face in my hands. For three whole hours I remained in that attitude, and I passed through a perfect hell during those hours. At last I could bear it no longer, and sent to inquire whether I could go to Alexandra Mihalovna. Madame Leotard came with an answer. Pyotr Alexandrovitch sent to say that the attack was over, that there was no need for anxiety, but that Alexandra Mihalovna must have rest. I did not go to bed till three o'clock in the morning, but walked up and down the room thinking. My position was more

perplexing than ever, but I somehow felt calmer, perhaps because I felt myself more to blame than anyone. I went to bed looking forward impatiently to the next day.

But next day, to my grievous surprise, I found an unaccountable coldness in Alexandra Mihalovna. At first I fancied that it was painful to her pure and noble heart to be with me after the scene of the day before with her husband, of which I had been the involuntary witness. I knew that the childlike creature was capable of blushing at the sight of me, and begging my forgiveness for the unlucky scene's having wounded me the day before. But I soon noticed in her another anxiety and an annoyance, which showed itself very awkwardly; at one time she would answer me coldly and dryly, then a peculiar significance could be detected in her words, then she would suddenly become very tender with me as though repenting the harshness which she could not feel in her heart, and there was a note of reproach in her affectionate and gentle words. At last I asked her directly what was the matter, and whether she had anything to say to me. She was a little taken aback at my rapid question, but at once raising her large clear eyes and looking at me with a tender smile, she said —

"It's nothing, Nyetochka; only do you know, when you asked me so quickly I was rather taken aback. That was because you asked me so quickly... I assure you. But listen — tell me the truth, my child — have you got anything on your mind which would have made you as confused if you had been asked about it so quickly and unexpectedly?"

"No," I answered, looking at her with clear eyes.

"Well, that is good to hear! If you only knew, my dear, how grateful I am to you for that good answer. Not that I could suspect you of anything bad — never. I could not forgive myself the thought of such a thing. But listen; I took you as a child, and now you are seventeen. You see for yourself: I am ill, I am like a child myself, I have to be looked after. I cannot fully take the place of a mother to you, although there was more than enough love in my heart for that. If I am troubled by anxiety now it is, of course, not your fault, but mine. Forgive me for the question, and for my having perhaps involuntarily failed in keeping the promises I made to you and my father when I took you into my house. This worries me very much, and has often worried me, my dear."

I embraced her and shed tears.

"Oh, I thank you; I thank you for everything," I said, bathing her hands with my tears. "Don't talk to me like that, don't break my heart. You have been more than a mother to me, yes; may God bless you and the prince for all you have both done for a poor, desolate child!"

"Hush, Nyetochka, hush! Hug me instead; that's right, hold me tight! Do you know, I believe, I don't know why, that it is the last time you will embrace me."

"No, no," I said, sobbing like a child; "no, that cannot be. You will be happy... You have many days before you. Believe me, we shall be happy."

"Thank you, thank you for loving me so much. I have not many friends about me now; they have all abandoned me!"

"Who have abandoned you? Who are they?"

"There used to be other people round me; yon don't know, Nyetochka. They have all left me. They have all faded away as though they were ghosts. And I have been waiting for them, waiting for them all my life. God be with them. Look, Nyetochka, you see it is late autumn, soon the snow will be here; with the first snow I shall die — but I do not regret it.

Farewell."

Her face was pale and thin, an ominous patch of red glowed on each cheek, her lips quivered and were parched by fever.

She went up to the piano and struck a few chords; at that instant a string snapped with a clang and died away in a long jarring sound...

"Do you hear, Nyetochka, do you hear?" she said all at once in a sort of inspired voice, pointing to the piano. "That string was strained too much, to the breaking point, it could bear no more and has perished. Do you hear how plaintively the sound is dying away?"

She spoke with difficulty. Mute spiritual pain was reflected in her face, her eyes filled with tears.

"Come, Nyetochka, enough of that, my dear. Fetch the children."

I brought them in. She seemed to find repose as she looked at them, and sent them away an hour later.

"You will not forsake them when I am dead, Nyetochka? Will you?" she said in a whisper, as though afraid someone might overhear us.

"Hush, you are killing me!" was all I could say to her in answer.

"I was joking," she said with a smile, after a brief pause. "And you believed me. You know, I talk all sorts of nonsense sometimes. I am like a child now, you must forgive me everything."

Then she looked at me timidly, as though afraid to say something. I waited.

"Mind you don't alarm him," she said at last, dropping her eyes, with a faint flush in her cheeks, and in so low a voice that I could hardly catch her words.

"Whom?" I asked, with surprise.

"My husband. You might perhaps tell him what I have said."

"What for, what for?" I repeated, more and more surprised.

"Well, perhaps you wouldn't tell him, how can I say!" she answered, trying to glance shyly at me, though the same simple-hearted smile was shining on her lips, and the colour was mounting more and more into her face. "Enough of that; I am still joking, you know."

My heart ached more and more.

"Only you will love them when I am dead, won't you?" she added gravely, and again, as it seemed, with a mysterious air. "You will love them as if they were your own. Won't you? Remember, I always looked on you as my own, and made no difference between you and the children."

"Yes, yes," I answered, not knowing what I was saying, and breathless with tears and confusion.

A hot kiss scalded my hand before I had time to snatch it away. I was tongue-tied with amazement.

What is the matter with her? What is she thinking? What happened between them yesterday? was the thought that floated through my mind.

A minute later she began to complain of being tired.

"I have been ill a long time, but I did not want to frighten you two. You both love me — don't you...? Good-bye for now, Nyetochka; leave me, but be sure to come in the evening. You will, won't you?"

I promised to; but I was glad to get away, I could not have borne any more.

"Poor darling, poor darling! What suspicion are you taking with you to the grave?" I exclaimed to myself, sobbing. "What new trouble is poisoning and gnawing your heart, though you scarcely dare to breathe a word of it? My God! This long suffering which I understand now through and through, this life without a ray of sunshine, this timid love that asks for nothing! And even now, now, almost on her death-bed, when her heart is torn in two with pain, she is afraid, like a criminal, to utter the faintest murmur, the slightest complaint — and imagining, inventing a new sorrow, she has already submitted to it, is already resigned to it..."

Towards the evening, in the twilight, I took advantage of the absence of Ovrov (the man who had come from Moscow) to go into the library and, unlocking a book-case, began rummaging among the bookshelves to choose something to read aloud to Alexandra Mihalovna. I wanted to distract her mind from gloomy thoughts, and to choose something gay and light... I was a long time, absent-mindedly choosing. It got darker, and my depression grew with the darkness. I found in my hands the same book again, with the page turned down on which even now I saw the imprint of the letter, which had never left my bosom since that day — the secret with which my existence seemed, as it were, to have been broken and to have begun anew, and with which so much that was cold, unknown, mysterious, forbidding and now so ominously menacing in the distance had come upon me... What will happen to me? I wondered: the corner in which I had been so snug and comfortable would be empty. The pure clean spirit which had guarded my youth would leave me. What was before me? I was standing in a reverie over my past, now so dear to my heart, as it were striving to gaze into the future, into the unknown that menaced me... I recall that minute as though I were living it again; it cut so sharply into my memory.

I was holding the letter and the open book in my hands, my face was wet with tears. All at once I started with dismay; I heard the sound of a familiar voice. At the same time I felt that the letter was torn out of my hands. I shrieked and looked round; Pyotr Alexandrovitch was standing before me. He seized me by the arm and held me firmly; with his right hand he raised the letter to the light and tried to decipher the first lines... I cried out, and would have faced death rather than leave the letter in his hands. From his triumphant smile I saw that he had succeeded in making out the first lines. I lost my head...

A moment later I had dashed at him, hardly knowing what I was doing, and snatched the letter from him. All this happened so quickly that I had not time to realise how I had got the letter again. But seeing that he meant to snatch it out of my hand again, I made haste to thrust it into my bosom and step back three or four paces.

For half a minute we stared at each other in silence. I was still trembling with terror, pale. With quivering lips that turned blue with rage, he broke the silence.

"That's enough!" he said in a voice weak with excitement. "You surely don't wish me to use force; give me back the letter of your own accord."

Only now I realised what had happened and I was breathless with resentment, shame, and indignation at this coarse brutality. Hot tears rolled down my burning cheeks. I was shaking all over with excitement, and was for some time incapable of uttering a word.

"Did you hear?" he said, advancing two paces towards me.

"Leave me alone, leave me alone!" I cried, moving away from him. "Your behaviour is low, ungentlemanly. You are forgetting yourself! Let me go!..."

"What? What's the meaning of this? And you dare to take up that tone to me... after what you've... Give it me, I tell you!"

He took another step towards me, but glancing at me saw such determination in my eyes that he stopped, as though hesitating.

"Very good!" he said dryly at last, as though he had reached a decision, though he could still scarcely control himself. "That will do later, but first..."

Here he looked round him.

"You... Who let you into the library? How is it that this bookcase is open? Where did you get the key?"

"I am not going to answer you," I said. "I can't talk to you. Let me go, let me go."

I went towards the door.

"Excuse me," he said, holding me by the arm. "You are not going away like that."

I tore my arm away from him without a word, and again made a movement towards the door.

"Very well. But I really cannot allow you to receive letters from your lovers in my house..."

I cried out with horror, and looked at him frantically...

"And so..."

"Stop!" I cried. "How can you? How could you say it to me? My God! My God!..."

"What? What? Are you threatening me too?"

But as I gazed at him, I was pale and overwhelmed with despair. The scene between us had reached a degree of exasperation I could not understand. My eyes besought him not to prolong it. I was ready to forgive the outrage if only he would stop. He looked at me intently, and visibly hesitated.

"Don't drive me to extremes," I whispered in horror.

"No, I must get to the bottom of it," he said at last, as though considering. "I must confess the look in your eyes almost made me hesitate," he added with a strange smile.

"But unluckily, the fact speaks for itself. I succeeded in reading the first words of your letter. It's a love letter. You won't persuade me it isn't! No, dismiss that idea from your mind! And that I could doubt it for a moment only proves that I must add to your excellent qualities your abilities as an expert liar, and therefore I repeat..."

As he talked, his face was more and more distorted with anger. He turned white, his lips were drawn and twitching, so that he could hardly articulate the last words. It was getting dark. I stood defenceless, alone, facing a man who was capable of insulting a woman. All appearances were against me too; I was tortured with shame, distracted, and could not understand this man's fury. Beside myself with terror, I rushed out of the room without answering him, and only came to myself as I stood on the threshold of Alexandra Mihalovna's study. At that instant I heard his footsteps; I was just about to go in when I stopped short as though thunderstruck.

"What will happen to her?" was the thought that flashed through my mind. "That letter!... No; better anything in the world than that last blow to her," and I was rushing back. But it was too late; he was standing beside me.

"Let us go where you like, only not here, not here!" I whispered, clutching at his arm. "Spare her! I will go back to the library or... where you like! You will kill her!"

"It is you who are killing her," he said, pushing me away.

Every hope vanished. I felt that to bring the whole scene before Alexandra Mihalovna was just what he wanted.

"For God's sake," I said, doing my utmost to hold him back. But at that instant the curtain was raised, and Alexandra Mihalovna stood facing us. She looked at us in surprise. Her face was paler than usual. She could hardly stand on her feet. It was evident that it had cost her a great effort to get as far as us when she heard our voices.

"Who is here? What are you talking about here?" she asked, looking at us in the utmost amazement.

There was a silence that lasted several moments, and she turned as white as a sheet. I flew to her, held her tight in my arms, and drew her back into her room. Pyotr Alexandrovitch walked in after me. I hid my face on her bosom and clasped her more and more tightly in my arms, half dead with suspense.

"What is it, Nyetochka, what's happened to you both?" Alexandra Mihalovna asked a second time.

"Ask her, you defended her so warmly yesterday," said Pyotr Alexandrovitch, sinking heavily into an arm-chair.

I held her more tightly in my embrace.

"But, my goodness, what is the meaning of it?" said Alexandra Milialovna in great alarm. "You are so irritated, and she is frightened and crying. Anneta, tell me all that has happened."

"No, allow me first," said Pyotr Alexandrovitch, coming up to us, taking me by the arm, and pulling me away from Alexandra Mihalovna. "Stand here," he said, putting me in the middle of the room. "I wish to judge you before her who has been a mother to you. And don't worry yourself, sit down," he added, motioning Alexandra Mihalovna

to an easy- chair. “It grieves me that I cannot spare you this unpleasant scene; but it must be so.”

“Good heavens! What is coming?” said Alexandra Mihalovna, in great distress, gazing alternately at me and her husband. I wrung my hands, feeling that the fatal moment was at hand. I expected no mercy from him now.

“In short,” Pyotr Alexandrovitch went on, “I want you to judge between us. You always (and I can’t understand why, it is one of your whims), you always — yesterday, for instance — thought and said... but I don’t know how to say it, I blush at the suggestion... In short, you defended her, you attacked me, you charged me with undue severity; you even hinted at another feeling, suggesting that that provoked me to undue severity; you... but I do not understand why, I cannot help my confusion, and the colour that flushes my face at the thought of your suppositions; and so I cannot speak of them directly, openly before her... In fact you...”

“Oh, you won’t do that! No, you won’t say that!” cried Alexandra Mihalovna in great agitation, hot with shame. “No, spare her. It was all my fault, it was my idea! I have no suspicions now. Forgive me for them, forgive me. I am ill, you must forgive me, only do not speak of it to her, don’t... Anneta,” she said, coming up to me, “Anneta, go out of the room, make haste, make haste! He was joking; it is all my fault; it is a tactless joke...”

“In short, you were jealous of her on my account,” said Pyotr Alexandrovitch, ruthlessly flinging those words in the face of her agonised suspense.

She gave a shriek, turned pale and leaned against her chair for support, hardly able to stand on her feet.

“God forgive you,” she said at last in a faint voice. “Forgive me for him, Nyetochka, forgive me; it was all my fault, I was ill, I...”

“But this is tyrannical, shameless, vile!” I cried in a frenzy, understanding it all at last, understanding why he wanted to discredit me in his wife’s eyes. “It’s below contempt; you...”

“Anneta!” cried Alexandra Mihalovna, clutching my hands in horror.

“It’s a farce, a farce, and nothing else!” said Pyotr Alexandrovitch, coming up to us in indescribable excitement. “It’s a farce, I tell you,” he went on, looking intently with a malignant smile at his wife. “And the only one deceived by the farce is — you. Believe me, we,” he brought out breathlessly, pointing at me, “are not at all afraid of discussing such matters; believe me, that we are not so maidenly as to be offended, to blush and to cover our ears, when we are talked to about such subjects. You must excuse me, I express myself plainly, simply, coarsely perhaps, but — it is necessary. Are you so sure, madam, of this... young person’s correctness of behaviour?”

“My God! What is the matter with you? You are forgetting yourself!” said Alexandra Mihalovna, numb and half dead with horror.

“Not so loud, please,” Pyotr Alexandrovitch interrupted her contemptuously. “I don’t like it. This is a simple matter, plain, vulgar in the extreme. I am asking you about her behaviour. Do you know...”

But I did not let him finish, and seizing him by the arm, I forcibly drew him away. Another minute — and everything might have been lost.

"Don't speak of the letter," I said quickly, in a whisper. "You will kill her on the spot. Censure of me will be censure of her too. She cannot judge me, for I know all... Do you understand? I know all!"

He looked at me intently with wild curiosity, was confused; the blood rushed to his face.

"I know all, all!" I repeated.

He was still hesitating. A question was trembling on his lips. I forestalled him.

"This is what happened," I said aloud hurriedly, addressing Alexandra Mihalovna, who was looking at us with timid and anxious amazement. "It was all my fault. I have been deceiving you for the last four years. I carried off the key of the library, and have for four years been secretly reading the books in it. Pyotr Alexandrovitch caught me reading a book which... could not, should not have been in my hands. In his anxiety over me, he has exaggerated the danger!... But I do not justify myself," I added quickly, noticing a sarcastic smile on his lips. "It is all my fault. The temptation was too great for me, and having once done wrong, I was ashamed to confess what I had done... That's all, almost all that has passed between us."

"Oho, how smart," Pyotr Alexandrovitch whispered beside me.

Alexandra Mihalovna listened to me intently; but there was an unmistakable shade of mistrustfulness on her face. She kept looking first at me, then at her husband. A silence followed. I could hardly breathe. She let her head fall on her bosom and hid her face in her hands, considering and evidently weighing every word I had uttered. At last she raised her head and looked at me intently.

"Nyetochka, my child," she said, "I know you cannot He. Was this everything that happened, absolutely all?"

"Yes, all," I answered.

"Was that all?" she asked, addressing her husband.

"Yes," he answered with an effort, "all!"

I heaved a sigh.

"On your word of honour, Nyetochka?"

"Yes," I answered without faltering.

But I could not refrain from glancing at Pyotr Alexandrovitch. He laughed as he heard my answer. I flushed hotly, and my confusion did not escape poor Alexandra Mihalovna. There was a look of overwhelming agonising misery in her face.

"That's enough," she said mournfully. "I believe you. I cannot but believe you."

"I think such a confession is sufficient," said Pyotr Alexandrovitch. "You have heard! What would you have me think?"

Alexandra Mihalovna made no answer. The scene became more and more unbearable.

"I will look through all the books to-morrow," Pyotr Alexandrovitch went on. "I don't know what else there was there; but..."

"But what book was she reading?" asked Alexandra Mihalovna.

"What book? Answer," he said, addressing me. "You can explain things better than I can," he said, with a hidden irony.

I was confused, and could not say a word. Alexandra Mihalovna blushed and dropped her eyes. A long pause followed Pyotr Alexandrovitch. walked up and down the room in vexation.

"I don't know what has passed between you," Alexandra Mihalovna began at last, timidly articulating each word; "but if that was all," she went on, trying to put a special significance into her voice, though she was embarrassed by her husband's fixed stare and trying not to look at him, "if that was all, I don't know what we all have to be so unhappy and despairing about. I am most to blame, I alone, and it troubles me very much. I have neglected her education, and I ought to answer for it all. She must forgive me, and I cannot and dare not blame her. But, again, what is there to be so desperate about? The danger is over. Look at her," she went on, speaking with more and more feeling, and casting a searching glance at her husband, "look at her, has her indiscretion left any trace on her? Do you suppose I don't know her, my child, my darling daughter? Don't I know that her heart is pure and noble, that in that pretty little head," she went on, drawing me towards her and fondling me, "there is clear, candid intelligence and a conscience that fears deceit... Enough of this, my dear! Let us drop it! Surely something else is underlying our distress; perhaps it was only a passing shadow of antagonism. But we will drive it away by love, by good-will, and let us put away our perplexities. Perhaps there is a good deal that has not been spoken out between us, and I blame myself most. I was first reserved with you, I was the first to be suspicious — goodness knows of what, and my sick brain is to blame for it... But since we have been open to some extent, you must both forgive me because... because indeed there was no great sin in what I suspected..."

As she said this she glanced shyly, with a flush on her cheek, at her husband, and anxiously awaited his words. As he heard her a sarcastic smile came on to his lips. He left off walking about and stopped directly facing her, with his hands behind his back. He seemed to be scrutinising her confusion, watched it, revelled in it; feeling his eyes fixed upon her, she was overwhelmed with confusion. He waited a moment as though he expected something more. At last he cut short the uncomfortable scene by a soft, prolonged, malignant laugh.

"I am sorry for you, poor woman!" he said at last gravely and bitterly, leaving off smiling. "You have taken up an attitude which you cannot keep up. What did you want? You wanted to incite me to answer, to rouse me by fresh suspicions, or rather by the old suspicion which you have failed to conceal in your words. The implication of your words, that there is no need to be angry with her, that she is good even after reading immoral books, the morality of which — I am saying what I think — seems already to have borne fruits, that you will answer for her yourself; wasn't that it? Well, in explaining that, you hint at something else; you imagine that my suspiciousness and my persecution arise from some other feeling. You even hinted to me yesterday — please

do not stop me, I like to speak straight out — you even hinted yesterday that in some people (I remember that you observed that such people were most frequently steady, severe, straightforward, clever, strong, and God knows what other qualities you did not bestow on them in your generosity), that in some people, I repeat, love (and God knows why you imagined such a thing) cannot show itself except harshly, hotly, sternly, often in the form of suspicions and persecutions. I don't quite remember whether that was just what you said yesterday... please don't stop me. I know your protégée well: she can hear all, all, I repeat for the hundredth time, all. You are deceived. But I do not know why it pleases you to insist on my being just such a man. God knows why you want to dress me up like a tomfool. It is out of the question, at my age, to be in love with this young girl; moreover, let me tell you, madam, I know my duty, and however generously you may excuse me, I shall say as before, that crime will always remain crime, that sin will always be sin, shameful, abominable, dishonourable, to whatever height of grandeur you raise the vicious feeling! But enough, enough, and let me hear no more of these abominations!"

Alexandra Mihalovna was crying. "Well, let me endure this, let this be for me!" she said at last, sobbing and embracing me. "My suspicions may have been shameful, you may jeer so harshly at them; but you, my poor child, why are you condemned to hear such insults? and I cannot defend you! I am speechless! My God! I cannot be silent, sir, I can't endure it... Your behaviour is insane."

"Hush, hush," I whispered, trying to calm her excitement, afraid that her cruel reproaches would put him out of patience. I was still trembling with fear for her.

"But, blind woman!" he shouted, "you do not know, you do not see."

He stopped for a moment.

"Away from her!" he said, addressing me and tearing my hand out of the hands of Alexandra Mihalovna. "I will not allow you to touch my wife; you pollute her, you insult her by your presence. But... but what forces me to be silent when it is necessary, when it is essential to speak?" he shouted, stamping. "And I will speak, I will tell you everything. I don't know what you know, madam, and with what you tried to threaten me, and I don't care to know. Listen!" he went oh, addressing Alexandra Mihalovna. "Listen..."

"Be silent!" I cried, darting forward. "Hold your tongue, not a word!"

"Listen!..."

"Hold your tongue in the name of..."

"In the name of what, madam?" he interrupted, with a rapid and piercing glance into my eyes. "In the name of what?" Let me tell you I pulled out of her hands a letter from a lover! So that's what's going on in our house! That's what's going on at your side! That's what you have not noticed, not seen!"

I could hardly stand. Alexandra Mihalovna turned white as death.

"It cannot be," she whispered in a voice hardly audible.

"I have seen the letter, madam; it has been in my hands; I have read the first lines and I am not mistaken: the letter was from a lover. She snatched it out of my hands.

It is in her possession now — it is clear, it is so, there is no doubt of it; and if you still doubt it, look at her and then try and hope for a shadow of doubt."

"Nyetochka!" cried Alexandra Mihalovna, rushing at me. "But no, don't speak, don't speak! I don't understand what it was, how it was... My God! My God!"

And she sobbed, hiding her face in her hands.

"But no, it cannot be," she cried again. "You are mistaken. I know... I know what it means," she said, looking intently at her husband. "You... I... could not... you are not deceiving me, Nyetochka, you cannot deceive me. Tell me all, all without reserve. He has made a mistake? Yes, he has made a mistake, hasn't he? He has seen something else, he was blind! Yes, wasn't he, wasn't he? Why did you not tell me all about it, Nyetochka, my child, my own child?"

"Answer, make haste, make haste!" I heard Pyotr Alexandrovitch's voice above my head. "Answer: did I or did I not see the letter in your hand?"

"Yes!" I answered, breathless with emotion.

"Is that letter from your lover?"

"Yes!" I answered.

"With whom you are now carrying on an intrigue?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" I said, hardly knowing what I was doing by now, and answering yes to every question, simply to put an end to our agony.

"You hear her. Well, what do you say now? Believe me, you kind, too confiding heart," he added, taking his wife's hand; "believe me and distrust all that your sick imagination has created. You see now, what this... young person is. I only wanted to show how impossible your suspicions were. I noticed all this long ago, and am glad that at last I have unmasked her before you. It was disagreeable to me to see her beside you, in your arms, at the same table with us, in my house, in fact, I was revolted by your blindness. That was the reason and the only reason that I observed her, watched her; my attention attracted your notice, and starting from God knows what suspicion, God only knows what you have deduced from it. But now the position is clear, every doubt is at an end, and to-morrow, madam, to-morrow you will leave my house," he concluded, addressing me.

"Stop!" cried Alexandra Mihalovna, getting up from her chair. "I don't believe in all this scene. Don't look at me so dreadfully, don't laugh at me. I want to judge you now. Anneta, my child, come to me, give me your hand, so. We are all sinners!" she said in a voice that quivered with tears, and she looked meekly at her husband. "And which of us can refuse anyone's hand? Give me your hand, Anneta, my dear child; I am no worthier, no better than you; you cannot injure me by your presence, for I too, I too am a sinner."

"Madam!" yelled Pyotr Alexandrovitch in amazement. "Madam! Restrain yourself! Do not forget yourself!..."

"I am not forgetting anything. Do not interrupt me, but let me have my say. You saw a letter in her hand, you even read it, you say, and she... has admitted that this letter is from the man she loves. But does that show that she is a criminal? Does

that justify your treating her like this, insulting her like this before your wife? Yes, sir, before your wife? Have you gone into this affair? Do you know how it has happened?"

"The only thing is for me to run and beg her pardon. Is that what you want?" cried Pyotr Alexandrovitch. "It puts me out of all patience listening to you! Think what you are talking about. Do you know what you are talking about? Do you know what and whom you are defending? Why, I see through it all..."

"And you don't see the very first thing because anger and pride prevent your seeing. You don't see what I am defending and what I mean. I am not defending vice. But have you considered — and you will see clearly if you do consider — have you considered that perhaps she is as innocent as a child? Yes, I am not defending vice! I will make haste and explain myself, if that will be pleasant to you. Yes; if she had been a wife, a mother, and had forgotten her duties, oh, then I would have agreed with you... You see I have made a reservation. Notice that and don't reproach me. But what if she has received this letter thinking no harm? What if in her inexperience she has been carried away by her feelings and had no one to hold her back? If I am more to blame than anyone because I did not watch over her heart? If this letter is the first? If you have insulted her fragrant maidenly feelings with your coarse suspicions? What if you have sullied her imagination with your cynical talk about the letter? If you did not see the chaste maidenly shame which was shining on her face, pure as innocence, which I see now, which I saw when distracted, harassed, not knowing what to say and torn with anguish, she answered yes to all your inhuman questions? Yes, yes! Yes, it is inhuman; it is cruel. I don't know you; I shall never forgive you this, never!"

"Yes, have mercy on me, have mercy on me!" I cried, holding her in my arms. "Spare me, trust me, do not repulse me..."

I fell on my knees before her.

"What if I had not been beside her," she went on breathlessly, "and if you had frightened her with your words, and if the poor child had been herself persuaded that she was guilty, if you had confounded her conscience and soul and chattered the peace of her heart? My God! You mean to turn her out of the house! But do you know who are treated like that? You know that if you turn her out of the house, you are turning us out together, both of us. Do you hear me, sir?"

Her eyes flashed; her bosom heaved; her feverish excitement reached a climax...

"Yes, I've heard enough, madam!" Pyotr Alexandrovitch shouted at last. "Enough of this! I know that there are Platonic passions, and to my sorrow I know it, madam, do you hear? To my sorrow. But I cannot put up with gilded vice, madam! I do not understand it. Away with tawdry trappings! And if you feel guilty, if you are conscious of some wrong-doing on your part (it is not for me to remind you of it, madam), if you, in fact, like the idea of leaving my house... there is nothing left for me to say, but that you made a mistake in not carrying out your design when it was the fitting moment.

If you have forgotten how many years ago, I will help you..."

I glanced at Alexandra Mihalovna, she was leaning on me and clutching convulsively at me, helpless with inward agony, half closing her eyes in intense misery. Another minute and she would have been ready to drop.

"Oh, for God's sake, if only this once, spare her! Don't say the last word," I cried, flinging myself on my knees before Pyotr Alexandrovitch, and forgetting that I was betraying myself; but it was too late. A faint scream greeted my words, and the poor woman fell senseless on the floor.

"It is all over! You have killed her," I said. "Call the servants, save her! I will wait for you in your study. I must speak to you; I will tell you all..."

"But what? But what?"

"Afterwards !"

The fainting and hysterics lasted two hours. The whole household was alarmed. The doctor shook his head dubiously. Two hours later I went into Pyotr Alexandrovitch's study. He had only just come back from his wife, and was walking up and down the room, pale and distracted, biting his nails fill they bled. I had never seen him in such a state.

"What do you want to say to me?" he said in a harsh coarse voice. "You wanted to say something?"

"Here is the letter you found in my possession. Do you recognise it?"

"Yes."

"Take it."

He took the letter and raised it to the light. I watched him attentively. A few minutes later, he turned quickly to the fourth page and read the signature. I saw the blood rush to his head.

"What's this?" he asked me, petrified with amazement.

"It's three years ago that I found that letter in a book. I guessed that it was forgotten, I read it and learned everything. From that time forth it has been in my possession because I had no one to whom to give it. I could not give it to her. Could I to you? But you must have known the contents of this letter, and all the sorrowful story in it... What your pretending is for, I don't know. That is for the present dark to me. I cannot yet see clearly into your dark soul. You wanted to keep up your superiority over her, and have done so. But for what object? To triumph over a phantom, over a sick woman's unhinged imagination, to prove to her that she has erred and you are more sinless than she! And you have attained your aim, for this suspicion of hers is the fixed idea of a failing brain, perhaps, the last plaint of a heart broken against the injustice of men's verdict, with which you were at one. 'What docs it matter if you have fallen in love with her?' That is what she said, that is what she wanted to show you. Your vanity, your jealous egoism have been merciless. Good-bye! No need to explain! But mind, I know you, I see through you. Don't forget that!"

I went to my own room, scarcely knowing what was happening to me. At the door I was stopped by Ovrov, Pyotr Alexandrovich's secretary.

"I should like to have a word with you," he said with a respectful bow.

I looked at him, scarcely understanding what he said to me.

"Afterwards. Excuse me, I am not well," I answered at last, passing him.

"To-morrow then," he said, bowing with an ambiguous smile.

But perhaps that was my fancy. All this seemed to flit before my eyes.

THE END OF THE FRAGMENT LEFT UNFINISHED BY DOSTOYEVSKY

Fyodor Dostoevsky
Netochka Nezvanova; an Incomplete Novel
1848

<archive.org/details/novelsoffyodordo12dost>
Written by Dostoyevsky in 1848. It was translated into english by Constance Garnett and published in 1912.