МАКСИМ ГОРЬКИЙ

THE MAN WHO WAS AFRAID

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The Man Who Was Afraid

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

OUT of the darkest depths of life, where vice and crime and misery abound, comes the Byron of the twentieth century, the poet of the vagabond and the proletariat, Maxim Gorky. Not like the beggar, humbly imploring for a crust in the name of the Lord, nor like the jeweller displaying his precious stones to dazzle and tempt the eye, he comes to the world, – nay, in accents of Tyrtaeus this commoner of Nizhni Novgorod spurs on his troops of freedom-loving heroes to conquer, as it were, the placid, self-satisfied literatures of to-day, and bring new life to pale, bloodless frames.

Like Byron's impassioned utterances, "borne on the tones of a wild and quite artless melody," is Gorky's mad, unbridled, powerful voice, as he sings of the "madness of the brave," of the barefooted dreamers, who are proud of their idleness, who possess nothing and fear nothing, who are gay in their misery, though miserable in their joy.

Gorky's voice is not the calm, cultivated, well-balanced voice of Chekhov, the Russian De Maupassant, nor even the apostolic, well-meaning, but comparatively faint voice of Tolstoy, the preacher: it is the roaring of a lion, the crash of thunder. In its elementary power is the heart rending cry of a sincere but suffering soul that saw the brutality of life in all its horrors, and now flings its experiences into the face of the world with unequalled sympathy and the courage of a giant.

For Gorky, above all, has courage; he dares to say that he finds the vagabond, the outcast of society, more sublime and significant than society itself.

His Bosyak, the symbolic incarnation of the Over-man, is as naive and as bold as a child – or as a genius. In the vehement passions of the magnanimous, compassionate hero in tatters, in the aristocracy of his soul, and in his constant thirst for Freedom, Gorky sees the rebellious and irreconcilable spirit of man, of future man, – in these he sees something beautiful, something powerful, something monumental, and is carried away by their strange psychology. For the barefooted dreamer's life is Gorky's life, his ideals are Gorky's ideals, his pleasures and pains, Gorky's pleasures and pains.

And Gorky, though broken in health now, buffeted by the storms of fate, bruised and wounded in the battle-field of life, still like Byron and like Lermontov,

" – seeks the storm
As though the storm contained repose."

And in a leonine voice he cries defiantly:

"Let the storm rage with greater force and fury!"

HERMAN BERNSTEIN.
September 20, 1901.

CHAPTER I

ABOUT sixty years ago, when fortunes of millions had been made on the Volga with fairy-tale rapidity, Ignat Gordyeeff, a young fellow, was working as water-pumper on one of the barges of the wealthy merchant Zayev.

Built like a giant, handsome and not at all stupid, he was one of those people whom luck always follows everywhere – not because they are gifted and industrious, but rather because, having an enormous stock of energy at their command, they cannot stop to think over the choice of means when on their way toward their aims, and, excepting their own will, they know no law. Sometimes they speak of their conscience with fear, sometimes they really torture themselves struggling with it, but conscience is an unconquerable power to the faint-hearted only; the strong master it quickly and make it a slave to their desires, for they unconsciously feel that, given room and freedom, conscience would fracture life. They sacrifice days to it; and if it should happen that conscience conquered their souls, they are never wrecked, even in defeat – they are just as healthy and strong under its sway as when they lived without conscience.

At the age of forty Ignat Gordyeeff was himself the owner of three steamers and ten barges. On the Volga he was respected as a rich and clever man, but was nicknamed "Frantic," because his life did not flow along a straight channel, like that of other people of his kind, but now and again, boiling up turbulently, ran out of its rut, away from gain – the prime aim of his existence. It looked as though there were three Gordyeeffs in him, or as though there were three souls in Ignat's body. One of them, the mightiest, was only greedy, and when Ignat lived according to its commands, he was merely a man seized with untamable passion for work. This passion burned in him by day and by night, he was completely absorbed by it, and, grabbing everywhere hundreds and thousands of roubles, it seemed as if he could never have enough of the jingle and sound of money. He worked about up and down the Volga, building and fastening nets in which he caught gold: he bought up grain in the villages, floated it to Rybinsk on his barges; he plundered, cheated, sometimes not noticing it, sometimes noticing, and, triumphant, be openly laughed at by his victims; and in the senselessness of his thirst for money, he rose to the heights of poetry. But, giving up so much strength to this hunt after the rouble, he was not greedy in the narrow sense, and sometimes he even betrayed an inconceivable but sincere indifference to his property. Once, when the ice was drifting down the Volga, he stood on the shore, and, seeing that the ice was breaking his new barge, having crushed it against the bluff shore, he ejaculated:

"That's it. Again. Crush it! Now, once more! Try!"

"Well, Ignat," asked his friend Mayakin, coming up to him, "the ice is crushing about ten thousand out of your purse, eh?"

"That's nothing! I'll make another hundred. But look how the Volga is working! Eh? Fine? She can split the whole world, like curd, with a knife. Look, look! There you have my 'Boyarinya!' She floated but once. Well, we'll have mass said for the dead."

The barge was crushed into splinters. Ignat and the godfather, sitting in the tavern on the shore, drank vodka and looked out of the window, watching the fragments of the "Boyarinya" drifting down the river together with the ice.

"Are you sorry for the vessel, Ignat?" asked Mayakin.

"Why should I be sorry for it? The Volga gave it to me, and the Volga has taken it back. It did not tear off my hand."

"Nevertheless."

"What – nevertheless? It is good at least that I saw how it was all done. It's a lesson for the future. But when my 'Volgar' was burned – I was really sorry – I didn't see it. How beautiful it must

have looked when such a woodpile was blazing on the water in the dark night! Eh? It was an enormous steamer."

"Weren't you sorry for that either?"

"For the steamer? It is true, I did feel sorry for the steamer. But then it is mere foolishness to feel sorry! What's the use? I might have cried; tears cannot extinguish fire. Let the steamers burn. And even though everything be burned down, I'd spit upon it! If the soul is but burning to work, everything will be erected anew. Isn't it so?"

"Yes," said Mayakin, smiling. "These are strong words you say. And whoever speaks that way, even though he loses all, will nevertheless be rich."

Regarding losses of thousands of roubles so philosophically, Ignat knew the value of every kopeika; he gave to the poor very seldom, and only to those that were altogether unable to work. When a more or less healthy man asked him for alms, Ignat would say, sternly:

"Get away! You can work yet. Go to my dvornik and help him to remove the dung. I'll pay you for it."

Whenever he had been carried away by his work he regarded people morosely and piteously, nor did he give himself rest while hunting for roubles. And suddenly – it usually happened in spring, when everything on earth became so bewitchingly beautiful and something reproachfully wild was breathed down into the soul from the clear sky – Ignat Gordyeeff would feel that he was not the master of his business, but its low slave. He would lose himself in thought and, inquisitively looking about himself from under his thick, knitted eyebrows, walk about for days, angry and morose, as though silently asking something, which he feared to ask aloud. They awakened his other soul, the turbulent and lustful soul of a hungry beast. Insolent and cynical, he drank, led a depraved life, and made drunkards of other people. He went into ecstasy, and something like a volcano of filth boiled within him. It looked as though he was madly tearing the chains which he himself had forged and carried, and was not strong enough to tear them. Excited and very dirty, his face swollen from drunkenness and sleeplessness, his eyes wandering madly, and roaring in a hoarse voice, he tramped about the town from one tavern to another, threw away money without counting it, cried and danced to the sad tunes of the folk songs, or fought, but found no rest anywhere – in anything.

It happened one day that a degraded priest, a short, stout little bald-headed man in a torn cassock, chanced on Ignat, and stuck to him, just as a piece of mud will stick to a shoe. An impersonal, deformed and nasty creature, he played the part of a buffoon: they smeared his bald head with mustard, made him go upon all-fours, drink mixtures of different brandies and dance comical dances; he did all this in silence, an idiotic smile on his wrinkled face, and having done what he was told to do, he invariably said, outstretching his hand with his palm upward:

"Give me a rouble."

They laughed at him and sometimes gave him twenty kopeiks, sometimes gave him nothing, but it sometimes happened that they threw him a ten-rouble bill and even more.

"You abominable fellow," cried Ignat to him one day. "Say, who are you?"

The priest was frightened by the call, and bowing low to Ignat, was silent.

"Who? Speak!" roared Ignat.

"I am a man – to be abused," answered the priest, and the company burst out laughing at his words.

"Are you a rascal?" asked Ignat, sternly.

"A rascal? Because of need and the weakness of my soul?"

"Come here!" Ignat called him. "Come and sit down by my side."

Trembling with fear, the priest walked up to the intoxicated merchant with timid steps and remained standing opposite him.

"Sit down beside me!" said Ignat, taking the frightened priest by the hand and seating him next to himself. "You are a very near man to me. I am also a rascal! You, because of need; I, because of wantonness. I am a rascal because of grief! Understand?"

"I understand," said the priest, softly. All the company were giggling.

"Do you know now what I am?"

"I do."

"Well, say, 'You are a rascal, Ignat!'"

The priest could not do it. He looked with terror at the huge figure of Ignat and shook his head negatively. The company's laughter was now like the rattling of thunder. Ignat could not make the priest abuse him. Then he asked him:

"Shall I give you money?"

"Yes," quickly answered the priest.

"And what do you need it for?"

He did not care to answer. Then Ignat seized him by the collar, and shook out of his dirty lips the following speech, which he spoke almost in a whisper, trembling with fear:

"I have a daughter sixteen years old in the seminary. I save for her, because when she comes out there won't be anything with which to cover her nakedness."

"Ah," said Ignat, and let go the priest's collar. Then he sat for a long time gloomy and lost in thought, and now and again stared at the priest. Suddenly his eyes began to laugh, and he said:

"Aren't you a liar, drunkard?"

The priest silently made the sign of the cross and lowered his head on his breast.

"It is the truth!" said one of the company, confirming the priest's words.

"True? Very well!" shouted Ignat, and, striking the table with his fist, he addressed himself to the priest:

"Eh, you! Sell me your daughter! How much will you take?"

The priest shook his head and shrank back.

"One thousand!"

The company giggled, seeing that the priest was shrinking as though cold water was being poured on him.

"Two!" roared Ignat, with flashing eyes.

"What's the matter with you? How is it?" muttered the priest, stretching out both hands to Ignat.

"Three!"

"Ignat Matveyich!" cried the priest, in a thin, ringing voice. "For God's sake! For Christ's sake! Enough! I'll sell her! For her own sake I'll sell her!"

In his sickly, sharp voice was heard a threat to someone, and his eyes, unnoticed by anybody before, flashed like coals. But the intoxicated crowd only laughed at him foolishly.

"Silence!" cried Ignat, sternly, straightening himself to his full length and flashing his eyes.

"Don't you understand, devils, what's going on here? It's enough to make one cry, while you giggle."

He walked up to the priest, went down on his knees before him, and said to him firmly:

"Father now you see what a rascal I am. Well, spit into my face!"

Something ugly and ridiculous took place. The priest too, knelt before Ignat, and like a huge turtle, crept around near his feet, kissed his knees and muttered something, sobbing. Ignat bent over him, lifted him from the floor and cried to him, commanding and begging:

"Spit! Spit right into my shameless eyes!"

The company, stupefied for a moment by Ignat's stern voice, laughed again so that the panes rattled in the tavern windows.

"I'll give you a hundred roubles. Spit!"

And the priest crept over the floor and sobbed for fear, or for happiness, to hear that this man was begging him to do something degrading to himself.

Finally Ignat arose from the floor, kicked the priest, and, flinging at him a package of money, said morosely, with a smile:

"Rabble! Can a man repent before such people? Some are afraid to hear of repentance, others laugh at a sinner. I was about to unburden myself completely; the heart trembled. Let me, I thought. No, I didn't think at all. Just so! Get out of here! And see that you never show yourself to me again. Do you hear?"

"Oh, a queer fellow!" said the crowd, somewhat moved.

Legends were composed about his drinking bouts in town; everybody censured him strictly, but no one ever declined his invitation to those drinking bouts. Thus he lived for weeks.

And unexpectedly he used to come home, not yet altogether freed from the odour of the kabaks, but already crestfallen and quiet. With humbly downcast eyes, in which shame was burning now, he silently listened to his wife's reproaches, and, humble and meek as a lamb, went away to his room and locked himself in. For many hours in succession he knelt before the cross, lowering his head on his breast; his hands hung helplessly, his back was bent, and he was silent, as though he dared not pray. His wife used to come up to the door on tiptoe and listen. Deep sighs were heard from behind the door – like the breathing of a tired and sickly horse.

"God! You see," whispered Ignat in a muffled voice, firmly pressing the palms of his hands to his broad breast.

During the days of repentance he drank nothing but water and ate only rye bread.

In the morning his wife placed at the door of his room a big bottle of water, about a pound and a half of bread, and salt. He opened the door, took in these victuals and locked himself in again. During this time he was not disturbed in any way; everybody tried to avoid him. A few days later he again appeared on the exchange, jested, laughed, made contracts to furnish corn as sharp-sighted as a bird of prey, a rare expert at anything concerning his affairs.

But in all the moods of Ignat's life there was one passionate desire that never left him – the desire to have a son; and the older he grew the greater was this desire. Very often such conversation as this took place between him and his wife. In the morning, at her tea, or at noon during dinner hour he gloomily glared at his wife, a stout, well-fed woman, with a red face and sleepy eyes, and asked her:

"Well, don't you feel anything?"

She knew what he meant, but she invariably replied:

"How can I help feeling? Your fists are like dumb-bells."

"You know what I'm talking about, you fool."

"Can one become pregnant from such blows?"

"It's not on account of the blows that you don't bear any children; it's because you eat too much. You fill your stomach with all sorts of food – and there's no room for the child to engender."

"As if I didn't bear you any children?"

"Those were girls," said Ignat, reproachfully. "I want a son! Do you understand? A son, an heir! To whom shall I give my capital after my death? Who shall pray for my sins? Shall I give it to a cloister? I have given them enough! Or shall I leave it to you? What a fine pilgrim you are! Even in church you think only of fish pies. If I die, you'll marry again, and my money will be turned over to some fool. Do you think this is what I am working for?"

And he was seized with sardonic anguish, for he felt that his life was aimless if he should have no son to follow him.

During the nine years of their married life his wife had borne him four daughters, all of whom had passed away. While Ignat had awaited their birth tremblingly, he mourned their death but little – at any rate they were unnecessary to him. He began to beat his wife during the second year of their married life; at first he did it while being intoxicated and without animosity, but just according to the

proverb: “Love your wife like your soul and shake her like a pear-tree;” but after each confinement, deceived in his expectation, his hatred for his wife grew stronger, and he began to beat her with pleasure, in revenge for not bearing him a son.

Once while on business in the province of Samarsk, he received a telegram from relatives at home, informing him of his wife’s death. He made the sign of the cross, thought awhile and wrote to his friend Mayakin:

“Bury her in my absence; look after my property.”

Then he went to the church to serve the mass for the dead, and, having prayed for the repose of the late Aquilina’s soul, he began to think that it was necessary for him to marry as soon as possible.

He was then forty-three years old, tall, broad-shouldered, with a heavy bass voice, like an archdeacon; his large eyes looked bold and wise from under his dark eyebrows; in his sunburnt face, overgrown with a thick, black beard, and in all his mighty figure there was much truly Russian, crude and healthy beauty; in his easy motions as well as in his slow, proud walk, a consciousness of power was evident – a firm confidence in himself. He was liked by women and did not avoid them.

Ere six months had passed after the death of his wife, he courted the daughter of an Ural Cossack. The father of the bride, notwithstanding that Ignat was known even in Ural as a “pranky” man, gave him his daughter in marriage, and toward autumn Ignat Gordyeeff came home with a young Cossack-wife. Her name was Natalya. Tall, well-built, with large blue eyes and with a long chestnut braid, she was a worthy match for the handsome Ignat. He was happy and proud of his wife and loved her with the passionate love of a healthy man, but he soon began to contemplate her thoughtfully, with a vigilant eye.

Seldom did a smile cross the oval, demure face of his wife – she was always thinking of something foreign to life, and in her calm blue eyes something dark and misanthropic was flashing at times. Whenever she was free from household duties she seated herself in the most spacious room by the window, and sat there silently for two or three hours. Her face was turned toward the street, but the look of her eyes was so indifferent to everything that lived and moved there beyond the window, and at the same time it was so fixedly deep, as though she were looking into her very soul. And her walk, too, was queer. Natalya moved about the spacious room slowly and carefully, as if something invisible restrained the freedom of her movements. Their house was filled with heavy and coarsely boastful luxury; everything there was resplendent, screaming of the proprietor’s wealth, but the Cossack-wife walked past the costly furniture and the silverware in a shy and somewhat frightened manner, as though fearing lest they might seize and choke her. Evidently, the noisy life of the big commercial town did not interest this silent woman, and whenever she went out driving with her husband, her eyes were fixed on the back of the driver. When her husband took her visiting she went and behaved there just as queerly as at home; when guests came to her house, she zealously served them refreshments, taking no interest whatever in what was said, and showing preference toward none. Only Mayakin, a witty, droll man, at times called forth on her face a smile, as vague as a shadow. He used to say of her:

“It’s a tree – not a woman! But life is like an inextinguishable wood-pile, and every one of us blazes up sometimes. She, too, will take fire; wait, give her time. Then we shall see how she will bloom.”

“Eh!” Ignat used to say to her jestingly. “What are you thinking about? Are you homesick? Brighten up a bit!”

She would remain silent, calmly looking at him.

“You go entirely too often to the church. You should wait. You have plenty of time to pray for your sins. Commit the sins first. You know, if you don’t sin you don’t repent; if you don’t repent, you don’t work out your salvation. You better sin while you are young. Shall we go out for a drive?”

“I don’t feel like going out.”

He used to sit down beside her and embrace her. She was cold, returning his caresses but sparingly. Looking straight into her eyes, he used to say:

"Natalya! Tell me – why are you so sad? Do you feel lonesome here with me?"

"No," she replied shortly.

"What then is it? Are you longing for your people?"

"No, it's nothing."

"What are you thinking about?"

"I am not thinking."

"What then?"

"Oh, nothing!"

Once he managed to get from her a more complete answer:

"There is something confused in my heart. And also in my eyes. And it always seems to me that all this is not real."

She waved her hand around her, pointing at the walls, the furniture and everything. Ignat did not reflect on her words, and, laughing, said to her:

"That's to no purpose! Everything here is genuine. All these are costly, solid things. If you don't want these, I'll burn them, I'll sell them, I'll give them away – and I'll get new ones! Do you want me to?"

"What for?" said she calmly.

He wondered, at last, how one so young and healthy could live as though she were sleeping all the time, caring for nothing, going nowhere, except to the church, and shunning everybody. And he used to console her:

"Just wait. You'll bear a son, and then an altogether different life will commence. You are so sad because you have so little anxiety, and he will give you trouble. You'll bear me a son, will you not?

"If it pleases God," she answered, lowering her head.

Then her mood began to irritate him.

"Well, why do you wear such a long face? You walk as though on glass. You look as if you had ruined somebody's soul! Eh! You are such a succulent woman, and yet you have no taste for anything. Fool!"

Coming home intoxicated one day, he began to ply her with caresses, while she turned away from him. Then he grew angry, and exclaimed:

"Natalya! Don't play the fool, look out!"

She turned her face to him and asked calmly:

"What then?"

Ignat became enraged at these words and at her fearless look.

"What?" he roared, coming up close to her.

"Do you wish to kill me?" asked she, not moving from her place, nor winking an eye.

Ignat was accustomed to seeing people tremble before his wrath, and it was strange and offensive to him to see her calm.

"There," he cried, lifting his hand to strike her. Slowly, but in time, she eluded the blow; then she seized his hand, pushed it away from her, and said in the same tone:

"Don't you dare to touch me. I will not allow you to come near me!"

Her eyes became smaller and their sharp, metallic glitter sobered Ignat. He understood by her face that she, too, was a strong beast, and if she chose to she wouldn't admit him to her, even though she were to lose her life.

"Oh," he growled, and went away.

But having retreated once, he would not do it again: he could not bear that a woman, and his wife at that, should not bow before him – this would have degraded him. He then began to realise that henceforth his wife would never yield to him in any matter, and that an obstinate strife for predominance must start between them.

"Very well! We'll see who will conquer," he thought the next day, watching his wife with stern curiosity; and in his soul a strong desire was already raging to start the strife, that he might enjoy his victory the sooner.

But about four days later, Natalya Fominichna announced to her husband that she was pregnant.

Ignat trembled for joy, embraced her firmly, and said in a dull voice:

"You're a fine fellow, Natalya! Natasha, if it should be a son! If you bear me a son I'll enrich you! I tell you plainly, I'll be your slave! By God! I'll lie down at your feet, and you may trample upon me, if you like!"

"This is not within our power; it's the will of the Lord," said she in a low voice.

"Yes, the Lord's!" exclaimed Ignat with bitterness and drooped his head sadly.

From that moment he began to look after his wife as though she were a little child.

"Why do you sit near the window? Look out. You'll catch cold in your side; you may take sick," he used to say to her, both sternly and mildly. "Why do you skip on the staircase? You may hurt yourself. And you had better eat more, eat for two, that he may have enough."

And the pregnancy made Natalya more morose and silent, as though she were looking still deeper into herself, absorbed in the throbbing of new life within her. But the smile on her lips became clearer, and in her eyes flashed at times something new, weak and timid, like the first ray of the dawn.

When, at last, the time of confinement came, it was early on an autumn morning. At the first cry of pain she uttered, Ignat turned pale and started to say something, but only waved his hand and left the bedroom, where his wife was shrinking convulsively, and went down to the little room which had served his late mother as a chapel. He ordered vodka, seated himself by the table and began to drink sternly, listening to the alarm in the house and to the moans of his wife that came from above. In the corner of the room, the images of the ikons, indifferent and dark, stood out confusedly, dimly illumined by the glimmering light of the image lamp. There was a stamping and scraping of feet over his head, something heavy was moved from one side of the floor to the other, there was a clattering of dishes, people were bustling hurriedly, up and down the staircase. Everything was being done in haste, yet time was creeping slowly. Ignat could hear a muffled voice from above,

"As it seems, she cannot be delivered that way. We had better send to the church to open the gates of the Lord."

Vassushka, one of the hangers-on in his house, entered the room next to Ignat's and began to pray in a loud whisper:

"God, our Lord, descend from the skies in Thy benevolence, born of the Holy Virgin. Thou dost divine the helplessness of human creatures. Forgive Thy servant."

And suddenly drowning all other sounds, a superhuman, soul-rending cry rang out, and a continuous moan floated softly over the room and died out in the corners, which were filled now with the twilight. Ignat cast stern glances at the ikons, heaved a deep sigh and thought:

"Is it possible that it's again a daughter?"

At times he arose, stupidly stood in the middle of the room, and crossed himself in silence, bowing before the ikons; then he went back to the table, drank the vodka, which had not made him dizzy during these hours, dozed off, and thus passed the whole night and following morning until noon.

And then, at last, the midwife came down hastily, crying to him in a thin, joyous voice.

"I congratulate you with a son, Ignat Matveyich!"

"You lie!" said he in a dull voice. "What's the matter with you, batushka!" Heaving a sigh with all the strength of his massive chest, Ignat went down on his knees, and clasping his hands firmly to his breast, muttered in a trembling voice:

"Thank God! Evidently Thou didst not want that my stem should be checked! My sins before Thee shall not remain without repentance. I thank Thee, Oh Lord. Oh!" and, rising to his feet, he immediately began to command noisily:

"Eh! Let someone go to St. Nicholas for a priest. Tell him that Ignat Matveyich asked him to come! Let him come to make a prayer for the woman."

The chambermaid appeared and said to him with alarm:

"Ignat Matveyich, Natalya Fominichna is calling you. She is feeling bad."

"Why bad? It'll pass!" he roared, his eyes flashing cheerfully. "Tell her I'll be there immediately! Tell her she's a fine fellow! I'll just get a present for her and I'll come! Hold on! Prepare something to eat for the priest. Send somebody after Mayakin!"

His enormous figure looked as though it had grown bigger, and intoxicated with joy, he stupidly tossed about the room; he was smiling, rubbing his hands and casting fervent glances at the images; he crossed himself swinging his hand wide. At last he went up to his wife.

His eyes first of all caught a glimpse of the little red body, which the midwife was bathing in a tub. Noticing him, Ignat stood up on tiptoes, and, folding his hands behind his back, walked up to him, stepping carefully and comically putting forth his lips. The little one was whimpering and sprawling in the water, naked, impotent and pitiful.

"Look out there! Handle him more carefully! He hasn't got any bones yet," said Ignat to the midwife, softly.

She began to laugh, opening her toothless mouth, and cleverly throwing the child over from one hand to the other.

"You better go to your wife."

He obediently moved toward the bed and asked on his way:

"Well, how is it, Natalya?"

Then, on reaching her, he drew back the bed curtain, which had thrown a shadow over the bed.

"I'll not survive this," said she in a low, hoarse voice.

Ignat was silent, fixedly staring at his wife's face, sunk in the white pillow, over which her dark locks were spread out like dead snakes. Yellow, lifeless, with black circles around her large, wide-open eyes – her face was strange to him. And the glance of those terrible eyes, motionlessly fixed somewhere in the distance through the wall – that, too, was unfamiliar to Ignat. His heart, compressed by a painful foreboding, slackened its joyous throbbing.

"That's nothing. That's nothing. It's always like this," said he softly, bending over his wife to give her a kiss. But she moaned right into his face:

"I'll not survive this."

Her lips were gray and cold, and when he touched them with his own he understood that death was already within her.

"Oh, Lord!" he uttered, in an alarmed whisper, feeling that fright was choking his throat and suppressing his breath.

"Natasha? What will become of him? He must be nursed! What is the matter with you?"

He almost began to cry at his wife. The midwife was bustling about him; shaking the crying child in the air. She spoke to him reassuringly, but he heard nothing – he could not turn his eyes away from the frightful face of his wife. Her lips were moving, and he heard words spoken in a low voice, but could not understand them. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he spoke in a dull and timid voice: "Just think of it! He cannot do without you; he's an infant! Gather strength! Drive this thought away from you! Drive it away."

He talked, yet he understood he was speaking useless words. Tears welled up within him, and in his breast there came a feeling heavy as stone and cold as ice.

"Forgive me. Goodbye! Take care. Look out. Don't drink," whispered Natalya, soundlessly.

The priest came, and, covering her face with something, and sighing, began to read gentle, beseeching words:

"Oh God, Almighty Lord, who cureth every disease, cure also Thy servant Natalya, who has just given birth to a child; and restore her from the bed on which she now lies, for in the words of David, 'We indulge in lawlessness and are wicked in Thine eyes.'"

The old man's voice was interrupted now and then, his thin face was stern and from his clothes came the odour of rock-rose.

"Guard the infant born of her, guard him from all possible temptation, from all possible cruelty, from all possible storms, from evil spirits, night and day."

Ignat listened to the prayer, and wept silently. His big, hot tears fell on the bare hand of his wife. But the hand, evidently, did not feel that the tears were dropping upon it: it remained motionless, and the skin did not tremble from the fall of the tears. After the prayer Natalya became unconscious and a day later she died, without saying another word – she died just as quietly as she had lived. Having arranged a pompous funeral, Ignat christened his son, named him Foma, and unwillingly gave his boy into the family of the godfather, his old friend Mayakin, whose wife, too, had given birth to a child not long before. The death of his wife had sown many gray hairs in Ignat's dark beard, but in the stern glitter of his eyes appeared a new expression, gentle, clear and mild.

CHAPTER II

MAYAKIN lived in an enormous two-story house near a big palisade, where sturdy, old spreading linden trees were growing magnificently. The rank branches covered the windows with a dense, dark embroidery, and the sun in broken rays peeped into the small rooms, which were closely crowded with miscellaneous furniture and big trunks, wherefore a stern and melancholy semi-darkness always reigned there supreme. The family was devout – the odour of wax, of rock-rose and of image-lamp oil filled the house, and penitent sighs and prayers soared about in the air. Religious ceremonials were performed infallibly, with pleasure, absorbing all the free power of the souls of the dwellers of the house. Feminine figures almost noiselessly moved about the rooms in the half-dark, stifling, heavy atmosphere. They were dressed in black, wore soft slippers on their feet, and always had a penitent look on their faces.

The family of Yakov Tarazovich Mayakin consisted of himself, his wife, a daughter and five kinswomen, the youngest of whom was thirty-four years old. These were alike devout and impersonal, and subordinate to Antonina Ivanovna, the mistress of the house. She was a tall, thin woman, with a dark face and with stern gray eyes, which had an imperious and intelligent expression. Mayakin also had a son Taras, but his name was never mentioned in the house; acquaintances knew that since the nineteen-year-old Taras had gone to study in Moscow – he married there three years later, against his father's will – Yakov disowned him. Taras disappeared without leaving any trace. It was rumoured that he had been sent to Siberia for something.

Yakov Mayakin was very queerly built. Short, thin, lively, with a little red beard, sly greenish eyes, he looked as though he said to each and every one:

"Never mind, sir, don't be uneasy. Even though I know you for what you are, if you don't annoy me I will not give you away."

His beard resembled an egg in shape and was monstrously big. His high forehead, covered with wrinkles, joined his bald crown, and it seemed as though he really had two faces – one an open, penetrating and intellectual face, with a long gristle nose, and above this face another one, eyeless and mouthless, covered with wrinkles, behind which Mayakin seemed to hide his eyes and his lips until a certain time; and when that time had arrived, he would look at the world with different eyes and smile a different smile.

He was the owner of a rope-yard and kept a store in town near the harbour. In this store, filled up to the ceiling with rope, twine, hemp and tow, he had a small room with a creaking glass door. In this room stood a big, old, dilapidated table, and near it a deep armchair, covered with oilcloth, in which Mayakin sat all day long, sipping tea and always reading the same "Moskovskiya Vedomosty," to which he subscribed, year in and year out, all his life. Among merchants he enjoyed the respect and reputation of a "brainy" man, and he was very fond of boasting of the antiquity of his race, saying in a hoarse voice:

"We, the Mayakins, were merchants during the reign of 'Mother' Catherine, consequently I am a pure-blooded man."

In this family Ignat Gordyeeff's son lived for six years. By the time he was seven years old Foma was a big-headed, broad-shouldered boy, seemingly older that his years, both in his size and in the serious look of his dark, almond-shaped eyes. Quiet, silent and persistent in his childish desires, he spent all his days over his playthings, with Mayakin's daughter, Luba, quietly looked after by one of the kinswomen, a stout, pock-marked old maid, who was, for some reason or other, nicknamed "Buzya." She was a dull, somewhat timid creature; and even to the children she spoke in a low voice, in words of monosyllables. Having devoted her time to learning prayers, she had no stories to tell Foma.

Foma was on friendly terms with the little girl, but when she angered or teased him he turned pale, his nostrils became distended, his eyes stared comically and he beat her audaciously. She cried,

ran to her mother and complained to her, but Antonina loved Foma and she paid but little attention to her daughter's complaints, which strengthened the friendship between the children still more. Foma's day was long and uniform. Getting out of bed and washing himself, he used to place himself before the image, and under the whispering of the pock-marked Buzya he recited long prayers. Then they drank tea and ate many biscuits, cakes and pies. After tea – during the summer – the children went to the big palisade, which ran down to a ravine, whose bottom always looked dark and damp, filling them with terror. The children were not allowed to go even to the edge of the ravine, and this inspired in them a fear of it. In winter, from tea time to dinner, they played in the house when it was very cold outside, or went out in the yard to slide down the big ice hill.

They had dinner at noon, "in Russian style," as Mayakin said. At first a big bowl of fat, sour cabbage soup was served with rye biscuits in, but without meat, then the same soup was eaten with meat cut into small pieces; then they ate roast meat – pork, goose, veal or rennet, with gruel – then again a bowl of soup with vermicelli, and all this was usually followed by dessert. They drank kvass made of red bilberries, juniper-berries, or of bread – Antonina Ivanovna always carried a stock of different kinds of kvass. They ate in silence, only now and then uttering a sigh of fatigue; the children each ate out of a separate bowl, the adults eating out of one bowl. Stupefied by such a dinner, they went to sleep; and for two or three hours Mayakin's house was filled with snoring and with drowsy sighs.

Awaking from sleep, they drank tea and talked about local news, the choristers, the deacons, weddings, or the dishonourable conduct of this or that merchant. After tea Mayakin used to say to his wife:

"Well, mother, hand me the Bible."

Yakov Tarasovich used to read the Book of Job more often than anything else. Putting his heavy, silver-framed spectacles on his big, ravenous nose, he looked around at his listeners to see whether all were in their places.

They were all seated where he was accustomed to see them and on their faces was a familiar, dull and timid expression of piety.

"There was a man in the land of Uz," began Mayakin, in a hoarse voice, and Foma, sitting beside Luba on the lounge in the corner of the room, knew beforehand that soon his godfather would become silent and pat his bald head with his hand. He sat and, listening, pictured to himself this man from the land of Uz. The man was tall and bare, his eyes were enormously large, like those of the image of the Saviour, and his voice was like a big brass trumpet on which the soldiers played in the camps. The man was constantly growing bigger and bigger; and, reaching the sky, he thrust his dark hands into the clouds, and, tearing them asunder, cried out in a terrible voice:

"Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?"

Dread fell on Foma, and he trembled, slumber fled from his eyes, he heard the voice of his godfather, who said, with a light smile, now and then pinching his beard:

"See how audacious he was!"

The boy knew that his godfather spoke of the man from the land of Uz, and the godfather's smile soothed the child. So the man would not break the sky; he would not rend it asunder with his terrible arms. And then Foma sees the man again – he sits on the ground, "his flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust, his skin is broken." But now he is small and wretched, he is like a beggar at the church porch.

Here he says:

"What is man, that he should be clean? And he which is born of woman, that he should be righteous?" [These words attributed by Mayakin to Job are from Eliphaz the Temanite's reply – Translator's Note.]

"He says this to God," explained Mayakin, inspired. "How, says he, can I be righteous, since I am made of flesh? That's a question asked of God. How is that?"

And the reader, triumphantly and interrogatively looks around at his listeners.

"He merited it, the righteous man," they replied with a sigh.

Yakov Mayakin eyes them with a smile, and says:

"Fools! You better put the children to sleep."

Ignat visited the Mayakins every day, brought playthings for his son, caught him up into his arms and hugged him, but sometimes dissatisfied he said to him with ill-concealed uneasiness:

"Why are you such a bugbear? Oh! Why do you laugh so little?"

And he would complain to the lad's godfather:

"I am afraid that he may turn out to be like his mother. His eyes are cheerless."

"You disturb yourself rather too soon," Mayakin smilingly replied.

He, too, loved his godson, and when Ignat announced to him one day that he would take Foma to his own house, Mayakin was very much grieved.

"Leave him here," he begged. "See, the child is used to us; there! he's crying."

"He'll cease crying. I did not beget him for you. The air of the place is disagreeable. It is as tedious here as in an old believer's hermitage. This is harmful to the child. And without him I am lonesome. I come home – it is empty. I can see nothing there. It would not do for me to remove to your house for his sake. I am not for him, he is for me. So. And now that my sister has come to my house there will be somebody to look after him."

And the boy was brought to his father's house.

There he was met by a comical old woman, with a long, hook-like nose and with a mouth devoid of teeth. Tall, stooping, dressed in gray, with gray hair, covered by a black silk cap, she did not please the boy at first; she even frightened him. But when he noticed on the wrinkled face her black eyes, which beamed so tenderly on him, he at once pressed his head close to her knees in confidence.

"My sickly little orphan!" she said in a velvet-like voice that trembled from the fulness of sound, and quietly patted his face with her hand, "stay close to me, my dear child!"

There was something particularly sweet and soft in her caresses, something altogether new to Foma, and he stared into the old woman's eyes with curiosity and expectation on his face. This old woman led him into a new world, hitherto unknown to him. The very first day, having put him to bed, she seated herself by his side, and, bending over the child, asked him:

"Shall I tell you a story, Fomushka?"

And after that Foma always fell asleep amid the velvet-like sounds of the old woman's voice, which painted before him a magic life. Giants defeating monsters, wise princesses, fools who turned out to be wise – troops of new and wonderful people were passing before the boy's bewitched imagination, and his soul was nourished by the wholesome beauty of the national creative power. Inexhaustible were the treasures of the memory and the fantasy of this old woman, who oftentimes, in slumber, appeared to the boy – now like the witch of the fairy-tales – only a kind and amiable old witch – now like the beautiful, all-wise Vasilisa. His eyes wide open, holding his breath, the boy looked into the darkness that filled his chamber and watched it as it slowly trembled in the light of the little lamp that was burning before the image. And Foma filled this darkness with wonderful pictures of fairy-tale life. Silent, yet living shadows, were creeping over the walls and across the floor; it was both pleasant and terrible to him to watch their life; to deal out unto them forms and colours, and, having endowed them with life, instantly to destroy them all with a single twinkle of the eyelashes. Something new appeared in his dark eyes, something more childish and naive, less grave; the loneliness and the darkness, awaking in him a painful feeling of expectation, stirred his curiosity, compelled him to go out to the dark corner and see what was hidden there beyond the thick veils of darkness. He went and found nothing, but he lost no hope of finding it out.

He feared his father and respected him. Ignat's enormous size, his harsh, trumpet-like voice, his bearded face, his gray-haired head, his powerful, long arms and his flashing eyes – all these gave to Ignat the resemblance of the fairy-tale robbers.

Foma shuddered whenever he heard his voice or his heavy, firm steps; but when the father, smiling kind-heartedly, and talking playfully in a loud voice, took him upon his knees or threw him high up in the air with his big hands the boy's fear vanished.

Once, when the boy was about eight years old, he asked his father, who had returned from a long journey:

"Papa, where were you?"

"On the Volga."

"Were you robbing there?" asked Foma, softly.

"Wha-at?" Ignat drawled out, and his eyebrows contracted.

"Aren't you a robber, papa? I know it," said Foma, winking his eyes slyly, satisfied that he had already read the secret of his father's life.

"I am a merchant!" said Ignat, sternly, but after a moment's thought he smiled kind-heartedly and added: "And you are a little fool! I deal in corn, I run a line of steamers. Have you seen the 'Yermak'? Well, that is my steamer. And yours, too."

"It is a very big one," said Foma with a sigh.

"Well, I'll buy you a small one while you are small yourself. Shall I?"

"Very well," Foma assented, but after a thoughtful silence he again drawled out regretfully: "But I thought you were a robber or a giant."

"I tell you I am a merchant!" repeated Ignat, insinuatingly, and there was something discontented and almost timorous in his glance at the disenchanted face of his son.

"Like Grandpa Fedor, the Kalatch baker?" asked Foma, having thought awhile.

"Well, yes, like him. Only I am richer than he. I have more money than Fedor."

"Have you much money?"

"Well, some people have still more."

"How many barrels do you have?"

"Of what?"

"Of money, I mean."

"Fool! Is money counted by the barrel?"

"How else?" exclaimed Foma, enthusiastically, and, turning his face toward his father, began to tell him quickly: "Maksimka, the robber, came once to a certain town and filled up twelve barrels with money belonging to some rich man there. And he took different silverware and robbed a church. And cut up a man with his sword and threw him down the steeple because he tried to sound an alarm."

"Did your aunt tell you that?" asked Ignat admiring his son's enthusiasm.

"Yes! Why?"

"Nothing!" said Ignat, laughing. "So you thought your father was a robber."

"And perhaps you were a robber long ago?"

Foma again returned to his theme, and it was evident on his face that he would be very glad to hear an affirmative answer.

"I was never a robber. Let that end it."

"Never?"

"I tell you I was not! What a queer little boy you are! Is it good to be a robber? They are all sinners, the robbers. They don't believe in God – they rob churches. They are all cursed in the churches. Yes. Look here, my son, you'll have to start to study soon. It is time; you'll soon be nine years old. Start with the help of God. You'll study during the winter and in spring I'll take you along with me on the Volga."

"Will I go to school?" asked Foma, timidly.

"First you'll study at home with auntie." Soon after the boy would sit down near the table in the morning and, fingering the Slavonic alphabet, repeat after his aunt:

"Az, Buky, Vedy."

When they reached "bra, vra, gra, dra" for a long time the boy could not read these syllables without laughter. Foma succeeded easily in gaining knowledge, almost without any effort, and soon he was reading the first psalm of the first section of the psalter: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly."

"That's it, my darling! So, Fomushka, that's right!" chimed in his aunt with emotion, enraptured by his progress.

"You're a fine fellow, Foma!" Ignat would approvingly say when informed of his son's progress. "We'll go to Astrakhan for fish in the spring, and toward autumn I'll send you to school!"

The boy's life rolled onward, like a ball downhill. Being his teacher, his aunt was his playmate as well. Luba Mayakin used to come, and when with them, the old woman readily became one of them.

They played at "hide and seek" and "blind man's buff;" the children were pleased and amused at seeing Anfisa, her eyes covered with a handkerchief, her arms outstretched, walking about the room carefully, and yet striking against chairs and tables, or looking for them in each and every commodious corner, saying:

"Eh, little rascals. Eh, rogues. Where have they hidden themselves? Eh?"

And the sun shone cheerfully and playfully upon the old worn-out body, which yet retained a youthful soul, and upon the old life, that was adorning, according to its strength and abilities, the life-path of two children.

Ignat used to go to the Exchange early in the morning and sometimes stayed away until evening; in the evening he used to go to the town council or visiting or elsewhere. Sometimes he returned home intoxicated. At first Foma, on such occasions, ran from him and hid himself, then he became accustomed to it, and learned that his father was better when drunk than sober: he was kinder and plainer and was somewhat comical. If it happened at night, the boy was usually awakened by his trumpet-like voice:

"Anfisa! Dear sister! Let me in to my son; let me in to my successor!"

And auntie answered him in a crying and reproachful voice:

"Go on. You better go to sleep, you cursed devil! Drunk again, eh? You are gray already?"

"Anfisa! May I see my son, with one eye?" Foma knew that Anfisa would not let him in, and he again fell asleep in spite of the noise of their voices. But when Ignat came home intoxicated during the day he immediately seized his son with his enormous paws and carried him about the rooms, asking him with an intoxicated, happy laughter:

"Fomka! What do you wish? Speak! Presents? Playthings? Ask! Because you must know there's nothing in this world that I wouldn't buy for you. I have a million! Ha, ha, ha! And I'll have still more! Understand? All's yours! Ha, ha!"

And suddenly his enthusiasm was extinguished like a candle put out by a violent puff of the wind. His flushed face began to shake, his eyes, burning red, filled with tears, and his lips expanded into a sad and frightened smile.

"Anfisa, in case he should die, what am I to do then?"

And immediately after these words he was seized with fury.

"I'd burn everything!" he roared, staring wildly into some dark corner of the room. "I'd destroy everything! I'd blow it up with dynamite!"

"Enough, you ugly brute! Do you wish to frighten the child? Or do you want him to take sick?" interposed Anfisa, and that was sufficient for Ignat to rush off hastily, muttering:

"Well, well, well! I am going, I am going, but don't cry! Don't make any noise. Don't frighten him."

And when Foma was somewhat sick, his father, casting everything aside, did not leave the house for a moment, but bothered his sister and his son with stupid questions and advice; gloomy, sighing, and with fear in his eyes, he walked about the house quite out of sorts.

"Why do you vex the Lord?" said Anfisa. "Beware, your grumblings will reach Him, and He will punish you for your complaints against His graces."

"Eh, sister!" sighed Ignat. "And if it should happen? My entire life is crumbling away! Wherefore have I lived? No one knows."

Similar scenes and the striking transitions of his father from one mood to another frightened the child at first, but he soon became accustomed to all this, and when he noticed through the window that his father, on coming home, was hardly able to get out of the sledge, Foma said indifferently:

"Auntie, papa came home drunk again."

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Spring came, and, fulfilling his promise, Ignat took his son along on one of his steamers, and here a new life, abounding in impressions, was opened before Foma's eyes.

The beautiful and mighty "Yermak," Gordyeeff's steam tow-boat, was rapidly floating down the current, and on each side the shores of the powerful and beautiful Volga were slowly moving past him – the left side, all bathed in sunshine, stretching itself to the very end of the sky like a pompous carpet of verdure; the right shore, its high banks overgrown with woods, swung skyward, sinking in stern repose.

The broad-bosomed river stretched itself majestically between the shores; noiselessly, solemnly and slowly flowed its waters, conscious of their invincible power; the mountainous shore is reflected in the water in a black shadow, while on the left side it is adorned with gold and with verdant velvet by a border of sand and the wide meadows. Here and there villages appear on mountain and on meadow, the sun shines bright on the window-panes of the huts and on the yellow roofs of straw, the church crosses sparkle amid the verdure of the trees, gray wind-mill wings revolve lazily in the air, smoke from the factory chimney rises skyward in thick, black curling clouds. Crowds of children in blue, red or white shirts, standing on the banks, shouted loudly at the sight of the steamer, which had disturbed the quiet of the river, and from under the steamer's wheels the cheerful waves are rushing toward the feet of the children and splash against the bank. Now a crowd of children, seated in a boat, rowed toward the middle of the river to rock there on the waves as in a cradle. Trees stood out above the water; sometimes many of them are drowned in the overflow of the banks, and these stand in the water like islands. From the shore a melancholy song is heard:

"Oh, o-o-o, once more!"

The steamer passes many rafts, splashing them with waves. The beams are in continual motion under the blows of the waves; the men on the rafts in blue shirts, staggering, look at the steamer and laugh and shout something. The big, beautiful vessel goes sidewise on the river; the yellow scantlings with which it is loaded sparkle like gold and are dimly reflected in the muddy, vernal water. A passenger steamer comes from the opposite side and whistles – the resounding echo of the whistle loses itself in the woods, in the gorges of the mountainous bank, and dies away there. In the middle of the river the waves stirred up by the two vessels strike against one another and splash against the steamers' sides, and the vessels are rocked upon the water. On the slope of the mountainous bank are verdant carpets of winter corn, brown strips of fallow ground and black strips of ground tilled for spring corn. Birds, like little dots, soar over them, and are clearly seen in the blue canopy of the sky; nearby a flock is grazing; in the distance they look like children's toys; the small figure of the shepherd stands leaning on a staff, and looks at the river.

The glare of the water – freedom and liberty are everywhere, the meadows are cheerfully verdant and the blue sky is tenderly clear; a restrained power is felt in the quiet motion of the water; above it the generous May sun is shining, the air is filled with the exquisite odour of fir trees and of fresh foliage. And the banks keep on meeting them, caressing the eyes and the soul with their beauty, as new pictures constantly unfold themselves.

Everything surrounding them bears the stamp of some kind of tardiness: all – nature as well as men – live there clumsily, lazily; but in that laziness there is an odd gracefulness, and it seems as

though beyond the laziness a colossal power were concealed; an invincible power, but as yet deprived of consciousness, as yet without any definite desires and aims. And the absence of consciousness in this half-slumbering life throws shades of sadness over all the beautiful slope. Submissive patience, silent hope for something new and more inspiriting are heard even in the cry of the cuckoo, wafted to the river by the wind from the shore. The melancholy songs sound as though imploring someone for help. And at times there is in them a ring of despair. The river answers the songs with sighs. And the tree-tops shake, lost in meditation. Silence.

Foma spent all day long on the captain's bridge beside his father. Without uttering a word, he stared wide-eyed at the endless panorama of the banks, and it seemed to him he was moving along a broad silver path in those wonderful kingdoms inhabited by the sorcerers and giants of his familiar fairy-tales. At times he would load his father with questions about everything that passed before them. Ignat answered him willingly and concisely, but the boy was not pleased with his answers; they contained nothing interesting and intelligible to him, and he did not hear what he longed to hear. Once he told his father with a sigh:

"Auntie Anfisa knows better than you."

"What does she know?" asked Ignat, smiling.

"Everything," replied the boy, convincedly.

No wonderful kingdom appeared before him. But often cities appeared on the banks of the river, just such cities as the one where Foma lived. Some of them were larger, some smaller, but the people, and the houses, and the churches – all were the same as in his own city. Foma examined them in company with his father, but was still unsatisfied and returned to the steamer gloomy and fatigued.

"Tomorrow we shall be in Astrakhan," said Ignat one day.

"And is it just the same as the other cities?"

"Of course. How else should it be?"

"And what is beyond Astrakhan?"

"The sea. The Caspian Sea it is called."

"And what is there?"

"Fishes, queer fellow! What else can there be in the water?"

"There's the city Kitezh standing in the water."

"That's a different thing! That's Kitezh. Only righteous people live there."

"And are there no righteous cities on the sea?"

"No," said Ignat, and, after a moment's silence, added: "The sea water is bitter and nobody can drink it."

"And is there more land beyond the sea?"

"Certainly, the sea must have an end. It is like a cup."

"And are there cities there too?"

"Again cities. Of course! Only that land is not ours, it belongs to Persia. Did you see the Persians selling pistachio-nuts and apricots in the market?"

"Yes, I saw them," replied Foma, and became pensive.

One day he asked his father:

"Is there much more land left?"

"The earth is very big, my dear! If you should go on foot, you couldn't go around it even in ten years."

Ignat talked for a long time with his son about the size of the earth, and said at length:

"And yet no one knows for certain how big it really is, nor where it ends."

"And is everything alike on earth?"

"What do you mean?"

"The cities and all?"

"Well, of course, the cities are like cities. There are houses, streets – and everything that is necessary."

After many similar conversations the boy no longer stared so often into the distance with the interrogative look of his black eyes.

The crew of the steamer loved him, and he, too, loved those fine, sun-burnt and weather-beaten fellows, who laughingly played with him. They made fishing tackles for him, and little boats out of bark, played with him and rowed him about the anchoring place, when Ignat went to town on business. The boy often heard the men talking about his father, but he paid no attention to what they said, and never told his father what he heard about him. But one day, in Astrakhan, while the steamer was taking in a cargo of fuel, Foma heard the voice of Petrovich, the machinist:

"He ordered such a lot of wood to be taken in. What an absurd man! First he loads the steamer up to the very deck, and then he roars. 'You break the machinery too often,' he says. 'You pour oil,' he says, 'at random.'"

The voice of the gray and stern pilot replied:

"It's all his exorbitant greediness. Fuel is cheaper here, so he is taking all he can. He is greedy, the devil!"

"Oh, how greedy!"

This word, repeated many times in succession, fixed itself in Foma's memory, and in the evening, at supper, he suddenly asked his father:

"Papa!"

"What?"

"Are you greedy?"

In reply to his father's questions Foma told him of the conversation between the pilot and the machinist. Ignat's face became gloomy, and his eyes began to flash angrily.

"That's how it is," ejaculated Ignat, shaking his head. "Well, you – don't you listen to them. They are not your equals; don't have so much to do with them. You are their master, they are your servants, understand that. If we choose to, we can put every one of them ashore. They are cheap and they can be found everywhere like dogs. Understand? They may say many bad things about me. But they say them, because I am their master. The whole thing arises because I am fortunate and rich, and the rich are always envied. A happy man is everybody's enemy."

About two days later there was a new pilot and another machinist on the steamer.

"And where is Yakov?" asked the boy.

"I discharged him. I ordered him away."

"For that?" queried Foma.

"Yes, for that very thing."

"And Petrovich, too?"

"Yes, I sent him the same way."

Foma was pleased with the fact that his father was able to change the men so quickly. He smiled to his father, and, coming out on the deck, walked up to a sailor, who sat on the floor, untwisting a piece of rope and making a swab.

"We have a new pilot here," announced Foma.

"I know. Good health to you, Foma Ignatich! How did you sleep?"

"And a new machinist, too."

"And a new machinist. Are you sorry for Petrovich?"

"Really? And he was so good to you."

"Well, why did he abuse my father?"

"Oh? Did he abuse him?"

"Of course he did. I heard it myself."

"Mm – and your father heard it, too?"

"No, I told him."

"You – so" – drawled the sailor and became silent, taking up his work again.

"And papa says to me: 'You,' he says, 'you are master here – you can drive them all away if you wish.'"

"So," said the sailor, gloomily looking at the boy, who was so enthusiastically boasting to him of his supreme power. From that day on Foma noticed that the crew did not regard him as before. Some became more obliging and kind, others did not care to speak to him, and when they did speak to him, it was done angrily, and not at all entertainingly, as before. Foma liked to watch while the deck was being washed: their trousers rolled up to their knees, or sometimes taken off altogether, the sailors, with swabs and brushes in their hands, cleverly ran about the deck, emptying pails of water on it, besprinkling one another, laughing, shouting, falling. Streams of water ran in every direction, and the lively noise of the men intermingled with the gray splash of the water. Before, the boy never bothered the sailors in this playful and light work; nay, he took an active part, besprinkling them with water and laughingly running away, when they threatened to pour water over him. But after Yakov and Petrovich had been discharged, he felt that he was in everybody's way, that no one cared to play with him and that no one regarded him kindly. Surprised and melancholy, he left the deck, walked up to the wheel, sat down there, and, offended, he thoughtfully began to stare at the distant green bank and the dented strip of woods upon it. And below, on the deck, the water was splashing playfully, and the sailors were gaily laughing. He yearned to go down to them, but something held him back.

"Keep away from them as much as possible," he recalled his father's words; "you are their master." Then he felt like shouting at the sailors – something harsh and authoritative, so his father would scold them. He thought a long time what to say, but could not think of anything. Another two, three days passed, and it became perfectly clear to him that the crew no longer liked him. He began to feel lonesome on the steamer, and amid the parti-coloured mist of new impressions, still more often there came up before Foma the image of his kind and gentle Aunt Anfisa, with her stories, and smiles, and soft, ringing laughter, which filled the boy's soul with a joyous warmth. He still lived in the world of fairy-tales, but the invisible and pitiless hand of reality was already at work tearing the beautiful, fine web of the wonderful, through which the boy had looked at everything about him. The incident with the machinist and the pilot directed his attention to his surroundings; Foma's eyes became more sharp-sighted. A conscious searchfulness appeared in them and in his questions to his father rang a yearning to understand which threads and springs were managing the deeds of men.

One day a scene took place before him: the sailors were carrying wood, and one of them, the young, curly-haired and gay Yefim, passing the deck of the ship with hand-barrows, said loudly and angrily:

"No, he has no conscience whatever! There was no agreement that I should carry wood. A sailor – well, one's business is clear – but to carry wood into the bargain – thank you! That means for me to take off the skin I have not sold. He is without conscience! He thinks it is clever to sap the life out of us."

The boy heard this grumbling and knew that it was concerning his father. He also noticed that although Yefim was grumbling, he carried more wood on his stretcher than the others, and walked faster than the others. None of the sailors replied to Yefim's grumbling, and even the one who worked with him was silent, only now and then protesting against the earnestness with which Yefim piled up the wood on the stretchers.

"Enough!" he would say, morosely, "you are not loading a horse, are you?"

"And you had better keep quiet. You were put to the cart – cart it and don't kick – and should your blood be sucked – keep quiet again. What can you say?"

Suddenly Ignat appeared, walked up to the sailor and, stopping in front of him, asked sternly:

"What were you talking about?"

"I am talking – I know," replied Yefim, hesitating. "There was no agreement – that I must say nothing."

"And who is going to suck blood?" asked Ignat, stroking his beard.

The sailor understood that he had been caught unawares, and seeing no way out of it, he let the log of wood fall from his hands, rubbed his palms against his pants, and, facing Ignat squarely, said rather boldly:

"And am I not right? Don't you suck it?"

"I?"

"You."

Foma saw that his father swung his hand. A loud blow resounded, and the sailor fell heavily on the wood. He arose immediately and worked on in silence. Blood was trickling from his bruised face on to the white bark of the birch wood; he wiped the blood off his face with the sleeve of his shirt, looked at his sleeve and, heaving a sigh, maintained silence, and when he went past Foma with the hand-harrows, two big, turbid tears were trembling on his face, near the bridge of his nose, and Foma noticed them.

At dinner Foma was pensive and now and then glanced at his father with fear in his eyes.

"Why do you frown?" asked his father, gently.

"Frown?"

"Are you ill, perhaps? Be careful. If there is anything, tell me."

"You are strong," said Foma of a sudden musingly.

"I? That's right. God has favoured me with strength."

"How hard you struck him!" exclaimed the boy in a low voice, lowering his head.

Ignat was about to put a piece of bread with caviar into his mouth, but his hand stopped, held back by his son's exclamation; he looked interrogatively at Foma's drooping head and asked:

"You mean Yefim, don't you?"

"Yes, he was bleeding. And how he walked afterward, how he cried," said the boy in a low voice.

"Mm," roared Ignat, chewing a bite. "Well, are you sorry for him?"

"It's a pity!" said Foma, with tears in his voice.

"Yes. So that's the kind of a fellow you are," said Ignat.

Then, after a moment's silence, he filled a wineglass with vodka, emptied it, and said sternly, in a slightly reprimanding tone:

"There is no reason why you should pity him. He brawled at random, and therefore got what he deserved. I know him: he is a good fellow, industrious, strong and not a bit foolish. But to argue is not his business; I may argue, because I am the master. It isn't simple to be master. A punch wouldn't kill him, but will make him wiser. That's the way. Eh, Foma! You are an infant, and you do not understand these things. I must teach you how to live. It may be that my days on earth are numbered."

Ignat was silent for awhile, drank some more vodka and went on instinctively:

"It is necessary to have pity on men. You are right in doing so. But you must pity them sensibly. First look at a man, find out what good there is in him, and what use may be made of him! And if you find him to be strong and capable – pity and assist him. And if he is weak and not inclined to work – spit upon him, pass him by. Just keep this in mind – the man who complains against everything, who sighs and moans all the time – that man is worth nothing; he merits no compassion and you will do him no good whatever, even if you help him. Pity for such people makes them more morose, spoils them the more. In your godfather's house you saw various kinds of people – unfortunate travellers and hangers-on, and all sorts of rabble. Forget them. They are not men, they are just shells, and are good for nothing. They are like bugs, fleas and other unclean things. Nor do they live for God's sake – they have no God. They call His name in vain, in order to move fools to pity, and, thus pitied, to fill their bellies with something. They live but for their bellies, and aside from eating, drinking, sleeping and moaning they can do nothing. And all they accomplish is the soul's decay. They are in your way

and you trip over them. A good man among them – like fresh apples among bad ones – may soon be spoilt, and no one will profit by it. You are young, that's the trouble. You cannot comprehend my words. Help him who is firm in misery. He may not ask you for assistance, but think of it yourself, and assist him without his request. And if he should happen to be proud and thus feel offended at your aid, do not allow him to see that you are lending him a helping hand. That's the way it should be done, according to common sense! Here, for example, two boards, let us say, fall into the mud – one of them is a rotten one, the other, a good sound board. What should you do? What good is there in the rotten board? You had better drop it, let it stay in the mud and step on it so as not to soil your feet. As to the sound board, lift it up and place it in the sun; if it can be of no use to you, someone else may avail himself of it. That's the way it is, my son! Listen to me and remember. There is no reason why Yefim should be pitied. He is a capable fellow, he knows his value. You cannot knock his soul out with a box on the ear. I'll just watch him for about a week, and then I'll put him at the helm. And there, I am quite sure, he'll be a good pilot. And if he should be promoted to captain, he wouldn't lose courage – he would make a clever captain! That's the way people grow. I have gone through this school myself, dear. I, too, received more than one box on the ear when I was of his age. Life, my son, is not a dear mother to all of us. It is our exacting mistress."

Ignat talked with his son about two hours, telling him of his own youth, of his toils, of men; their terrible power, and of their weakness; of how they live, and sometimes pretend to be unfortunate in order to live on other people's money; and then he told him of himself, and of how he rose from a plain working man to be proprietor of a large concern. The boy listened to his words, looked at him and felt as though his father were coming nearer and nearer to him. And though his father's story did not contain the material of which Aunt Anfisa's fairy-tales were brimful, there was something new in it, something clearer and more comprehensible than in her fairy-tales, and something just as interesting. Something powerful and warm began to throb within his little heart, and he was drawn toward his father. Ignat, evidently, surmised his son's feelings by his eyes: he rose abruptly from his seat, seized him in his arms and pressed him firmly to his breast. And Foma embraced his neck, and, pressing his cheek to that of his father, was silent and breathed rapidly.

"My son," whispered Ignat in a dull voice, "My darling! My joy! Learn while I am alive. Alas! it is hard to live."

The child's heart trembled at this whisper; he set his teeth together, and hot tears gushed from his eyes.

Until this day Ignat had never kindled any particular feeling in his son: the boy was used to him; he was tired of looking at his enormous figure, and feared him slightly, but was at the same time aware that his father would do anything for him that he wanted. Sometimes Ignat would stay away from home a day, two, a week, or possibly the entire summer. And yet Foma did not even notice his absence, so absorbed was he by his love for Aunt Anfisa. When Ignat returned the boy was glad, but he could hardly tell whether it was his father's arrival that gladdened him or the playthings he brought with him. But now, at the sight of Ignat, the boy ran to meet him, grasped him by the hand, laughed, stared into his eyes and felt weary if he did not see him for two or three hours: His father became interesting to him, and, rousing his curiosity, he fairly developed love and respect for himself. Every time that they were together Foma begged his father:

"Papa, tell me about yourself."

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The steamer was now going up the Volga. One suffocating night in July, when the sky was overcast with thick black clouds, and everything on the Volga was somewhat ominously calm, they reached Kazan and anchored near Uslon at the end of an enormous fleet of vessels. The clinking of the anchor chains and the shouting of the crew awakened Foma; he looked out of the window and saw, far in the distance, small lights glimmering fantastically: the water about the boat black and thick, like oil – and nothing else could be seen. The boy's heart trembled painfully and he began to

listen attentively. A scarcely audible, melancholy song reached his ears – mournful and monotonous as a chant on the caravan the watchmen called to one another; the steamer hissed angrily getting up steam. And the black water of the river splashed sadly and quietly against the sides of the vessels. Staring fixedly into the darkness, until his eyes hurt, the boy discerned black piles and small lights dimly burning high above them. He knew that those were barges, but this knowledge did not calm him and his heart throbbed unevenly, and, in his imagination, terrifying dark images arose.

"O-o-o," a drawling cry came from the distance and ended like a wail.

Someone crossed the deck and went up to the side of the steamer.

"O-o-o," was heard again, but nearer this time.

"Yefim!" some one called in a low voice on the deck. "Yefimka!"

"Well?"

"Devil! Get up! Take the boat-hook."

"O-o-o," someone moaned near by, and Foma, shuddering, stepped back from the window.

The queer sound came nearer and nearer and grew in strength, sobbed and died out in the darkness. While on the deck they whispered with alarm:

"Yefimka! Get up! A guest is floating!"

"Where?" came a hasty question, then bare feet began to patter about the deck, a bustle was heard, and two boat-hooks slipped down past the boy's face and almost noiselessly plunged into the water.

"A gue-e-est!" Some began to sob near by, and a quiet, but very queer splash resounded.

The boy trembled with fright at this mournful cry, but he could not tear his hands from the window nor his eyes from the water.

"Light the lantern. You can't see anything."

"Directly."

And then a spot of dim light fell over the water. Foma saw that the water was rocking calmly, that a ripple was passing over it, as though the water were afflicted, and trembled for pain.

"Look! Look!" they whispered on the deck with fright.

At the same time a big, terrible human face, with white teeth set together, appeared on the spot of light. It floated and rocked in the water, its teeth seemed to stare at Foma as though saying, with a smile:

"Eh, boy, boy, it is cold. Goodbye!"

The boat-hooks shook, were lifted in the air, were lowered again into the water and carefully began to push something there.

"Shove him! Shove! Look out, he may be thrown under the wheel."

"Shove him yourself then."

The boat-hooks glided over the side of the steamer, and, scratching against it, produced a noise like the grinding of teeth. Foma could not close his eyes for watching them. The noise of feet stamping on the deck, over his head, was gradually moving toward the stern. And then again that moaning cry for the dead was heard:

"A gue-e-est!"

"Papa!" cried Foma in a ringing voice. "Papa!" His father jumped to his feet and rushed toward him.

"What is that? What are they doing there?" cried Foma.

Wildly roaring, Ignat jumped out of the cabin with huge bounds. He soon returned, sooner than Foma, staggering and looking around him, had time to reach his father's bed.

"They frightened you? It's nothing!" said Ignat, taking him up in his arms. "Lie down with me."

"What is it?" asked Foma, quietly.

"It was nothing, my son. Only a drowned man. A man was drowned and he is floating. That's nothing! Don't be afraid, he has already floated clear of us."

"Why did they push him?" interrogated the boy, firmly pressing close to his father, and shutting his eyes for fright.

"It was necessary to do so. The water might have thrown him under the wheel. Under ours, for instance. Tomorrow the police would notice it, there would be trouble, inquests, and we would be held here for examination. That's why we shoved him along. What difference does it make to him? He is dead; it doesn't pain him; it doesn't offend him. And the living would be troubled on his account. Sleep, my son.

"So he will float on that way?"

"He will float. They'll take him out somewhere and bury him."

"And will a fish devour him?"

"Fish do not eat human bodies. Crabs eat them. They like them."

Foma's fright was melting, from the heat of his father's body, but before his eyes the terrible sneering face was still rocking in the black water.

"And who is he?"

"God knows! Say to God about him: 'Oh Lord, rest his soul! '"

"Lord, rest his soul!" repeated Foma, in a whisper.

"That's right. Sleep now, don't fear. He is far away now! Floating on. See here, be careful as you go up to the side of the ship. You may fall overboard. God forbid! And – "

"Did he fall overboard?"

"Of course. Perhaps he was drunk, and that's his end! And maybe he threw himself into the water. There are people who do that. They go and throw themselves into the water and are drowned. Life, my dear, is so arranged that death is sometimes a holiday for one, sometimes it is a blessing for all."

"Papa."

"Sleep, sleep, dear."

CHAPTER III

DURING the very first day of his school life, stupefied by the lively and hearty noise of provoking mischiefs and of wild, childish games, Foma picked out two boys from the crowd who at once seemed more interesting to him than the others. One had a seat in front of him. Foma, looking askance, saw a broad back; a full neck, covered with freckles; big ears; and the back of the head closely cropped, covered with light-red hair which stood out like bristles.

When the teacher, a bald-headed man, whose lower lip hung down, called out: "Smolin, African!" the red-headed boy arose slowly, walked up to the teacher, calmly stared into his face, and, having listened to the problem, carefully began to make big round figures on the blackboard with chalk.

"Good enough!" said the teacher. "Yozhov, Nicolai. Proceed!"

One of Foma's neighbours, a fidgety little boy with black little mouse-eyes, jumped up from his seat and passed through the aisle, striking against everything and turning his head on all sides. At the blackboard he seized the chalk, and, standing up on the toes of his boots, noisily began to mark the board with the chalk, creaking and filling with chalk dust, dashing off small, illegible marks.

"Not so loud!" said the teacher, wrinkling his yellow face and contracting his fatigued eyes. Yozhov spoke quickly and in a ringing voice:

"Now we know that the first peddler made 17k. profit."

"Enough! Gordyeeff! Tell me what must we do in order to find out how much the second peddler gained?"

Watching the conduct of the boys, so unlike each other, Foma was thus taken unawares by the question and he kept quiet.

"Don't you know? How? Explain it to him, Smolin."

Having carefully wiped his fingers, which had been soiled with chalk, Smolin put the rag away, and, without looking at Foma, finished the problem and again began to wipe his hands, while Yozhov, smiling and skipping along as he walked, returned to his seat.

"Eh, you!" he whispered, seating himself beside Foma, incidentally striking his side with his fist. "Why don't you know it? What was the profit altogether? Thirty kopecks. And there were two peddlers. One of them got 17. Well, how much did the other one get?"

"I know," replied Foma, in a whisper, feeling confused and examining the face of Smolin, who was sedately returning to his seat. He didn't like that round, freckled face, with the blue eyes, which were loaded with fat. And Yozhov pinched his leg and asked:

"Whose son are you? The Frantic's?"

"Yes."

"So. Do you wish me to prompt you always?"

"Yes."

"And what will you give me for it?"

Foma thought awhile and asked:

"And do you know it all yourself?"

"I? I am the best pupil. You'll see for yourself."

"Hey, there! Yozhov, you are talking again?" cried the teacher, faintly.

Yozhov jumped to his feet and said boldly:

"It's not I, Ivan Andreyich – it's Gordyeeff."

"Both of them were whispering," announced Smolin, serenely.

Wrinkling his face mournfully and moving his big lip comically, the teacher reprimanded them all, but his words did not prevent Yozhov from whispering immediately:

"Very well, Smolin! I'll remember you for telling."

"Well, why do you blame it all on the new boy?" asked Smolin, in a low voice, without even turning his head to them.

"All right, all right," hissed Yozhov.

Foma was silent, looking askance at his brisk neighbour, who at once pleased him and roused in him a desire to get as far as possible away from him. During recess he learned from Yozhov that Smolin, too, was rich, being the son of a tan-yard proprietor, and that Yozhov himself was the son of a guard at the Court of Exchequer, and very poor. The last was clearly evident by the adroit boy's costume, made of gray fustian and adorned with patches on the knees and elbows; by his pale, hungry-looking face; and, by his small, angular and bony figure. This boy spoke in a metallic alto, elucidating his words with grimaces and gesticulations, and he often used words whose meaning was known but to himself.

"We'll be friends," he announced to Foma.

"Why did you complain to the teacher about me?" Gordyeeff reminded Yozhov, looking at him suspiciously.

"There! What's the difference to you? You are a new scholar and rich. The teacher is not exacting with the rich. And I am a poor hanger-on; he doesn't like me, because I am impudent and because I never bring him any presents. If I had been a bad pupil he would have expelled me long ago. You know I'll go to the Gymnasium from here. I'll pass the second class and then I'll leave. Already a student is preparing me for the second class. There I'll study so that they can't hold me back! How many horses do you have?"

"Three. What do you need to study so much for?" asked Foma.

"Because I am poor. The poor must study hard so that they may become rich. They become doctors, functionaries, officers. I shall be a 'tinkler.' A sword at my side, spur on my boots. Cling, cling! And what are you going to be?"

"I don't know," said Foma, pensively, examining his companion.

"You need not be anything. And are you fond of pigeons?"

"Yes."

"What a good-for-nothing you are! Oh! Eh!" Yozhov imitated Foma's slow way of speaking. "How many pigeons do you have?"

"I have none."

"Eh, you! Rich, and yet you have no pigeons. Even I have three. If my father had been rich I would have had a hundred pigeons and chased them all day long. Smolin has pigeons, too, fine ones! Fourteen. He made me a present of one. Only, he is greedy. All the rich are greedy. And you, are you greedy, too?"

"I don't know," said Foma, irresolutely.

"Come up to Smolin's and the three of us together will chase the pigeons."

"Very well. If they let me."

"Why, does not your father like you?"

"He does like me."

"Well, then, he'll let you go. Only don't tell him that I am coming. Perhaps he would not let you go with me. Tell him you want to go to Smolin's. Smolin!"

A plump boy came up to them, and Yozhov accosted him, shaking his head reproachfully:

"Eh, you red-headed slanderer! It isn't worth while to be friends with you, blockhead!"

"Why do you abuse me?" asked Smolin, calmly, examining Foma fixedly.

"I am not abusing you; I am telling the truth," Yozhov explained, straightening himself with animation. "Listen! Although you are a kissel, but – let it go! We'll come up to see you on Sunday after mass."

"Come," Smolin nodded his head.

"We'll come up. They'll ring the bell soon. I must run to sell the siskin," declared Yozhov, pulling out of his pocket a paper package, wherein some live thing was struggling. And he disappeared from the school-yard as mercury from the palm of a hand.

"What a queer fellow he is!" said Foma, dumfounded by Yozhov's adroitness and looking at Smolin interrogatively.

"He is always like this. He's very clever," the red-headed boy explained.

"And cheerful, too," added Foma.

"Cheerful, too," Smolin assented. Then they became silent, looking at each other.

"Will you come up with him to my house?" asked the red-headed boy.

"Yes."

"Come up. It's nice there."

Foma said nothing to this. Then Smolin asked him:

"Have you many friends?"

"I have none."

"Neither did I have any friends before I went to school. Only cousins. Now you'll have two friends at once."

"Yes," said Foma.

"Are you glad?"

"I'm glad."

"When you have lots of friends, it is lively. And it is easier to study, too – they prompt you."

"And are you a good pupil?"

"Of course! I do everything well," said Smolin, calmly.

The bell began to bang as though it had been frightened and was hastily running somewhere.

Sitting in school, Foma began to feel somewhat freer, and compared his friends with the rest of the boys. He soon learned that they both were the very best boys in school and that they were the first to attract everybody's attention, even as the two figures 5 and 7, which had not yet been wiped off the blackboard. And Foma felt very much pleased that his friends were better than any of the other boys.

They all went home from school together, but Yozhov soon turned into some narrow side street, while Smolin walked with Foma up to his very house, and, departing, said:

"You see, we both go home the same way, too."

At home Foma was met with pomp: his father made him a present of a heavy silver spoon, with an ingenious monogram on it, and his aunt gave him a scarf knitted by herself. They were awaiting him for dinner, having prepared his favourite dishes for him, and as soon as he took off his coat, seated him at the table and began to ply him with questions.

"Well, how was it? How did you like the school?" asked Ignat, looking lovingly at his son's rosy, animated face.

"Pretty good. It's nice!" replied Foma.

"My darling!" sighed his aunt, with feeling, "look out, hold your own with your friends. As soon as they offend you tell your teachers about it."

"Go on. What else will you tell him?" Ignat smiled. "Never do that! Try to get square with every offender yourself, punish him with your own hand, not with somebody else's. Are there any good fellows there?"

"There are two," Foma smiled, recalling Yozhov. "One of them is so bold – terrible!"

"Whose is he?"

"A guard's son."

"Mm! Bold did you say?"

"Dreadfully bold!"

"Well, let him be! And the other?"

"The other one is red-headed. Smolin."

"Ah! Evidently Mitry Ivanovitch's son. Stick to him, he's good company. Mitry is a clever peasant. If the son takes after his father it is all right. But that other one – you know, Foma, you had better invite them to our house on Sunday. I'll buy some presents and you can treat them. We'll see what sort of boys they are."

"Smolin asked me to come to him this Sunday," said Foma, looking up at his father questioningly.

"So. Well, you may go! That's all right, go. Observe what kind of people there are in the world. You cannot pass your life alone, without friendship. Your godfather and I, for instance, have been friends for more than twenty years, and I have profited a great deal by his common sense. So you, too, try to be friendly with those that are better and wiser than you. Rub against a good man, like a copper coin against silver, and you may then pass for a silver coin yourself."

And, bursting into laughter at his comparison, Ignat added seriously:

"I was only jesting. Try to be, not artificial, but genuine. And have some common sense, no matter how little, but your own. Have you many lessons to do?"

"Many!" sighed the boy, and to his sigh, like an echo, his aunt answered with a heavy sigh.

"Well, study. Don't be worse than others at school. Although, I'll tell you, even if there were twenty-five classes in your school, they could never teach you there anything save reading, writing and arithmetic. You may also learn some naughty things, but God protect you! I shall give you a terrible spanking if you do. If you smoke tobacco I'll cut your lips off."

"Remember God, Fomushka," said the aunt. "See that you don't forget our Lord."

"That's true! Honour God and your father. But I wish to tell you that school books are but a trivial matter. You need these as a carpenter needs an adze and a pointer. They are tools, but the tools cannot teach you how to make use of them. Understand? Let us see: Suppose an adze were handed to a carpenter for him to square a beam with it. It's not enough to have hands and an adze; it is also necessary for him to know how to strike the wood so as not to hit his foot instead. To you the knowledge of reading and writing is given, and you must regulate your life with it. Thus it follows that books alone are but a trifle in this matter; it is necessary to be able to take advantage of them. And it is this ability that is more cunning than any books, and yet nothing about it is written in the books. This, Foma, you must learn from Life itself. A book is a dead thing, you may take it as you please, you may tear it, break it – it will not cry out. While should you but make a single wrong step in life, or wrongly occupy a place in it, Life will start to bawl at you in a thousand voices; it will deal you a blow, felling you to the ground."

Foma, his elbows leaning on the table, attentively listened to his father, and under the sound of his powerful voice he pictured to himself now the carpenter squaring a beam, now himself, his hands outstretched, carefully and stealthily approaching some colossal and living thing, and desiring to grasp that terrible something.

"A man must preserve himself for his work and must be thoroughly acquainted with the road to it. A man, dear, is like the pilot on a ship. In youth, as at high tide, go straight! A way is open to you everywhere. But you must know when it is time to steer. The waters recede – here you see a sandbank, there, a rock; it is necessary to know all this and to slip off in time, in order to reach the harbour safe and sound."

"I will reach it!" said the boy, looking at his father proudly and with confidence.

"Eh? You speak courageously!" Ignat burst into laughter. And the aunt also began to laugh kindly.

Since his trip with his father on the Volga, Foma became more lively and talkative at home, with his father, with his aunt and with Mayakin. But on the street, in a new place, or in the presence of strangers, he was always gloomy, always looking about him with suspicion, as though he felt something hostile to him everywhere, something hidden from him spying on him.

At nights he sometimes awoke of a sudden and listened for a long time to the silence about him, fixedly staring into the dark with wide-open eyes. And then his father's stories were transformed before him into images and pictures. Without being aware of it, he mixed up those stories with his aunt's fairy-tales, thus creating for himself a chaos of adventures wherein the bright colours of fantasy were whimsically intertwined with the stern shades of reality. This resulted in something colossal, incomprehensible; the boy closed his eyes and drove it all away from him and tried to check the play of his imagination, which frightened him. In vain he attempted to fall asleep, and the chamber became more and more crowded with dark images. Then he quietly roused his aunt.

"Auntie! Auntie!"

"What? Christ be with you."

"I'll come to you," whispered Foma.

"Why? Sleep, darling, sleep."

"I am afraid," confessed the boy.

"You better say to yourself, 'And the Lord will rise again,' then you won't be afraid."

Foma lies with his eyes open and says the prayer. The silence of the night pictures itself before him in the form of an endless expanse of perfectly calm, dark water, which has overflowed everything and congealed; there is not a ripple on it, not a shadow of a motion, and neither is there anything within it, although it is bottomlessly deep. It is very terrible for one to look down from the dark at this dead water. But now the sound of the night watchman's mallet is heard, and the boy sees that the surface of the water is beginning to tremble, and, covering the surface with ripples, light little balls are dancing upon it. The sound of the bell on the steeple, with one mighty swing, brings all the water in agitation and it is slightly trembling from that sound; a big spot of light is also trembling, spreading light upon the water, radiating from its centre into the dark distance, there growing paler and dying out. Again there is weary and deathlike repose in this dark desert.

"Auntie," whispers Foma, beseechingly.

"Dearest?"

"I am coming to you."

"Come, then, come, my darling."

Going over into auntie's bed, he presses close to her, begging:

"Tell me something."

"At night?" protests auntie, sleepily.

"Please."

He does not have to ask her long. Yawning, her eyes closed, the old woman begins slowly in a voice grown heavy with sleep:

"Well, my dear sir, in a certain kingdom, in a certain empire, there lived a man and his wife, and they were very poor. They were so unfortunate that they had nothing to eat. They would go around begging, somebody would give them a crust of stale bread and that would keep them for awhile. And it came to pass that the wife begot a child – a child was born – it was necessary to christen it, but, being poor, they could not entertain the godparents and the guests, so nobody came to christen the child. They tried this and they tried that – yet nobody came. And they began to pray to the Lord, 'Oh Lord! Oh Lord!'"

Foma knew this awful story about God's godchild. He had heard it more than once and was already picturing to himself this godchild riding on a white horse to his godfather and godmother; he was riding in the darkness, over the desert, and he saw there all the unbearable miseries to which sinners are condemned. And he heard their faint moans and requests:

"Oh! Man! Ask the Lord yet how long are we to suffer here!"

Then it appeared to Foma that it was he who was riding at night on the white horse, and that the moans and the implorings were addressed to him. His heart contracts with some incomprehensible

desire; sorrow compressed his breast and tears gathered in his eyes, which he had firmly closed and now feared to open.

He is tossing about in his bed restlessly.

"Sleep, my child. Christ be with you!" says the old woman, interrupting her tale of men suffering for their sins.

But in the morning after such a night Foma rose sound and cheerful, washed himself hastily, drank his tea in haste and ran off to school, provided with sweet cakes, which were awaited by the always hungry little Yozhov, who greedily subsisted on his rich friend's generosity.

"Got anything to eat?" he accosted Foma, turning up his sharp-pointed nose. "Let me have it, for I left the house without eating anything. I slept too long, devil take it! I studied up to two o'clock last night. Have you solved your problems?"

"No, I haven't."

"Eh, you lazy bones! Well, I'll dash them off for you directly!"

Driving his small, thin teeth into the cakes, he purred something like a kitten, stamped his left foot, beating time, and at the same time solved the problem, rattling off short phrases to Foma:

"See? Eight bucketfuls leaked out in one hour. And how many hours did it leak – six? Eh, what good things they eat in your house! Consequently, we must multiply six by eight. Do you like cake with green onions? Oh, how I like it! So that in six hours forty-eight bucketfuls leaked out of the first gauge-cock. And altogether the tub contained ninety. Do you understand the rest?"

Foma liked Yozhov better than Smolin, but he was more friendly with Smolin. He wondered at the ability and the sprightliness of the little fellow. He saw that Yozhov was more clever and better than himself; he envied him, and felt offended on that account, and at the same time he pitied him with the condescending compassion of a satisfied man for a hungry one. Perhaps it was this very compassion that prevented him from preferring this bright boy to the boring red-headed Smolin. Yozhov, fond of having a laugh at the expense of his well-fed friends, told them quite often: "Eh, you are little trunks full of cakes!"

Foma was angry with him for his sneers, and one day, touched to the quick, said wickedly and with contempt:

"And you are a beggar – a pauper!"

Yozhov's yellow face became overcast, and he replied slowly:

"Very well, so be it! I shall never prompt you again – and you'll be like a log of wood!"

And they did not speak to each other for about three days, very much to the regret of the teacher, who during these days had to give the lowest markings to the son of the esteemed Ignat Matveyich.

Yozhov knew everything: he related at school how the procurator's chambermaid gave birth to a child, and that for this the procurator's wife poured hot coffee over her husband; he could tell where and when it was best to catch perch; he knew how to make traps and cages for birds; he could give a detailed account of how the soldier had hanged himself in the garret of the armoury, and knew from which of the pupils' parents the teacher had received a present that day and precisely what sort of a present it was.

The sphere of Smolin's knowledge and interests was confined to the merchant's mode of life, and, above all, the red-headed boy was fond of judging whether this man was richer than that, valuing and pricing their houses, their vessels and their horses. All this he knew to perfection, and spoke of it with enthusiasm.

Like Foma, he regarded Yozhov with the same condescending pity, but more as a friend and equal. Whenever Gordyeeff quarrelled with Yozhov, Smolin hastened to reconcile them, and he said to Foma one day, on their way home:

"Why do you always quarrel with Yozhov?"

"Well, why is he so self-conceited?" said Foma, angrily.

"He is proud because you never know your lessons, and he always helps you out. He is clever. And because he is poor – is he to blame for that? He can learn anything he wants to, and he will be rich, too."

"He is like a mosquito," said Foma, disdainfully; "he will buzz and buzz, and then of a sudden will bite."

But there was something in the life of these boys that united them all; there were hours when the consciousness of difference in their natures and positions was entirely lost. On Sundays they all gathered at Smolin's, and, getting up on the roof of the wing, where they had an enormous pigeon-house, they let the pigeons loose.

The beautiful, well-fed birds, ruffling their snow-white wings, darted out of the pigeon-house one by one, and, seating themselves in a row on the ridge of the roof, and, illumined by the sun, cooing, flaunted before the boys.

"Scare them!" implored Yozhov, trembling for impatience.

Smolin swung a pole with a bast-wisp fastened to its end, and whistled.

The frightened pigeons rushed into the air, filling it with the hurried flapping of their wings. And now, outlining big circles, they easily soar upwards, into the blue depths of the sky; they float higher and higher, their silver and snow-white feathers flashing. Some of them are striving to reach the dome of the skies with the light soaring of the falcon, their wings outstretched wide and almost motionless; others play, turn over in the air, now dropping downward in a snowy lump, now darting up like an arrow. Now the entire flock seems as though hanging motionless in the desert of the sky, and, growing smaller and smaller, seems to sink in it. With heads thrown back, the boys admire the birds in silence, without taking their eyes from them – their tired eyes, so radiant with calm joy, not altogether free from envying these winged creatures, which so freely took flight from earth up into the pure and calm atmosphere full of the glitter of the sun. The small group of scarcely visible dots, now mere specks in the azure of the sky, leads on the imagination of the children, and Yozhov expresses their common feeling when, in a low voice, he says thoughtfully:

"That's the way we ought to fly, friends."

While Foma, knowing that human souls, soaring heavenward, oftentimes assume the form of pigeons, felt in his breast the rising of a burning, powerful desire.

Unified by their joy, attentively and mutely awaiting the return of their birds from the depths of the sky, the boys, pressing close to one another, drifted far away from the breath of life, even as their pigeons were far from earth; at this moment they are merely children, knowing neither envy nor anger; free from everything, they are near to one another, they are mute, judging their feelings by the light in their eyes – and they feel as happy as the birds in the sky.

But now the pigeons come down on the roof again, and, tired out by their flight, are easily driven into the pigeon-house.

"Friends, let's go for apples?" suggests Yozhov, the instigator of all games and adventures.

His call drives out of the children's souls the peacefulness brought into them by the pigeons, and then, like plunderers, carefully listening for each and every sound, they steal quietly across the back yards toward the neighbouring garden. The fear of being caught is balanced by the hope of stealing with impunity. But stealing is work and dangerous work at that, and everything that is earned by your own labour is so sweet! And the more effort required to gain it, the sweeter it is. Carefully the boys climb over the fence of the garden, and, bending down, crawl toward the apple trees and, full of fright, look around vigilantly. Their hearts tremble and their throbbing slackens at the faintest rustle. They are alike afraid of being caught, and, if noticed, of being recognised, but in case they should only see them and yell at them, they would be satisfied. They would separate, each going in a different direction, and then, meeting again, their eyes aglow with joy and boldness, would laughingly tell one another how they felt when they heard some one giving chase to them, and what happened to them when they ran so quickly through the garden, as though the ground were burning under their feet.

Such invasions were more to Foma's liking than all other adventures and games, and his behaviour during these invasions was marked with a boldness that at once astounded and angered his companions. He was intentionally careless in other people's gardens: he spoke loud, noisily broke the branches of apple trees, and, tearing off a worm-eaten apple, threw it in the direction of the proprietor's house. The danger of being caught in the act did not frighten him; it rather encouraged him – his eyes would turn darker, his teeth would clench, and his face would assume an expression of anger and pride.

Smolin, distorting his big mouth contemptibly, would say to him:

"You are making entirely too much fuss about yourself."

"I am not a coward anyway!" replied Foma.

"I know that you are not a coward, but why do you boast of it? One may do a thing as well without boasting."

Yozhov blamed him from a different point of view:

"If you thrust yourself into their hands willingly you can go to the devil! I am not your friend. They'll catch you and bring you to your father – he wouldn't do anything to you, while I would get such a spanking that all my bones would be skinned."

"Coward!" Foma persisted, stubbornly.

And it came to pass one day that Foma was caught by the second captain, Chumakov, a thin little old man. Noiselessly approaching the boy, who was hiding away in his bosom the stolen apples, the old man seized him by the shoulders and cried in a threatening voice:

"Now I have you, little rogue! Aha!"

Foma was then about fifteen years old, and he cleverly slipped out of the old man's hands. Yet he did not run from him, but, knitting his brow and clenching his fist, he said threateningly:

"You dare to touch me!"

"I wouldn't touch you. I'll just turn you over to the police! Whose son are you?"

Foma did not expect this, and all his boldness and spitefulness suddenly left him.

The trip to the police station seemed to him something which his father would never forgive him. He shuddered and said confusedly:

"Gordyeeff."

"Ignat Gordyeeff's?"

"Yes."

Now the second captain was taken aback. He straightened himself, expanded his chest and for some reason or other cleared his throat impressively. Then his shoulders sank and he said to the boy in a fatherly tone:

"It's a shame! The son of such a well-known and respected man! It is unbecoming your position. You may go. But should this happen again! Hm! I should be compelled to notify your father, to whom, by the way, I have the honour of presenting my respects."

Foma watched the play of the old man's physiognomy and understood that he was afraid of his father. Like a young wolf, he looked askance at Chumakov; while the old man, with comical seriousness, twisted his gray moustache, hesitating before the boy, who did not go away, notwithstanding the given permission.

"You may go," repeated the old man, pointing at the road leading to his house.

"And how about the police?" asked Foma, sternly, and was immediately frightened at the possible answer.

"I was but jesting," smiled the old man. "I just wanted to frighten you."

"You are afraid of my father yourself," said Foma, and, turning his back to the old man, walked off into the depth of the garden.

"I am afraid? Ah! Very well!" exclaimed Chumakov after him, and Foma knew by the sound of his voice that he had offended the old man. He felt sad and ashamed; he passed the afternoon in walking, and, coming home, he was met by his father's stern question:

"Foma! Did you go to Chumakov's garden?"

"Yes, I did," said the boy, calmly, looking into his father's eyes.

Evidently Ignat did not expect such an answer and he was silent for awhile, stroking his beard.

"Fool! Why did you do it? Have you not enough of your own apples?"

Foma cast down his eyes and was silent, standing before his father.

"See, you are shamed! Yozhishka must have incited you to this! I'll give it to him when he comes, or I'll make an end of your friendship altogether."

"I did it myself," said Foma, firmly.

"From bad to worse!" exclaimed Ignat. "But why did you do it?"

"Because."

"Because!" mocked the father. "Well, if you did it you ought to be able to explain to yourself and to others the reason for so doing. Come here!"

Foma walked up to his father, who was sitting on a chair, and placed himself between his knees. Ignat put his hand on the boy's shoulders, and, smiling, looked into his eyes.

"Are you ashamed?"

"I am ashamed," sighed Foma.

"There you have it, fool! You have disgraced me and yourself."

Pressing his son's head to his breast, he stroked his hair and asked again:

"Why should you do such a thing – stealing other people's apples?"

"I – I don't know," said Foma, confusedly. "Perhaps because it is so lonesome. I play and play the same thing day after day. I am growing tired of it! While this is dangerous."

"Exciting?" asked the father, smiling.

"Yes."

"Mm, perhaps it is so. But, nevertheless, Foma, look out – drop this, or I shall deal with you severely."

"I'll never climb anywhere again," said the boy with confidence.

"And that you take all the blame on yourself – that is good. What will become of you in the future, only God knows, but meanwhile – it is pretty good. It is not a trifle if a man is willing to pay for his deeds with his own skin. Someone else in your place would have blamed his friends, while you say: 'I did it myself.' That's the proper way, Foma. You commit the sin, but you also account for it. Didn't Chumakov strike you?" asked Ignat, pausing as he spoke.

"I would have struck him back," declared Foma, calmly.

"Mm," roared his father, significantly.

"I told him that he was afraid of you. That is why he complained. Otherwise he was not going to say anything to you about it."

"Is that so?"

"'By God! Present my respects to your father,' he said."

"Did he?"

"Yes."

"Ah! the dog! See what kind of people there are; he is robbed and yet he makes a bow and presents his respects! Ha, ha! It is true it might have been worth no more than a kopeck, but a kopeck is to him what a rouble is to me. And it isn't the kopeck, but since it is mine, no one dares touch it unless I throw it away myself. Eh! The devil take them! Well, tell me – where have you been, what have you seen?"

The boy sat down beside his father and told him in detail all the impressions of that day. Ignat listened, fixedly watching the animated face of his son, and the eyebrows of the big man contracted pensively.

"You are still but floating on the surface, dear. You are still but a child. Eh! Eh!"

"We scared an owl in the ravine," related the boy. "That was fun! It began to fly about and struck against a tree – bang! It even began to squeak so pitifully. And we scared it again; again it rose and flew about here and there, and again it struck against something, so that its feathers were coming out. It flew about in the ravine and at last hid itself somewhere with difficulty. We did not try to look for it, we felt sorry it was all bruised. Papa, is an owl entirely blind in daytime?"

"Blind!" said Ignat; "some men will toss about in life even as this owl in daytime. Ever searching for his place, he strives and strives – only feathers fly from him, but all to no purpose. He is bruised, sickened, stripped of everything, and then with all his might he thrusts himself anywhere, just to find repose from his restlessness. Woe to such people. Woe to them, dear!"

"How painful is it to them?" said Foma in a low voice.

"Just as painful as to that owl."

"And why is it so?"

"Why? It is hard to tell. Someone suffers because he is darkened by his pride – he desires much, but has but little strength. Another because of his foolishness. But then there are a thousand and one other reasons, which you cannot understand."

"Come in and have some tea," Anfisa called to them. She had been standing in the doorway for quite a long while, and, folding her hands, lovingly admired the enormous figure of her brother, who bent over Foma with such friendliness, and the pensive pose of the boy, who clung to his father's shoulder.

Thus day by day Foma's life developed slowly – a quiet, peaceful life, not at all brimful of emotions. Powerful impressions, rousing the boy's soul for an hour or for a day, sometimes stood out strikingly against the general background of this monotonous life, but these were soon obliterated. The boy's soul was as yet but a calm lake – a lake hidden from the stormy winds of life, and all that touched the surface of the lake either sank to the bottom, stirring the placid water for a moment, or gliding over the smooth surface, swam apart in big circles and disappeared.

Having stayed at the district school for five years, Foma passed four classes tolerably well and came out a brave, dark-haired fellow, with a swarthy face, heavy eyebrows and dark down on the upper lip. His big dark eyes had a naive and pensive look, and his lips were like a child's, half-open; but when meeting with opposition to his desires or when irritated by something else, the pupils of his eyes would grow wide, his lips press tight, and his whole face assume a stubborn and resolute expression. His godfather, smiling sceptically, would often say to him:

"To women, Foma, you'll be sweeter than honey, but as yet not much common sense can be seen in you."

Ignat would heave a sigh at these words.

"You had better start out your son as soon as possible."

"There's time yet, wait."

"Why wait? He'll go about the Volga for two or three years and then we'll have him married. There's my Lubov."

Lubov Mayakina was now studying in the fifth class of some boarding school. Foma often met her on the street at which meeting she always bowed condescendingly, her fair head in a fashionable cap. Foma liked her, but her rosy cheeks, her cheerful brown eyes and crimson lips could not smooth the impression of offence given to him by her condescending bows. She was acquainted with some Gymnasium students, and although Yozhov, his old friend, was among them, Foma felt no inclination to be with them, and their company embarrassed him. It seemed to him that they were all boasting of their learning before him and that they were mocking his ignorance. Gathered together in Lubov's

house they would read some books, and whenever he found them reading or loudly arguing, they became silent at his sight. All this removed them further from him. One day when he was at Mayakin's, Luba called him to go for a walk in the garden, and there, walking by his side, asked him with a grimace on her face:

"Why are you so unsociable? You never talk about anything."

"What shall I talk about, since I know nothing!" said Foma, plainly.

"Study – read books."

"I don't feel like doing it."

"You see, the Gymnasium students know everything, and know how to talk about everything. Take Yozhov, for instance."

"I know Yozhov – a chatterbox."

"You simply envy him. He is very clever – yes. He will soon graduate from the Gymnasium – and then he'll go to Moscow to study in the University."

"Well, what of it?" said Foma, indifferently.

"And you'll remain just an ignorant man."

"Well, be it so."

"That will be nice!" exclaimed Luba, ironically.

"I shall hold my ground without science," said Foma, sarcastically. "And I'll have a laugh at all the learned people. Let the hungry study. I don't need it."

"Pshaw, how stupid you are, bad, disgusting!" said the girl with contempt and went away, leaving him alone in the garden. Offended and gloomy, he looked after her, moved his eyebrows and lowering his head, slowly walked off into the depth of the garden.

He already began to recognise the beauty of solitude and the sweet poison of contemplation. Oftentimes, during summer evenings, when everything was coloured by the fiery tints of sunset, kindling the imagination, an uneasy longing for something incomprehensible penetrated his breast. Sitting somewhere in a dark corner of the garden or lying in bed, he conjured up before him the images of the fairy-tale princesses – they appeared with the face of Luba and of other young ladies of his acquaintance, noiselessly floating before him in the twilight and staring into his eyes with enigmatic looks. At times these visions awakened in him a mighty energy, as though intoxicating him – he would rise and, straightening his shoulders, inhale the perfumed air with a full chest; but sometimes these same visions brought to him a feeling of sadness – he felt like crying, but ashamed of shedding tears, he restrained himself and never wept in silence. Or suddenly his heart began to tremble with the desire to express his gratitude to God, to bow before Him; the words of the prayer flashed through his memory, and beholding the sky, he whispered them for a long time, one by one, and his heart grew lighter, breathing into prayer the excess of his power.

The father patiently and carefully introduced him into commercial circles, took him on the Exchange, told him about his contracts and enterprises, about his co-associates, described to him how they had made their way, what fortunes they now possessed, what natures were theirs. Foma soon mastered it, regarding everything seriously and thoughtfully.

"Our bud is blooming into a blood-red cup-rose!" Mayakin smiled, winking to Ignat.

And yet, even when Foma was nineteen years old, there was something childish in him, something naive which distinguished him from the boys of his age. They were laughing at him, considering him stupid; he kept away from them, offended by their relations toward him. As for his father and Mayakin, who were watching him vigilantly, this uncertainty of Foma's character inspired them with serious apprehensions.

"I cannot understand him!" Ignat would say with contrite heart. "He does not lead a dissipated life, he does not seem to run after the women, treats me and you with respect, listens to everything – he is more like a pretty girl than a fellow! And yet he does not seem to be stupid!"

"No, there's nothing particularly stupid about him," said Mayakin.

"It looks as though he were waiting for something – as though some kind of shroud were covering his eyes. His late mother groped on earth in the same way.

"Just look, there's Afrikanka Smolin, but two years older than my boy – what a man he has become! That is, it is difficult to tell whether he is his father's head or his father his. He wants to go to some factory to study. He swears:

"'Eh,' says he, 'papa, you have not taught me enough.' Yes. While mine does not express himself at all. Oh Lord!"

"Look here," Mayakin advised him, "you had better push him head foremost into some active business! I assure you! Gold is tested in fire. We'll see what his inclinations are when at liberty. Send him out on the Kama – alone."

"To give him a trial?"

"Well, he'll do some mischief – you'll lose something – but then we'll know what stuff he is made of."

"Indeed – I'll send him off," Ignat decided.

And thus in the spring, Ignat sent his son off on the Kama with two barges laden with corn. The barges were led by Gordyeeff's steamer "Philezhny," under the command of Foma's old acquaintance, the former sailor Yefim – now, Yefim Ilyich, a squarely built man of about thirty with lynx-like eyes – a sober-minded, steady and very strict captain.

They sailed fast and cheerfully, because all were contented. At first Foma was proud of the responsible commission with which he had been charged. Yefim was pleased with the presence of the young master, who did not rebuke or abuse him for each and every oversight; and the happy frame of mind of the two most important persons on the steamer reflected in straight rays on the entire crew. Having left the place where they had taken in their cargo of corn in April, the steamer reached the place of its destination in the beginning of May, and the barges were anchored near the shore with the steamer at their side. Foma's duty was to deliver the corn as soon as possible, and receiving the payments, start off for Perm, where a cargo of iron was awaiting him, which Ignat had undertaken to deliver at the market.

The barges stood opposite a large village, near a pine forest, about two versts distant from the shore. On the very next day after their arrival, a big and noisy crowd of women and peasants, on foot and on horses, came up to the shore early in the morning. Shouting and singing, they scattered on the decks and in an instant work started expeditiously. Having descended into the holds, the women were filling the sacks with rye, the peasants, throwing the sacks upon their shoulders, ran over the gang-planks to the shore, and from the shore, carts, heavily laden with the long-expected corn, went off slowly to the village. The women sang songs; the peasants jested and gaily abused one another; the sailors representing the guardians of peace, scolded the working people now and then; the gang-planks, bending under the feet of the carriers, splashed against the water heavily; while on the shore the horses neighed, and the carts and the sand under the wheels were creaking.

The sun had just risen, the air was fresh and invigorating and densely filled with the odour of pines; the calm water of the river, reflecting the clear sky, was gently murmuring, breaking against the sides of the vessels and the chains of the anchors. The loud and cheerful noise of toil, the youthful beauty of nature, gaily illumined by the sunbeams – all was full of a kind-hearted, somewhat crude, sound power, which pleasantly stirred Foma's soul, awakening in him new and perplexed sensations and desires. He was sitting by the table under the awning of the steamer and drinking tea, together with Yefim and the receiver of the corn, a provincial clerk – a redheaded, short-sighted gentleman in glasses. Nervously shrugging his shoulders the receiver was telling in a hoarse voice how the peasants were starving, but Foma paid little attention to his words, looking now at the work below, now at the other side of the river – a tall, yellow, sandy steep shore, whose edges were covered with pine trees. It was unpeopled and quiet.

"I'll have to go over there," thought Foma. And as though from a distance the receiver's tiresome, unpleasant, harsh voice fell on his ears:

"You wouldn't believe it – at last it became horrible! Such an incident took place! A peasant came up to a certain intelligent man in Osa and brought along with him a girl about sixteen years old.

"'What do you wish?"

"'Here,' he says, 'I've brought my daughter to your Honour.'

"'What for?'

"'Perhaps,' he says, 'you'll take her – you are a bachelor.'

"'That is, how? What do you mean?'

"'I took her around town,' he says. 'I wanted to hire her out as a servant – but nobody would have her – take her at least as your mistress!'

"Do you understand? He offered his own daughter – just think of it! A daughter – as a mistress! The devil knows what that is! Eh? The man, of course, became indignant and began abusing the peasant. But the peasant spoke to him reasonably:

"'Your Honour! Of what use is she to me at this time? Utterly useless. I have,' says he, 'three boys – they will be working men; it is necessary to keep them up. Give me,' says he, 'ten roubles for the girl, and that will improve my lot and that of my boys.'

"How is that? Eh? It is simply terrible, I tell you."

"No good!" sighed Yefim. "As they say – hunger will break through stone walls. The stomach, you see, has its own laws."

This story called forth in Foma a great incomprehensible interest in the fate of the girl, and the youth hastened to enquire of the receiver:

"Well, did the man buy her?"

"Of course not!" exclaimed the receiver, reproachfully.

"Well, and what became of her?"

"Some good people took pity on her – and provided for her."

"A-h!" drawled Foma, and suddenly he said firmly and angrily: "I would have given that peasant such a thrashing! I would have broken his head!" And he showed the receiver his big tightly-clenched fist.

"Eh! What for?" cried the receiver in a sickly, loud voice, tearing his spectacles from his eyes. "You do not understand the motive."

"I do understand it!" said Foma, with an obstinate shake of his head.

"But what could he do? It came to his mind."

"How can one allow himself to sell a human being?"

"Ah! It is brutal, I agree with you."

"And a girl at that! I would have given him the ten roubles!"

The receiver waved his hand hopelessly and became silent. His gesture confused Foma. He arose from his seat, walked off to the railing and looked down at the deck of the barge, which was covered with an industriously working crowd of people. The noise intoxicated him, and the uneasy something, which was rambling in his soul, was now defined into a powerful desire to work, to have the strength of a giant, to possess enormous shoulders and put on them at one time a hundred bags of rye, that every one looking at him might be astonished.

"Come now, hurry up there!" he shouted down in a ringing voice. A few heads were raised to him, some faces appeared before him, and one of them – the face of a dark-eyed woman – smiled at him a gentle and enticing smile. Something flared up in his breast at this smile and began to spread over his veins in a hot wave. He drew back from the railing and walked up to the table again, feeling that his cheeks were burning.

"Listen!" said the receiver, addressing him, "wire to your father asking him to allow some grain for waste! Just see how much is lost here. And here every pound is precious! You should have understood this! What a fine father you have," he concluded with a biting grimace.

"How much shall I allow?" asked Foma, boldly and disdainfully. "Do you want a hundred puds? [A pud is a weight of 40 Russian pounds.] Two hundred?"

"I – I thank you!" exclaimed the receiver, overjoyed and confused, "if you have the right to do it."

"I am the master!" said Foma, firmly. "And you must not speak that way about my father – nor make such faces."

"Pardon me! I – I do not doubt that you have full power. I thank you heartily. And your father, too – in behalf of all these men – in behalf of the people!"

Yefim looked cautiously at the young master, spreading out and smacking his lips, while the master with an air of pride on his face listened to the quick-witted speech of the receiver, who was pressing his hand firmly.

"Two hundred puds! That is Russian-like, young man! I shall directly notify the peasants of your gift. You'll see how grateful they will be – how glad." And he shouted down:

"Eh, boys! The master is giving away two hundred puds."

"Three hundred!" interposed Foma.

"Three hundred puds. Oh! Thank you! Three hundred puds of grain, boys!"

But their response was weak. The peasants lifted up their heads and mutely lowered them again, resuming their work. A few voices said irresolutely and as though unwillingly:

"Thanks. May God give you. We thank you very humbly."

And some cried out gaily and disdainfully:

"What's the use of that? If they had given each of us a glass of vodka instead – that would be a just favour. For the grain is not for us – but for the country Council."

"Eh! They do not understand!" exclaimed the receiver, confused. "I'll go down and explain it to them."

And he disappeared. But the peasants' regard for his gift did not interest Foma. He saw that the black eyes of the rosy-cheeked woman were looking at him so strangely and pleasingly. They seemed to thank him and caressingly beckoned him, and besides those eyes he saw nothing. The woman was dressed like the city women. She wore shoes, a calico waist, and over her black hair she had a peculiar kerchief. Tall and supple, seated on a pile of wood, she repaired sacks, quickly moving her hands, which were bare up to the elbows, and she smiled at Foma all the time.

"Foma Ignatyich!" he heard Yefim's reproachful voice, "you've showed off too much. Well, if it were only about fifty puds! But why so much? Look out that we don't get a good scolding for this."

"Leave me alone!" said Foma, shortly.

"What is it to me? I'll keep quiet. But as you are so young, and as I was told to keep an eye on you, I may get a rap on the snout for being heedless."

"I'll tell my father all about it. Keep quiet!" said Foma.

"As for me – let it be so – so that you are master here."

"Very well."

"I have said this, Foma Ignatyich, for your own sake – because you are so young and simple-minded."

"Leave me alone, Yefim!"

Yefim heaved a sigh and became silent, while Foma stared at the woman and thought:

"I wish they would bring such a woman for sale to me."

His heart beat rapidly. Though as yet physically pure, he already knew from conversations the mysteries of intimate relations between men and women. He knew by rude and shameful names, and these names kindled in him an unpleasant, burning curiosity and shame; his imagination worked

obstinately, for he could not picture it to himself in intelligible images. And in his soul he did not believe that those relations were really so simple and rude, as he had been told. When they had laughed at him and assured him that they were such, and, indeed, could not be otherwise, he smiled stupidly and confusedly, but thought nevertheless that the relations with women did not have to be in such a shameful form for everyone, and that, in all probability, there was something purer, less rude and abusive to a human being.

Now looking at the dark-eyed working woman with admiration, Foma distinctly felt just that rude inclination toward her, and he was ashamed and afraid of something. And Yefim, standing beside him, said admonitively:

"There you are staring at the woman, so that I cannot keep silence any longer. You do not know her, but when she winks at you, you may, because of your youth – and with a nature like yours – you may do such a thing that we'll have to go home on foot by the shore. And we'll have to thank God if our trousers at least remain with us."

"What do you want?" asked Foma, red with confusion.

"I want nothing. And you had better mind me. In regard to affairs with women I may perfectly well be a teacher. You must deal with a woman very plainly – give her a bottle of vodka, something to eat after it, then a couple of bottles of beer and after everything give her twenty kopecks in cash. For this price she will show you all her love in the best way possible."

"You are lying," said Foma, softly.

"I am lying? Why shall I lie to you since I have observed that same policy perhaps a hundred times? Just charge me to have dealings with her. Eh? I'll make you acquainted with her in a moment."

"Very well," said Foma, feeling that he could hardly breathe and that something was choking his throat.

"Well, then, I'll bring her up in the evening."

And Yefim smiled approvingly into Foma's face and walked off. Until evening Foma walked about as though lost in mist, not noticing the respectful and beseeching glances with which the peasants greeted him at the receiver's instigation. Dread fell on him, he felt himself guilty before somebody, and to all those that addressed him he replied humbly and gently, as though excusing himself for something. Some of the working people went home toward evening, others gathered on the shore near a big, bright bonfire and began cooking their supper. Fragments of their conversation floated about in the stillness of the evening. The reflection of the fire fell on the river in red and yellow stripes, which trembled on the calm water and on the window panes of the cabin where Foma was sitting. He sat in the corner on a lounge, which was covered with oilcloth – and waited. On the table before him were a few bottles of vodka and beer, and plates with bread and dessert. He covered the windows and did not light the lamp; the faint light from the bonfire, penetrating through the curtains, fell on the table, on the bottles and on the wall, and trembled, now growing brighter, now fainter. It was quiet on the steamer and on the barges, only from the shore came indistinct sounds of conversation, and the river was splashing, scarcely audible, against the sides of the steamer. It seemed to Foma that somebody was hiding in the dark near by, listening to him and spying upon him. Now somebody is walking over the gang-plank of the barges with quick and heavy steps – the gang-plank strikes against the water clangously and angrily. Foma hears the muffled laughter of the captain and his lowered voice. Yefim stands by the cabin door and speaks softly, but somewhat reprimandingly, as though instructing. Foma suddenly felt like crying out:

"It is not necessary!"

And he arose from the lounge – but at this moment the cabin door was opened, the tall form of a woman appeared on the threshold, and, noiselessly closing the door behind her, she said in a low voice:

"Oh dear! How dark it is! Is there a living soul somewhere around here?"

"Yes," answered Foma, softly.

"Well, then, good evening."

And the woman moved forward carefully.

"I'll light the lamp," said Foma in a broken voice, and, sinking on the lounge, he curled himself up in the corner.

"It is good enough this way. When you get used to it you can see everything in the dark as well."

"Be seated," said Foma.

"I will."

She sat down on the lounge about two steps away from him. Foma saw the glitter of her eyes, he saw a smile on her full lips. It seemed to him that this smile of hers was not at all like that other smile before – this smile seemed plaintive, sad. This smile encouraged him; he breathed with less difficulty at the sight of these eyes, which, on meeting his own, suddenly glanced down on the floor. But he did not know what to say to this woman and for about two minutes both were silent. It was a heavy, awkward silence. She began to speak:

"You must be feeling lonesome here all alone?"

"Yes," answered Foma.

"And do you like our place here?" asked the woman in a low voice.

"It is nice. There are many woods here."

And again they became silent.

"The river, if you like, is more beautiful than the Volga," uttered Foma, with an effort.

"I was on the Volga."

"Where?"

"In the city of Simbirsk."

"Simbirsk?" repeated Foma like an echo, feeling that he was again unable to say a word.

But she evidently understood with whom she had to deal, and she suddenly asked him in a bold whisper:

"Why don't you treat me to something?"

"Here!" Foma gave a start. "Indeed, how queer I am? Well, then, come up to the table."

He bustled about in the dark, pushed the table, took up one bottle, then another, and again returned them to their place, laughing guiltily and confusedly as he did so. She came up close to him and stood by his side, and, smiling, looked at his face and at his trembling hands.

"Are you bashful?" she suddenly whispered.

He felt her breath on his cheek and replied just as softly:

"Yes."

Then she placed her hands on his shoulders and quietly drew him to her breast, saying in a soothing whisper:

"Never mind, don't be bashful, my young, handsome darling. How I pity you!"

And he felt like crying because of her whisper, his heart was melting in sweet fatigue; pressing his head close to her breast, he clasped her with his hands, mumbling to her some inarticulate words, which were unknown to himself.

"Be gone!" said Foma in a heavy voice, staring at the wall with his eyes wide open.

Having kissed him on the cheek she walked out of the cabin, saying to him:

"Well, good-bye."

Foma felt intolerably ashamed in her presence; but no sooner did she disappear behind the door than he jumped up and seated himself on the lounge. Then he arose, staggering, and at once he was seized with the feeling of having lost something very valuable, something whose presence he did not seem to have noticed in himself until the moment it was lost. But immediately a new, manly feeling of self-pride took possession of him. It drowned his shame, and, instead of the shame, pity for the woman sprang up within him – for the half-clad woman, who went out alone into the dark of the chilly May night. He hastily came out on the deck – it was a starlit, but moonless night; the coolness and the darkness embraced him. On the shore the golden-red pile of coals was still glimmering. Foma

listened – an oppressive stillness filled the air, only the water was murmuring, breaking against the anchor chains. There was not a sound of footsteps to be heard. Foma now longed to call the woman, but he did not know her name. Eagerly inhaling the fresh air into his broad chest, he stood on deck for a few minutes. Suddenly, from beyond the roundhouse – from the prow – a moan reached his ears – a deep, loud moan, resembling a wail. He shuddered and went thither carefully, understanding that she was there.

She sat on the deck close to the side of the steamer, and, leaning her head against a heap of ropes, she wept. Foma saw that her bare white shoulders were trembling, he heard her pitiful moans, and began to feel depressed. Bending over her, he asked her timidly:

"What is it?"

She nodded her head and said nothing in reply.

"Have I offended you?"

"Go away," she said.

"But, how?" said Foma, alarmed and confused, touching her head with his hand. "Don't be angry. You came of your own free will."

"I am not angry!" she replied in a loud whisper. "Why should I be angry at you? You are not a seducer. You are a pure soul! Eh, my darling! Be seated here by my side."

And taking Foma by the hand, she made him sit down, like a child, in her lap, pressed his head close to her breast, and, bending over him, pressed her lips to his for a long time.

"What are you crying about?" asked Foma, caressing her cheek with one hand, while the other clasped the woman's neck.

"I am crying about myself. Why have you sent me away?" she asked plaintively.

"I began to feel ashamed of myself," said Foma, lowering his head.

"My darling! Tell me the truth – haven't you been pleased with me?" she asked with a smile, but her big, hot tears were still trickling down on Foma's breast.

"Why should you speak like this?" exclaimed the youth, almost frightened, and hotly began to mumble to her some words about her beauty, about her kindness, telling her how sorry he was for her and how bashful in her presence. And she listened and kept on kissing his cheeks, his neck, his head and his uncovered breast.

He became silent – then she began to speak – softly and mournfully as though speaking of the dead:

"And I thought it was something else. When you said, 'Be gone!' I got up and went away. And your words made me feel sad, very sad. There was a time, I remembered, when they caressed me and fondled me unceasingly, without growing tired; for a single kind smile they used to do for me anything I pleased. I recalled all this and began to cry! I felt sorry for my youth, for I am now thirty years old, the last days for a woman! Eh, Foma Ignatyevich!" she exclaimed, lifting her voice louder, and reiterating the rhythm of her harmonious speech, whose accents rose and fell in unison with the melodious murmuring of the water.

"Listen to me – preserve your youth! There is nothing in the world better than that. There is nothing more precious than youth. With youth, as with gold, you can accomplish anything you please. Live so that you shall have in old age something to remind you of your youth. Here I recalled myself, and though I cried, yet my heart blazed up at the very recollection of my past life. And again I was young, as though I drank of the water of life! My sweet child I'll have a good time with you, if I please you, we'll enjoy ourselves as much as we can. Eh! I'll burn to ashes, now that I have blazed up!"

And pressing the youth close to herself, she greedily began to kiss him on the lips.

"Lo-o-ok o-u-u-u-t!" the watch on the barge wailed mournfully, and, cutting short the last syllable, began to strike his mallet against the cast-iron board.

The shrill, trembling sounds harshly broke the solemn quiet of the night.

A few days later, when the barges had discharged their cargo and the steamer was ready to leave for Perm, Yefim noticed, to his great sorrow, that a cart came up to the shore and that the dark-eyed Pelageya, with a trunk and with some bundles, was in it.

"Send a sailor to bring her things," ordered Foma, nodding his head toward the shore.

With a reproachful shake of his head, Yefim carried out the order angrily, and then asked in a lowered voice:

"So she, too, is coming with us?"

"She is going with me," Foma announced shortly.

"It is understood. Not with all of us. Oh, Lord!"

"Why are you sighing?"

"Yes. Foma Ignatyich! We are going to a big city. Are there not plenty of women of her kind?"

"Well, keep quiet!" said Foma, sternly.

"I will keep quiet, but this isn't right!"

"What?"

"This very wantonness of ours. Our steamer is perfect, clean – and suddenly there is a woman there! And if it were at least the right sort of a woman! But as it is, she merely bears the name of woman."

Foma frowned insinuatingly and addressed the captain, imperiously emphasizing his words:

"Yefim, I want you to bear it in mind, and to tell it to everybody here, that if anyone will utter an obscene word about her, I'll strike him on the head with a log of wood!"

"How terrible!" said Yefim, incredulously, looking into the master's face with curiosity. But he immediately made a step backward. Ignat's son, like a wolf, showed his teeth, the apples of his eyes became wider, and he roared:

"Laugh! I'll show you how to laugh!"

Though Yefim lost courage, he nevertheless said with dignity:

"Although you, Foma Ignatyich, are the master, yet as I was told, 'Watch, Yefim,' and then I am the captain here."

"The captain?" cried Foma, shuddering in every limb and turning pale. "And who am I?"

"Well, don't bawl! On account of such a trifle as a woman."

Red spots came out on Foma's pale face, he shifted from one foot to the other, thrust his hands into the pockets of his jacket with a convulsive motion and said in a firm and even voice:

"You! Captain! See here, say another word against me – and you go to the devil! I'll put you ashore! I'll get along as well with the pilot! Understand? You cannot command me. Do you see?"

Yefim was dumfounded. He looked at his master and comically winked his eyes, finding no reply to his words.

"Do you understand, I say?"

"Yes. I understand!" drawled Yefim. "But what is all this noise about? On account of – "

"Silence!"

Foma's eyes, which flashed wildly, and his face distorted with wrath, suggested to the captain the happy thought to leave his master as soon as possible and, turning around quickly, he walked off.

"Pshaw! How terrible! As it seems the apple did not fall too far from the tree," he muttered sneeringly, walking on the deck. He was angry at Foma, and considered himself offended for nothing, but at the same time he began to feel over himself the real, firm hand of a master. For years accustomed to being subordinate, he rather liked this manifestation of power over him, and, entering the cabin of the old pilot, he related to him the scene between himself and his master, with a shade of satisfaction in his voice.

"See?" he concluded his story. "A pup coming from a good breed is an excellent dog at the very first chase. From his exterior he is so-so. A man of rather heavy mind as yet. Well, never mind, let him have his fun. It seems now as though nothing wrong will come out of this. With a character

like his, no. How he bawled at me! A regular trumpet, I tell you! And he appointed himself master at once. As though he had sipped power and strictness out of a ladle."

Yefim spoke the truth: during these few days Foma underwent a striking transformation. The passion now kindled in him made him master of the soul and body of a woman; he eagerly absorbed the fiery sweetness of this power, and this burned out all that was awkward in him, all that gave him the appearance of a somewhat stupid, gloomy fellow, and, destroying it, filled his heart with youthful pride, with the consciousness of his human personality. Love for a woman is always fruitful to the man, be the love whatever it may; even though it were to cause but sufferings there is always much that is rich in it. Working as a powerful poison on those whose souls are afflicted, it is for the healthy man as fire for iron, which is to be transformed into steel.

Foma's passion for the thirty-year-old woman, who lamented in his embraces her dead youth, did not tear him away from his affairs; he was never lost in the caresses, or in his affairs, bringing into both his whole self. The woman, like good wine, provoked in him alike a thirst for labour and for love, and she, too, became younger from the kisses of the youth.

In Perm, Foma found a letter waiting for him. It was from his godfather, who notified him that Ignat, out of anxiety for his son, had begun to drink heavily, and that it was harmful to drink thus, for a man of his age. The letter concluded with advice to hurry up matters in order to return home the sooner. Foma felt alarmed over this advice, and it clouded the clear holiday of his heart. But this shadow soon melted in his worries over his affairs, and in the caresses of Pelageya. His life streamed on with the swiftness of a river wave, and each day brought to him new sensations, awakening in him new thoughts. Pelageya's relations with him contained all the passion of a mistress, all that power of feeling which women of her age put into their passion when drinking the last drops from the cup of life. But at times a different feeling awoke in her, a feeling not less powerful, and by which Foma became still more attached to her – something similar to a mother's yearning to guard her beloved son from errors, to teach him the wisdom of life. Oftentimes at night, sitting in his embraces on the deck, she spoke to him tenderly and sadly:

"Mind me as an older sister of yours. I have lived, I know men. I have seen a great deal in my life! Choose your companions with care, for there are people just as contagious as a disease. At first you cannot tell them even when you see them; he looks to be a man like everybody else, and, suddenly, without being aware of it yourself, you will start to imitate him in life. You look around – and you find that you have contracted his scabs. I myself have lost everything on account of a friend. I had a husband and two children. We lived well. My husband was a clerk at a volost." She became silent and looked for a long time at the water, which was stirred by the vessel. Then she heaved a sigh and spoke to him again:

"May the Holy Virgin guard you from women of my kind – be careful. You are tender as yet, your heart has not become properly hardened. And women are fond of such as you – strong, handsome, rich. And most of all beware of the quiet women. They stick to a man like blood-suckers, and suck and suck. And at the same time they are always so kind, so gentle. They will keep on sucking your juice, but will preserve themselves. They'll only break your heart in vain. You had better have dealings with those that are bold, like myself. These live not for the sake of gain."

And she was indeed disinterested. In Perm Foma purchased for her different new things and what-not. She was delighted, but later, having examined them, she said sadly:

"Don't squander your money too freely. See that your father does not get angry. I love you anyway, without all this."

She had already told him that she would go with him only as far as Kazan, where she had a married sister. Foma could not believe that she would leave him, and when, on the eve of their arrival at Kazan, she repeated her words, he became gloomy and began to implore her not to forsake him.

"Do not feel sorry in advance," she said. "We have a whole night before us. You will have time to feel sorry when I bid you good-bye, if you will feel sorry at all."

But he still tried to persuade her not to forsake him, and, finally – which was to be expected – announced his desire to marry her.

"So, so!" and she began to laugh. "Shall I marry you while my husband is still alive? My darling, my queer fellow! You have a desire to marry, eh? But do they marry such women as I am? You will have many, many mistresses. Marry then, when you have overflowed, when you have had your fill of all sweets and feel like having rye bread. Then you may marry! I have noticed that a healthy man, for his own peace, must not marry early. One woman will not be enough to satisfy him, and he'll go to other women. And for your own happiness, you should take a wife only when you know that she alone will suffice for you."

But the more she spoke, the more persistent Foma became in his desire not to part with her.

"Just listen to what I'll tell you," said the woman, calmly. "A splinter of wood is burning in your hand, and you can see well even without its light – you had better dip it into water, so that there will be no smell of smoke and your hand will not be burned."

"I do not understand your words."

"Do understand. You have done me no wrong, and I do not wish to do you any. And, therefore, I am going away."

It is hard to say what might have been the result of this dispute if an accident had not interfered with it. In Kazan Foma received a telegram from Mayakin, who wrote to his godson briefly: "Come immediately on the passenger steamer." Foma's heart contracted nervously, and a few hours later, gloomy and pale, his teeth set together, he stood on the deck of the steamer, which was leaving the harbour, and clinging to the rail with his hands, he stared motionlessly into the face of his love, who was floating far away from him together with the harbour and the shore. Pelageya waved her handkerchief and smiled, but he knew that she was crying, shedding many painful tears. From her tears the entire front of Foma's shirt was wet, and from her tears, his heart, full of gloomy alarm, was sad and cold. The figure of the woman was growing smaller and smaller, as though melting away, and Foma, without lifting his eyes, stared at her and felt that aside from fear for his father and sorrow for the woman, some new, powerful and caustic sensation was awakening in his soul. He could not name it, but it seemed to him as something like a grudge against someone.

The crowd in the harbour blended into a close, dark and dead spot, faceless, formless, motionless. Foma went away from the rail and began to pace the deck gloomily.

The passengers, conversing aloud, seated themselves to drink tea; the porters bustled about on the gallery, setting the tables; somewhere below, on the stern, in the third class, a child was crying, a harmonica was wailing, the cook was chopping something with knives, the dishes were jarring – producing a rather harsh noise. Cutting the waves and making foam, shuddering under the strain and sighing heavily, the enormous steamer moved rapidly against the current. Foma looked at the wide strip of broken, struggling, and enraged waves at the stern of the steamer, and began to feel a wild desire to break or tear something; also to go, breast foremost, against the current and to mass its pressure against himself, against his breast and his shoulders.

"Fate!" said someone beside him in a hoarse and weary voice.

This word was familiar to him: his Aunt Anfisa had often used it as an answer to his questions, and he had invested in this brief word a conception of a power, similar to the power of God. He glanced at the speakers: one of them was a gray little old man, with a kind face; the other was younger, with big, weary eyes and with a little black wedge-shaped beard. His big gristly nose and his yellow, sunken cheeks reminded Foma of his godfather.

"Fate!" The old man repeated the exclamation of his interlocutor with confidence, and began to smile. "Fate in life is like a fisherman on the river: it throws a baited hook toward us into the tumult of our life and we dart at it with greedy mouths. Then fate pulls up the rod – and the man is struggling, flopping on the ground, and then you see his heart is broken. That's how it is, my dear man."

Foma closed his eyes, as if a ray of the sun had fallen full on them, and shaking his head, he said aloud:

"True! That is true!"

The companions looked at him fixedly: the old man, with a fine, wise smile; the large-eyed man, unfriendly, askance. This confused Foma; he blushed and walked away, thinking of Fate and wondering why it had first treated him kindly by giving him a woman, and then took back the gift from him, so simply and abusively? And he now understood that the vague, caustic feeling which he carried within him was a grudge against Fate for thus sporting with him. He had been too much spoiled by life, to regard more plainly the first drop of poison from the cup which was just started, and he passed all the time of the journey without sleep, pondering over the old man's words and fondling his grudge. This grudge, however, did not awaken in him despondency and sorrow, but rather a feeling of anger and revenge.

Foma was met by his godfather, and to his hasty and agitated question, Mayakin, his greenish little eyes flashing excitedly, said when he seated himself in the carriage beside his godson:

"Your father has grown childish."

"Drinking?"

"Worse – he has lost his mind completely."

"Really? Oh Lord! Tell me."

"Don't you understand? A certain lady is always around him."

"What about her?" exclaimed Foma, recalling his Pelageya, and for some reason or other his heart was filled with joy.

"She sticks to him and – bleeds him."

"Is she a quiet one?"

"She? Quiet as a fire. Seventy-five thousand roubles she blew out of his pocket like a feather!"

"Oh! Who is she?"

"Sonka Medinskaya, the architect's wife."

"Great God! Is it possible that she – Did my father – Is it possible that he took her as his sweetheart?" asked Foma, with astonishment, in a low voice.

His godfather drew back from him, and comically opening his eyes wide, said convincedly:

"You are out of your mind, too! By God, you're out of your mind! Come to your senses! A sweetheart at the age of sixty-three! And at such a price as this. What are you talking about? Well, I'll tell this to Ignat."

And Mayakin filled the air with a jarring, hasty laughter, at which his goat-like beard began to tremble in an uncomely manner. It took Foma a long time to obtain a categorical answer; the old man, contrary to his habit, was restless and irritated; his speech, usually fluent, was now interrupted; he was swearing and expectorating as he spoke, and it was with difficulty that Foma learned what the matter was. Sophya Pavlovna Medinskaya, the wealthy architect's wife, who was well known in the city for her tireless efforts in the line of arranging various charitable projects, persuaded Ignat to endow seventy-five thousand roubles for the erection of a lodging-house in the city and of a public library with a reading-room. Ignat had given the money, and already the newspapers lauded him for his generosity. Foma had seen the woman more than once on the streets; she was short; he knew that she was considered as one of the most beautiful women in the city, and that bad rumours were afoot as to her behaviour.

"Is that all?" exclaimed Foma, when his godfather concluded the story. "And I thought God knows what!"

"You? You thought?" cried Mayakin, suddenly grown angry. "You thought nothing, you beardless youngster!"

"Why do you abuse me?" Foma said.

"Tell me, in your opinion, is seventy-five thousand roubles a big sum or not?"

"Yes, a big sum," said Foma, after a moment's thought.

"Ah, ha!"

"But my father has much money. Why do you make such a fuss about it?"

Yakov Tarasovich was taken aback. He looked into the youth's face with contempt and asked him in a faint voice:

"And you speak like this?"

"I? Who then?"

"You lie! It is your young foolishness that speaks. Yes! And my old foolishness – brought to test a million times by life – says that you are a young dog as yet, and it is too early for you to bark in a basso."

Foma hearing this, had often been quite provoked by his godfather's too picturesque language.

Mayakin always spoke to him more roughly than his father, but now the youth felt very much offended by the old man and said to him reservedly, but firmly:

"You had better not abuse me without reflection, for I am no longer a small child."

"Come, come!" exclaimed Mayakin, mockingly lifting his eyebrows and squinting.

This roused Foma's indignation. He looked full into the old man's eyes and articulated with emphasis:

"And I am telling you that I don't want to hear any more of that undeserved abuse of yours. Enough!"

"Mm! So-o! Pardon me."

Yakov Tarasovich closed his eyes, chewed a little with his lips, and, turning aside from his godson, kept silent for awhile. The carriage turned into a narrow street, and, noticing from afar the roof of his house, Foma involuntarily moved forward. At the same time Mayakin asked him with a roguish and gentle smile:

"Foma! Tell me – on whom you have sharpened your teeth? Eh?"

"Why, are they sharp?" asked Foma, pleased with the manner in which Mayakin now regarded him.

"Pretty good. That's good, dear. That's very good! Your father and I were afraid lest you should be a laggard. Well, have you learned to drink vodka?"

"I drank it."

"Rather too soon! Did you drink much of it?"

"Why much?"

"Does it taste good?"

"Not very."

"So. Never mind, all this is not so bad. Only you are too outspoken. You are ready to confess all your sins to each and every pope that comes along. You must consider it isn't always necessary to do that. Sometimes by keeping silent you both please people and commit no sins. Yes. A man's tongue is very seldom sober. Here we are. See, your father does not know that you have arrived. Is he home yet, I wonder?"

He was at home: his loud, somewhat hoarse laughter was heard from the open windows of the rooms. The noise of the carriage, which stopped at the house, caused Ignat to look out of the window, and at the sight of his son he cried out with joy:

"Ah! You've come."

After a while he pressed Foma to his breast with one hand, and, pressing the palm of his other hand against his son's forehead, thus bending his head back, he looked into his face with beaming eyes and spoke contentedly:

"You are sunburnt. You've grown strong. You're a fine fellow! Madame! How's my son? Isn't he fine?"

"Not bad looking," a gentle, silver voice was heard. Foma glanced from behind his father's shoulder and noticed that a slender woman with magnificent fair hair was sitting in the front corner of the room, resting her elbows on the table; her dark eyes, her thin eyebrows and plump, red lips strikingly defined on her pale face. Behind her armchair stood a large philodendron-plant whose big, figured leaves were hanging down in the air over her little golden head.

"How do you do, Sophya Pavlovna," said Mayakin, tenderly, approaching her with his hand outstretched. "What, are you still collecting contributions from poor people like us?"

Foma bowed to her mutely, not hearing her answer to Mayakin, nor what his father was saying to him. The lady stared at him steadfastly and smiled to him affably and serenely. Her childlike figure, clothed in some kind of dark fabric, was almost blended with the crimson stuff of the armchair, while her wavy, golden hair and her pale face shone against the dark background. Sitting there in the corner, beneath the green leaves, she looked at once like a flower, and like an ikon.

"See, Sophya Pavlovna, how he is staring at you. An eagle, eh?" said Ignat.

Her eyes became narrower, a faint blush leaped to her cheeks, and she burst into laughter. It sounded like the tinkling of a little silver bell. And she immediately arose, saying:

"I wouldn't disturb you. Good-bye!"

When she went past Foma noiselessly, the scent of perfume came to him, and he noticed that her eyes were dark blue, and her eyebrows almost black.

"The sly rogue glided away," said Mayakin in a low voice, angrily looking after her.

"Well, tell us how was the trip? Have you squandered much money?" roared Ignat, pushing his son into the same armchair where Medinskaya had been sitting awhile before. Foma looked at him askance and seated himself in another chair.

"Isn't she a beautiful young woman, eh?" said Mayakin, smiling, feeling Foma with his cunning eyes. "If you keep on gaping at her she will eat away all your insides."

Foma shuddered for some reason or other, and, saying nothing in reply, began to tell his father about the journey in a matter-of-fact tone. But Ignat interrupted him:

"Wait, I'll ask for some cognac."

"And you are keeping on drinking all the time, they say," said Foma, disapprovingly.

Ignat glanced at his son with surprise and curiosity, and asked:

"Is this the way to speak to your father?"

Foma became confused and lowered his head.

"That's it!" said Ignat, kind-heartedly, and ordered cognac to be brought to him.

Mayakin, winking his eyes, looked at the Gordyeeffs, sighed, bid them good-bye, and, after inviting them to have tea with him in his raspberry garden in the evening, went away.

"Where is Aunt Anfisa?" asked Foma, feeling that now, being alone with his father, he was somewhat ill at ease.

"She went to the cloister. Well, tell me, and I will have some cognac."

Foma told his father all about his affairs in a few minutes and he concluded his story with a frank confession:

"I have spent much money on myself."

"How much?"

"About six hundred roubles."

"In six weeks! That's a good deal. I see as a clerk you're too expensive for me. Where have you squandered it all?"

"I gave away three hundred puds of grain."

"To whom? How?"

Foma told him all about it.

"Hm! Well, that's all right!" Ignat approved. "That's to show what stuff we are made of. That's clear enough – for the father's honour – for the honour of the firm. And there is no loss either, because

that gives a good reputation. And that, my dear, is the very best signboard for a business. Well, what else?"

"And then, I somehow spent more."

"Speak frankly. It's not the money that I am asking you about – I just want to know how you lived there," insisted Ignat, regarding his son attentively and sternly.

"I was eating, drinking." Foma did not give in, bending his head morosely and confusedly.

"Drinking vodka?"

"Vodka, too."

"Ah! So. Isn't it rather too soon?"

"Ask Yefim whether I ever drank enough to be intoxicated."

"Why should I ask Yefim? You must tell me everything yourself. So you are drinking? I don't like it."

"But I can get along without drinking."

"Come, come! Do you want some cognac?"

Foma looked at his father and smiled broadly. And his father answered him with a kindly smile:

"Eh, you. Devil! Drink, but look out – know your business. What can you do? A drunkard will sleep himself sober, a fool – never. Let us understand this much at least, for our own consolation. And did you have a good time with girls, too? Be frank! Are you afraid that I will beat you, or what?"

"Yes. There was one on the steamer. I had her there from Perm to Kazan."

"So," Ignat sighed heavily and said, frowning: "You've become defiled rather too soon."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.