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THE SPY

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http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25202887
The Spy The Story of a Superfluous Man:

Содержание

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CHAPTER I

When Yevsey Klimkov was four years old, his father was shot dead by the forester; and when he was seven years old, his mother died. She died suddenly in the field at harvest time. And so strange was this that Yevsey was not even frightened by the sight of her dead body.

Uncle Piotr, a blacksmith, put his hand on the boy's head, and said:

"What are we going to do now?"

Yevsey took a sidelong glance at the corner where his mother lay upon a bench, and answered in a low voice:

"I don't know."

The blacksmith wiped the sweat from his face with his shirtsleeve, and after a long silence gently shoved his nephew aside.

"You're going to live with me," he said. "We'll send you to school, I suppose, so that you won't be in our way. Ah, you old man!"

From that day the boy was called Old Man. The nickname suited him very well. He was too small for his age, his movements were sluggish, and his voice thin. A little bird-like nose stuck out sadly from a bony face, his round colorless eyes blinked timorously, his hair was sparse and grew in tufts. The impression he made was of a puny, shriveled-up little old fellow. The children in school laughed at him and beat him, his dull oldish look and his owl-like face somehow irritating the healthier and livelier among them. He held himself aloof, and lived alone, silently, always in the shade, or in some corner or hole. Without winking his round eyes he looked forth upon the people from his retirement, cautiously contracted like a snail in its shell. When his eyes grew tired, he closed them, and for a long time sat sightless, gently swaying his thin body.

Yevsey endeavored to escape observation even in his uncle's home; but here it was difficult. He had to dine and sup in the company of the whole family, and when he sat at the table, Yakov, the uncle's youngest son, a lusty, red-faced youngster, tried every trick to tease him or make him laugh. He made faces, stuck out his tongue, kicked Yevsey's legs under the table, and pinched him. He never succeeded, however, in making the Old Man laugh, though he did succeed in producing quite the opposite result, for often Yevsey would start with pain, his yellow face would turn grey, his eyes open wide, and his spoon tremble in his hand.

"What is it?" his uncle Piotr sometimes asked.

"It's Yashka," the boy explained in an even voice, in which there was no note of complaint.

If Uncle Piotr gave Yashka a box on the ear, or pulled his hair, Aunt Agafya puckered up her lips and muttered angrily:

"Ugh, you telltale!"

And then Yashka found him somewhere, and pummeled him long and assiduously upon back, sides, and stomach. Yevsey endured the drubbing as something inevitable. It would not have been profitable to complain of Yashka, because if Uncle Piotr beat his son, Aunt Agafya repaid the punishment with interest upon her nephew, and her blows were more painful than Yashka's. So when Yevsey saw that Yashka wanted to attack him, he merely ran away, though he was always overtaken. Then the Old Man dropped to the ground, and pressed his body to the soil with all his might, pulling up his knees to his stomach, covering his face and his head with his hands, and silently yielding his sides and back to his cousin's fists. The more patiently he bore the buffeting, the angrier grew Yashka. Sometimes Yashka even cried and shouted, while he kicked his cousin's body:

"You nasty louse, you, scream!"

Once Yevsey found a horseshoe and gave it to the little pugilist, because he knew Yashka would take it from him at any rate. Mollified by the present, Yashka asked:

"Did I hurt you very much when I beat you the last time?"

"Very much," answered Yevsey.

Yashka thought a while, scratched his head, and said in

embarrassment:

"It's nothing. It will pass away."

He left Yevsey, but somehow his words settled deep in the Old Man's heart, and he repeated hopefully in an undertone:

"It will pass away."

Once Yevsey saw some women pilgrims rubbing their tired feet with nettles. He followed their example, and applied the nettles to his bruised sides. It seemed to him his pain was greatly assuaged. From that time he religiously rubbed his wounds with the down of the noxious and despised weed.

He was poor at his lessons, because he came to school full of dread of beatings, and he left school swelling with a sense of insult. His apparent apprehension of being wronged evoked in others the unconquerable desire to ply the Old Man with blows.

It turned out that Yevsey had a counter-tenor, and the teacher took him to the church choir. After this he had to be at home less, but to compensate he met his schoolmates more frequently, at the rehearsals, and they all fought no less than Yashka.

The old frame church pleased Yevsey. He was always strongly drawn to peep into the snug warm quiet of its many dark corners, expecting to find in one of them something uncommon and good, which would embrace him, press him tenderly to itself, and speak to him the way his mother used to. All the sacred images, black with many years of soot, with their good yet stern expression, recalled the dark-bearded face of Uncle Piotr.

At the church entrance was a picture, which depicted a saint

who had caught the devil and was beating him; the saint, a tall, dark, sinewy fellow with long hands, the devil, a reddish, lean wizened creature of stunted growth resembling a little goat. At first Yevsey did not look at the devil; he had a desire to spit at him surreptitiously; but then he began to pity the unfortunate little fiend, and when nobody was around he tenderly stroked the goat-like little chin disfigured by dread and pain. Thus, for the first time a sense of pity sprang up in the boy's heart.

Yevsey liked the church for another reason: here all the people, even the notorious ruffians, dropped their boisterousness, and conducted themselves quietly and submissively. For loud talk frightened Yevsey. He ran away from excited faces and shouts, and hid himself, owing to the fact that once on a market-day he had seen a brawl between a number of muzhiks, which began by their talking to one another in very loud voices. Then they shouted and pushed; next someone seized a pole, waved it about, and struck another man. A terrible howl ensued, many started to run. They knocked the Old Man off his feet, and he fell face downward in a puddle. When he jumped up he saw a huge muzhik coming toward him waving his hands, with a quivering, gory blotch instead of a face. This was so terrible that Yevsey yelled, and suddenly felt as if he were being precipitated into a black pit. He had to be sprinkled with water to bring him to his senses.

Yevsey was also afraid of drunken men. His mother had told him that a demon takes up his abode in the body of a drunkard.

The Old Man imagined this demon prickly as a hedgehog and moist as a frog, with a reddish body and green eyes, who settles in a man's stomach, stirs about there, and turns the man into an evil fiend.

There were many other good things about the church. Besides the quiet and tender twilight, Yevsey liked the singing. When he sang without notes, he closed his eyes firmly, and letting his clear plaintive soprano blend with the general chorus in order it should not be heard above the others, he hid himself deliciously somewhere, as if overcome by a sweet sleep. In this drowsy state it seemed to him he was drifting away from life, approaching another gentle, peaceful existence.

A thought took shape in his mind, which he once expressed to his uncle in these words:

"Can a person live so that he can go everywhere and see everything, but be seen by nobody?"

"Invisibly?" asked the blacksmith, and thought a while. "I should suppose it would be impossible." He turned his black face to his nephew, and added seriously, "Yes, of course, it would be very nice if you could do it, Orphan."

From the moment that all the villagers began to call Yevsey "Old Man," Uncle Piotr used "Orphan" instead. A peculiar man in every respect the blacksmith was not terrible even when drunk. He would merely remove his hat from his head and walk about the street waving it, singing in a high doleful voice, smiling, and shaking his head. The tears would run down his face even more

copiously than when he was sober.

His uncle seemed to Yevsey the very wisest and best muzhik in the whole village. He could talk with him about everything. Though he often smiled he scarcely ever laughed; he spoke without haste, in a quiet, serious tone. Either failing to notice his nephew, or forgetting about him – which especially pleased Yevsey – he would talk to himself in his shop, keeping up a constant dispute with some invisible opponent and forever admonishing him.

"Confound you," he would mumble, but without anger. "Greedy maw! Don't I work? There, I have scorched my eyes. I'll soon get blind. What else do you want? A curse on this life! Hard luck! No beauty – no joy."

His interjections sounded as if he were composing psalms; and Yevsey had the impression that his uncle was actually facing the man he was addressing.

Once Yevsey asked:

"Whom are you talking to?"

"Whom am I talking to?" repeated the blacksmith without looking at the boy. Then he smiled and answered. "I'm talking to my stupidity."

But it was a rare thing for Yevsey to be able to speak with his guardian, for he was seldom alone. Yashka, round as a top, often spun about the place, drowning the blows of the hammer and the crackling of the coals in the furnace with his piercing shouts. In his presence Yevsey did not dare even to look at his uncle.

The smithy stood at the edge of the shallow ravine, at the bottom of which among the osier bushes, Yevsey passed all his leisure time in spring, summer, and autumn. Here it was as peaceful as in the church. The birds warbled, the bees and drones hummed, and a fine quiet song quivered in the air. The boy sat there swaying his body and brooding with tightly shut eyes. Or he roamed amid the bushes, listening to the noise in the blacksmith shop. When he perceived his uncle was alone, he crept out and went up to him.

"What, you, Orphan?" was the blacksmith's greeting, as he scrutinized the boy with his little eyes wet with tears.

Once Yevsey asked:

"Is the evil power in the church at night?"

The smith thought a while, and answered:

"Why shouldn't it be? It gets everywhere. That's easy for it."

The boy raised his shoulders, and with his round eyes searchingly examined the dark corners of the shop.

"Don't be afraid of the devils," the uncle advised.

Yevsey sighed, and answered quietly:

"I'm not afraid."

"They won't hurt you," the blacksmith explained with assurance, wiping his eyes with his black fingers. Then Yevsey asked:

"And how about God?"

"What about Him?"

"Why does God let devils get into the church?"

"What's that to him? God isn't the keeper of the church."

"Doesn't he live there?"

"Who? God? Why should He? His place, Orphan, is everywhere. The churches are for the people."

"And the people, what are they for?"

"The people – it seems they are – in general – for everything. You can't get along without people."

"Are they for God?"

The blacksmith looked askance at his nephew, and answered after a pause:

"Of course." Wiping his hands on his apron and staring at the fire in the furnace, he added, "I don't know about this business, Orphan. Why don't you ask the teacher or the priest?"

Yevsey wiped his nose on his shirtsleeve.

"I'm afraid of them."

"It would be better for you not to talk of such things," the uncle advised gravely. "You are a little boy. You should play out in the open air, and store up health. If you want to live you must be a healthy man. If you are not strong, you can't work. Then you can't live at all. That's all we know, and what God needs is unknown to us." He grew silent, and meditated without removing his eyes from the fire. After a time he continued in a serious tone, speaking choppily: "On the one hand I know nothing, on the other hand I don't understand. They say all wisdom comes from Him. Yet it's evident that the thicker one's candle before God the more wolfish the heart." He looked around the shop, and his eyes

fell on the boy in the corner. "Why are you squeezing yourself into that crack? I told you to go out and play." As Yevsey crept out timidly, the smith added, "A spark will fall into your eye, and then you'll be one-eyed. Who wants a one-eyed fellow?"

His mother had told Yevsey several stories on winter nights when the snowstorm knocking against the walls of the hut ran along the roof, touched everything as if groping for something in anguish, crept down the chimney, and whined there mournfully in different keys. The mother recited the tales quietly, drowsily. Her speech sometimes grew confused; often she repeated the same words several times. It seemed to the boy she saw everything about which she spoke, but obscurely, as in the dark.

The neighbors reminded Yevsey of his mother's tales. The blacksmith, too, it seemed, saw in the furnace-fire both devils and God, and all the terrors of human life. That was why he continually wept. While Yevsey listened to his talk, which set his heart aquiver with a dreadful tremor of expectation, the hope insensibly formulated itself that some day he would see something remarkable, not resembling the life in the village, the drunken muzhiks, the cantankerous women, the boisterous children – something quite different, without noise and confusion, without malice and quarreling, something lovable and serious, like the church service.

One of the neighbors was a blind girl, with whom Yevsey became intimate. He took her to walk in the village; carefully helped her down the ravine, and spoke to her in a low voice,

opening wide his watery eyes in fear. This friendship did not escape the notice of the villagers, all of whom it pleased. But once the mother of the blind girl came to Uncle Piotr with a complaint. She declared Yevsey had frightened Tanya with his talk, and now she could not leave her daughter alone, because the girl cried and slept poorly, had disturbed dreams, and started out of her sleep screaming. What Yevsey had said to her it was impossible to make out. She kept babbling about devils, about the sky being black and having holes in it, about fires visible through the holes, and about devils who made sport in there, and teased people. What does it mean? How can anyone tell a little girl such stuff?

"Come here," said Uncle Piotr to his nephew.

When Yevsey quietly left his corner, the smith put his rough heavy hand on his head and asked:

"Did you tell her all that?"

"I did."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

The blacksmith, without removing his hand, shoved back the boy's head, and looking into his eyes asked gravely:

"Why, is the sky black?"

"What else is it if she can't see?" Yevsey muttered.

"Who?"

"Tanya."

"Yes," said the blacksmith. After a moment's reflection he

asked, "And how about the fire being black? Why did you invent that?"

The boy dropped his eyes and was silent.

"Well, speak. Nobody is beating you. Why did you tell her all that nonsense, eh?"

"I was sorry for her," whispered Yevsey.

The blacksmith pushed him aside lightly.

"You shan't talk to her any more, do you hear? Never! Don't worry, Aunt Praskovya, we'll put an end to this friendship."

"You ought to give him a whipping," said the mother. "My little girl lived quietly, she wasn't a bit of a bother to anybody, and now someone has to be with her all the time."

After Praskovya had left, the smith without saying anything led Yevsey by the hand into the yard.

"Now talk sensibly. Why did you frighten the little girl?"

The uncle's voice was not loud, but it was stern. Yevsey became frightened, and quickly began to justify himself, stuttering over his words.

"I didn't frighten her – I did it just – just – she kept complaining – she said I see only black, but for you everything – so I began to tell her everything is black to keep her from being envious. I didn't mean to frighten her at all."

Yevsey broke into sobs, feeling himself wronged. Uncle Piotr smiled.

"You fool! You should have remembered that she's been blind only three years. She wasn't born blind. She lost her sight after

she had the smallpox. So she recollects what things are really bright. Oh, what a stupid fellow!"

"I'm not stupid. She believed me," Yevsey retorted, wiping his eyes.

"Well, all right. Only don't go with her any more. Do you hear?"

"I won't."

"As to your crying; it's nothing. Let them think I gave you a beating." The blacksmith tapped Yevsey on the shoulder, and continued with a smile, "You and I, we're cheats, both of us."

The little fellow buried his head in his uncle's side, and asked tremulously:

"Why is everybody down on me?"

"I don't know, Orphan," answered the uncle after a moment's reflection.

The wrongs to which he was subjected now began to yield the boy a sort of bitter satisfaction. A dim conviction settled upon him that he was not like everybody else, and this was why all were down on him. He observed that all the people were malicious and worn out with ill-will. They lived, each deceiving his neighbor, abusing one another, and drinking. Everyone sought for mastery over his fellow, though over himself he was not master. Yevsey saw no man who was not in constant fear of something. The whole of life was filled with terror, and terror divided the people into fragments.

The village stood upon a low hill. On the other side of the

river stretched a marsh. In the summer after a hot day it exhaled a stifling lilac-colored mist, which breathed a putrid breath upon the village, and sent upon the people a swarm of mosquitoes. The people, angry and pitiful, scratched themselves until blood came. From behind the thin woods in the distance climbed a lowering reddish moon. Huge and round it looked through the haze like a dull sinister eye. Yevsey thought it was threatening him with all kinds of misery and dread. He feared its dirty reddish face. When he saw it over the marsh, he hid himself, and in his sleep he was tormented by heavy dreams. At night bluish, trembling lights strayed over the marsh, said to be the homeless spirits of sinners. The villagers sighed over them sorrowfully, pitying them. But for one another they had no pity.

It was possible for them, however, to have lived differently, in friendship and joy. An incident Yevsey once witnessed proved this to him.

One night the granary of the rich muzhik Veretennikov caught fire. The little boy ran into the garden, and climbed up a willow tree to look at the conflagration.

It seemed to him that the many-winged, supple body of a horrible smoke-begrimed bird with a fiery jaw was circling in the sky. It inclined its red blazing head to the ground, greedily tore the straw with its sharp fiery teeth, gnawed at the wood, and licked it with its hundred yellow tongues. Its smoky body playfully coiled in the black sky, fell upon the village, crept along the roofs of the houses, and again raised itself aloft majestically

and lightly, without removing its flaming red head from the ground. It snorted, scattering sheaves of sparks, whistling with joy in its evil work, singing, puffing, and spreading its raging jaw wider and wider, embracing the wood more and more greedily with its red ribbons of flame.

In the presence of the fire the people turned small and black. They sprinkled water into its jaws, thrust long poles at it, and tore flaming sheaves from between its teeth. Then they trampled the sheaves. The people, too, coughed, sniffed, and sneezed, gasping for breath in the greasy smoke. They shouted and roared, their voices blending with the crackling and roaring of the fire. They approached nearer and nearer to the great bird, surrounding its red head with a black living ring, as if tightening a noose about its body. Here and there the noose broke, but they tied it again, and crowded about more firmly. The noose strangled the fire, which lay there savagely. It jumped up, and its body swelled, writhing like a snake, striving to free its head; but the people held it fast to the ground. Finally, enfeebled, exhausted, and sullen it fell upon the neighboring granaries, crept along the gardens, and dwindled away, shattered and faint.

"All together!" shouted the villagers, encouraging one another.

"Water!" rang out the women's voices.

The women formed a chain from the fire to the river, strangers and kinsmen, friends and enemies all in a row. And the buckets of water were rapidly passed from hand to hand.

"Quick, women! Quick, good women!"

It was pleasant and cheerful to look upon this good, friendly life in conflict with the fire. The people emboldened one another. They spoke words of praise for displays of dexterity and disputed in kindly jest. The shouts were free from malice. In the presence of the fire everybody seemed to see his neighbor as good, and each grew pleasant to the other. When at last the fire was vanquished, the villagers grew even jolly. They sang songs, laughed, boasted of the work, and joked. The older people got whiskey to drink away their exhaustion, while the young folk remained in the streets amusing themselves almost until morning. And everything was as good as in a dream.

Yevsey heard not a single malicious shout, nor noticed a single angry face. During the entire time the fire was burning no one wept from pain or abuse, no one roared with the beastly roar of savage malice, ready for murder.

The next day Yevsey said to his uncle:

"How nice it was last night!"

"Yes, Orphan, it was nice. A little more, and the fire would have burned away half the village."

"I mean about the people," explained the boy. "How they joined together in a friendly way. If they would live like that all the time, if there were a fire all the time!"

The blacksmith reflected for an instant, then asked in surprise:

"You mean there should be fires all the time?" He looked at Yevsey sternly, and shook his finger. "You wiseacre, you, look

out! Don't think such sinful thoughts. Just see him! He finds pleasure in fires!"

CHAPTER II

When Yevsey completed the school course, the blacksmith said to him:

"What shall we do with you now? There's nothing for you here. You must go to the city. I have to get bellows there, and I'll take you along, Orphan."

"Will you yourself take me?"

"Yes. Are you sorry to leave the village?"

"No, but I am sorry on account of you."

The blacksmith put a piece of iron in the furnace and adjusting the coals with the tongs, said thoughtfully:

"There's no reason to be sorry on account of me. I am grown up. I am the muzhik I ought to be, like every other muzhik."

"You're better than everybody else," Yevsey said in a low voice.

It seemed that Uncle Piotr did not hear the last remark, for he did not answer, but removed the glowing iron from the fire, screwed up his eyes, and began to hammer, scattering the red sparks all about him. Then he suddenly stopped, slowly dropped the hand in which he held the hammer, and said smiling:

"I ought to give you some advice – how to live and all such things."

Yevsey waited to hear the advice. The blacksmith, however, apparently forgetful of his nephew, put the iron back into the fire,

wiped the tears from his cheeks, and looked into the furnace. A muzhik entered, bringing a cracked tire. Yevsey went out to go to the ravine, where he crouched in the bushes until sunset, waiting for his uncle to be alone; which did not happen.

The day of his departure from the village was effaced from the boy's memory. He recalled only that when he rode out into the fields, it was dark and the air strangely oppressive. The wagon jolted horribly, and on both sides rose black motionless trees. The further they advanced the wider the space became and the brighter the atmosphere. The uncle was sullen the whole way, and reluctantly gave brief and unintelligible answers to Yevsey's questions.

They rode an entire day, stopping over night in a little village. Yevsey heard the fine and protracted playing of an accordion, a woman weeping, and occasionally an angry voice crying out: "Shut up!" and swearing abusively.

The travelers continued on their way the same night. Two dogs accompanied them, running around the wagon and whining. As they left the village a bittern boomed sullenly and plaintively in the forest to the left of the road.

"God grant good luck!" mumbled the blacksmith.

Yevsey fell asleep, and awoke when his uncle lightly tapped him on his legs with the butt end of the whip.

"Look, Orphan."

To the sleepy eyes of the boy the city appeared like a huge field of buckwheat. Thick and varicolored, it stretched endlessly, with

the golden church steeples standing out like yellow pimpinellas, and the dark bands of the streets looking like fences between the patches.

"Oh, how large!" said Yevsey. After another look, he asked his uncle cautiously, "Will you come to see me?"

"Certainly, whenever I come to the city. You will begin to make money, and I will ask you to give me some. 'Orphan,' I'll say, 'give your uncle about three rubles.'"

"I'll give you all my money."

"You mustn't give me all. You should give only as much as you won't be sorry to part with. To give less is shameful; to give more is unfair."

The city grew quickly and became more and more varied in coloring. It glittered green, red, and golden, reflecting the rays of the sun from the glass of the countless windows and from the gold of the church steeples. It seemed to make promises, kindling in the heart a confused curiosity, a dim expectation of something unusual. Kneeling in the wagon with his hand on his uncle's shoulder, Yevsey looked before him while the smith said:

"You live this way – do whatever is assigned to you, hold yourself aloof, beware of the bold men. One bold man out of ten succeeds, and nine go to pieces."

He spoke with indecision, as if he himself doubted whether he was saying what he ought to say, and he searched his thoughts for something else more important. Yevsey listened attentively and gravely, expecting to hear a special warning against the

terrors and dangers of the new life. But the blacksmith drew a deep breath, and after a pause continued more firmly and with more assurance, "Once they came near giving me a lashing with switches in the district court. I was betrothed then. I had to get married. Nevertheless they wanted to whip me. It's all the same to them. They don't care about other people's affairs. I lodged a complaint with the governor, and for three and a half months they kept me in prison, not to speak of the blows. I got the worst beatings. I even spat blood. It's from that time that tears are always in my eyes. One policeman, a short reddish fellow, always went for my head."

"Uncle," said Yevsey quietly, "don't speak of it."

"What else shall I speak to you about?" cried Uncle Piotr with a smile. "There is nothing else."

Yevsey's head drooped sadly.

One detached house after another seemed to step toward them, dirty and wrapped in heavy odors, with chimneys sticking from their red and green roofs, like warts. Bluish-grey smoke rose from them lazily. Some chimneys, monstrously tall and dirty, jutted straight up from the ground, and emitted thick black clouds of smoke. The ground was compactly trodden, and seemed to be steeped in black grease. Everywhere heavy alarming sounds penetrated the smoky atmosphere. Something growled, hummed and whistled; iron clanged angrily, and some huge creature breathed hoarsely and brokenly.

"When will we get to the place?" asked Yevsey.

Looking carefully in front of him the uncle said:

"This isn't the city yet. These are factories in the suburb."

Finally they pulled into a broad street lined with old squat frame houses painted various colors, which had a peaceful, homelike appearance. Especially fine were the clean cheerful houses with gardens, which seemed to be tied about with green aprons.

"We'll soon be there," said the blacksmith, turning the horse into a narrow side street. "Don't be afraid, Orphan."

He drew up at the open gate of a large house, jumped down, and walked into the yard. The house was old and bent. The joists protruded from under the small dim windows. In the large dirty yard there were a number of carriages, and four muzhiks talking loudly stood about a white horse tapping it with their hands. One of them, a round, bald-headed fellow with a large yellow beard and a rosy face, waved his hands wildly on seeing Piotr, and cried:

"Oh!"

They went to a narrow, dark room, where they sat down and drank tea. Uncle Piotr spoke about the village. The bald fellow laughed and shouted so that the dishes rattled on the table. It was close in the room and smelled of hot bread. Yevsey wanted to sleep, and he kept looking into the corner where behind dirty curtains he could see a wide bed with several pillows. Large black flies buzzed about, knocking against his forehead, crawling over his face, and tickling his perspiring skin; but he restrained himself from driving them away.

"We'll find a place for you!" the bald man shouted to him, nodding his head gaily. "In a minute! Natalya, did you call for Matveyevich?"

A full woman with dark lashes, a small mouth, and a high bust, answered calmly and clearly:

"How many times have you asked me already?"

She held her head straight and proudly, and when she moved her hands the rose-colored chintz of her new jacket rustled sumptuously. Her whole being recalled some good dream or fairy tale.

"Piotr, my friend, look at Natalya. What a Natalya! Droppings from the honey-comb!" shouted the bald man deafeningly.

Uncle Piotr laughed quietly, as if fearing to look at the woman, who pushed a hot rye cake filled with curds toward Yevsey, and said:

"Eat, eat a lot. In the city people must eat a good deal."

A jar of preserves stood on the table, honey in a saucer, toasted cracknels sprinkled with anise-seed, sausage, cucumber, and vodka. All this filled the air with a strong odor. Yevsey grew faint from the oppressive sensation of over-abundance, though he did not dare to decline, and submissively chewed everything set before him.

"Eat!" cried the bald man, then continued his talk with Uncle Piotr. "I tell you, it's luck. It's only a week since the horse crushed the little boy. He went to the tavern for boiling water, when suddenly – "

Another man now made his entrance unnoticed by the others. He, too, was bald, but small and thin, with dark eyeglasses on a large nose, and a long tuft of grey hair on his chin.

"What is it, people?" he asked in a low, indistinct voice.

The master jumped up from his chair, uttered a cry, and laughed aloud. Yevsey was suddenly seized with alarm.

The man addressed Piotr and his hosts as "People," by which he separated himself from them. He sat down at some distance from the table, then moved to one side away from the blacksmith, and looked around moving his thin dry neck slowly. On his head, a little above his forehead, over his right eye, was a large bump. His little pointed ears clung closely to his skull, as if to hide themselves in the short fringe of his grey hair. He produced the impression of a quiet, grey, seedy, person. Yevsey unsuccessfully tried to get a surreptitious peep at his eyes under the glasses. His failure disquieted him.

The host cried:

"Do you understand, Orphan?"

"This is a trump," remarked the man with the bump. He sat supporting his thin dark hands on his sharp knees, and spoke little. Occasionally Yevsey heard the men utter some peculiar words.

At last the newcomer said:

"And so it is settled."

Uncle Piotr moved heavily in his chair.

"Now, Orphan, you have a place. This is your master." He

turned to the master. "I want to tell you, sir, that the boy can read and write, and is not at all a stupid fellow. I am not saying this because I can't find a place for him, but because it is the truth. The boy is even very curious – "

"I have no need for curiosity," said the master shaking his head.

"He's a quiet sort. They call him Old Man in the village – that's the kind he is."

"We shall see," said the man with the bump on his forehead. He adjusted his glasses, scrutinized Yevsey's face closely, and added, "My name is Matvey Matveyevich."

Turning away, he took up a glass of tea, which he drank noiselessly. Then he rose and with a silent nod walked out.

Yevsey and his uncle now went to the yard, where they seated themselves in the shade near the stable. The blacksmith spoke to Yevsey cautiously, as if groping with his words for something unintelligible to him.

"You'll surely have it good with him. He's a quiet little old man. He has run his course and left all sorts of sins behind him. Now he lives in order to eat a little bite, and he grumbles and purrs like a satiated Tom-cat."

"But isn't he a sorcerer?" asked the boy.

"Why? I should think there are no sorcerers in the cities." After reflecting a few moments, the blacksmith went on. "Anyway it's all the same to you. A sorcerer is a man, too. But remember this, a city is a dangerous place. This is how it

spoils people: the wife of a man goes away on a pilgrimage, and he immediately puts in her place some housemaid or other, and indulges himself. But the old man can't show you such an example. That's why I say you'll have it good with him. You will live with him as behind a bush, sitting and looking."

"And when he dies?" Yevsey inquired warily.

"That probably won't be soon. Smear your head with oil to keep your hair from sticking out."

About noon the uncle made Yevsey bid farewell to their hosts, and taking him firmly by the hand led him to the city. They walked for a long time. It was sultry. Often they asked the passersby how to get to the Circle. Yevsey regarded everything with his owl-like eyes, pressing close up to his uncle. The doors of shops slammed, pulleys squeaked, carriages rattled, wagons rumbled heavily, traders shouted, and feet scraped and tramped. All these sounds jumbled together were tangled up in the stifling dusty atmosphere. The people walked quickly, and hurried across the streets under the horses' noses as if afraid of being too late for something. The bustle tired the boy's eyes. Now and then he closed them, whereupon he would stumble and say to his uncle:

"Come, faster!"

Yevsey wanted to get to some place in a corner where it was not so stirring, not so noisy and hot. Finally they reached a little open place hemmed in by a narrow circle of old houses, which seemed to support one another solidly and firmly. In the center of the Circle was a fountain about which moist shadows hovered

on the soil. It was more tranquil here, and the noise was subdued.

"Look," said Yevsey, "there are only houses and no ground around them at all."

The blacksmith answered with a sigh:

"It's pretty crowded. Read the signs. Where is Raspopov's shop?"

They walked to the center of the Circle, and stopped at the fountain. There were many signs, which covered every house like the motley patches of a beggar's coat. When Yevsey saw the name his uncle had mentioned, a chill shiver ran through his body, and he examined it carefully without saying anything. It was small and eaten by rust, and was placed on the door of a dark basement. On either side the door there was an area between the pavement and the house, which was fenced in by a low iron railing. The house, a dirty yellow with peeling plaster, was narrow with four stories and three windows to each floor. It looked blind as a mole, crafty, and uncozy.

"Well," asked the smith, "can't you see the sign?"

"There it is," said the boy, indicating the place with a nod of his head.

"Let's cross ourselves and go."

They descended to the door at the bottom of five stone steps. The blacksmith raised his cap from his head, and looked cautiously into the shop.

"Come in," said a clear voice.

The master, wearing a black silk cap without a visor, was

sitting at a table by the window drinking tea.

"Take a chair, peasant, and have some tea. Boy, fetch a glass from the shelf."

The master pointed to the other end of the shop. Yevsey looked in the same direction, but saw no boy there. The master turned toward him.

"Well, what's the matter? Aren't you the boy?"

"He's not used to it yet," said Uncle Piotr quietly.

The old man again waved his hand.

"The second shelf on the right. A master must be understood when he says only half. That's the rule."

The blacksmith sighed. Yevsey groped for the glass in the dim light, and stumbled over a pile of books on the floor in his haste to hand it to the master.

"Put it on the table. And the saucer?"

"Oh, you!" exclaimed Uncle Piotr. "What's the matter with you? Get the saucer."

"It will take a long time to teach him," said the old man with an imposing look at the blacksmith. "Now, boy, go around the shop, and fix the place where everything stands in your memory."

Yevsey felt as if something commanding had entered his body, which impelled him powerfully to move as it pleased. He shrank together, drew his head in his shoulders, and straining his eyes began to look around the shop, all the time listening to the words of his master. It was cool, dusky, and quiet. The noise of the city entered reluctantly, like the muffled swashing of a stream.

Narrow and long as a grave the shop was closely lined with shelves holding books in compact rows. Large piles of books cluttered the floor, and barricaded the rear wall, rising almost to the ceiling. Besides the books Yevsey found only a ladder, an umbrella, galoshes, and a white pot whose handle was broken off. There was a great deal of dust, which probably accounted for the heavy odor.

"I'm a quiet man. I am all alone, and if he suits me, maybe I will make him perfectly happy."

"Of course it lies with you," said Uncle Piotr.

"I am fifty-seven years old. I lived an honest and straightforward life, and I will not excuse dishonesty. If I notice any such thing I'll hand him over to the court. Nowadays they sentence minors, too. They have founded a prison to frighten them called the Junior Colony of Criminals – for little thieves, you know."

His colorless, drawling words enveloped Yevsey tightly, evoking a timorous desire to soothe the old man and please him.

"Now, good-bye. The boy must get at the work."

Uncle Piotr rose and sighed.

"Well, Orphan, so you live here now. Obey your master. He won't want to do you any harm. Why should he? He is going to buy you city clothes. Now don't be downcast, will you?"

"No," said Yevsey.

"You ought to say 'No, sir,'" corrected the master.

"No, sir," repeated Yevsey.

"Well, good-bye," said the blacksmith putting his hand on the boy's shoulder, and giving his nephew a little shake he walked out as if suddenly grown alarmed.

Yevsey shivered, oppressed by a chill sorrow. He went to the door, and fixed his round eyes questioningly on the yellow face of the master. The old man twirling the grey tuft on his chin looked down upon the boy. Yevsey thought he could discern large dim black eyes behind the glasses. As the two stood thus for a few minutes apparently expecting something from each other, the boy's breast began to beat with a vague terror; but the old man merely took a book from a shelf, and pointed to the cover.

"What number is this?"

"1873," replied Yevsey lowering his head.

"That's it."

The master touched Yevsey's chin with his dry finger.

"Look at me."

The boy straightened his neck and quickly mumbled closing his eyes:

"Little uncle, I shall always obey you. I don't need beatings." His eyes grew dim, his heart sank within him.

"Come here."

The old man seated himself resting his hands on his knees. He removed his cap and wiped his bald spot with his handkerchief. His spectacles slid to the end of his nose, and he looked over them at Yevsey. Now he seemed to have two pairs of eyes. The real eyes were small, immobile, and dark grey with red lids. Without

the glasses the master's face looked thinner, more wrinkled, and less stern. In fact it wore an injured and downcast expression, and there was nothing in the least formidable in his eyes. The bump over his forehead got larger.

"Have you been beaten often?"

"Yes, sir, often."

"Who beat you?"

"The boys."

"Oh!"

The master drew his glasses close to his eyes and mumbled his lips.

"The boys are scrappers here, too," he said. "Don't have anything to do with them, do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Be on your guard against them. They are impudent rascals and thieves. I want you to know I am not going to teach you anything bad. Don't be afraid of me. I am a good man. You ought to get to love me. You will love me. You'll have it very good with me, you understand?"

"Yes, sir. I will."

The master's face assumed its former expression. He rose, and taking Yevsey by the hand led him to the further end of the shop.

"Here's work for you. You see these books? On every book the date is marked. There are twelve books to each year. Arrange them in order. How are you going to do it?"

Yevsey thought a while, and answered timidly:

"I don't know."

"Well, I am not going to tell you. You can read and you ought to be able to find out by yourself. Go, get to work."

The old man's dry even voice seemed to lash Yevsey, driving away the melancholy feeling of separation from his uncle and replacing it with the anxious desire to begin to work quickly. Restraining his tears the boy rapidly and quietly untied the packages. Each time a book dropped to the floor with a thud he started and looked around. The master was sitting at the table writing with a pen that scratched slightly. As the people hastened past the door, their feet flashed and their shadows jerked across the shop. Tears rolled from Yevsey's eyes one after the other. In fear lest they be detected he hurriedly wiped them from his face with dusty hands, and full of a vague dread went tensely at his work of sorting the books.

At first it was difficult for him, but in a few minutes he was already immersed in that familiar state of thoughtlessness and emptiness which took such powerful hold of him when, after beatings and insults, he sat himself down alone in some corner. His eye caught the date and the name of the month, his hand mechanically arranged the books in a row, while he sat on the floor swinging his body regularly. He became more and more deeply plunged in the tranquil state of half-conscious negation of reality. As always at such times the dim hope glowed in him of something different, unlike what he saw around him. Sometimes the all-comprehending, capacious phrase uttered by

Yashka dimly glimmered in his memory:

"It will pass away."

The thought pressed his heart warmly and softly with a promise of something unusual. The boy's hands involuntarily began to move more quickly, and he ceased to notice the lapse of time.

"You see, you knew how to do it," said the master.

Yevsey, who had not heard the old man approach him, started from his reverie. Glancing at his work, he asked:

"Is it all right?"

"Absolutely. Do you want tea?"

"No."

"You ought to say, 'No, thank you.' Well, keep on with your work."

He walked away. Yevsey looking after him saw a man carrying a cane enter the door. He had neither a beard nor mustache, and wore a round hat shoved back on the nape of his neck. He seated himself at the table, at the same time putting upon it some small black and white objects. When Yevsey again started to work, he every once in a while heard abrupt sounds from his master and the newcomer.

"Castle."

"King."

"Soon."

The confused noise of the street penetrated the shop wearily, with strange words quacking in it, like frogs in a marsh.

"What are they doing?" thought the boy, and sighed. He experienced a soft sensation, that from all directions something unusual was coming upon him, but not what he timidly awaited. The dust settled upon his face, tickled his nose and eyes, and set his teeth on edge. He recalled his uncle's words:

"You will live with him as behind a bush."

It grew dark.

"King and checkmate!" cried the guest in a thick voice. The master clucking his tongue called out:

"Boy, close up the shop!"

The old man lived in two small rooms in the fourth story of the same house. In the first room, which had one window, stood a large chest and a wardrobe.

"This is where you will sleep."

The two windows in the second room gave upon the street, with a view over an endless vista of uneven roofs and rosy sky. In the corner, in front of the ikons, flickered a little light in a blue glass lamp. In another corner stood a bed covered with a red blanket. On the walls hung gaudy portraits of the Czar and various generals. The room was close and smelt like a church, but it was clean.

Yevsey remained at the door looking at his elderly master, who said:

"Mark the arrangement of everything here. I want it always to be the same as it is now."

Against the wall stood a broad black sofa, a round table, and

about the table chairs also black. This corner had a mournful, sinister aspect.

A tall, white-faced woman with eyes like a sheep's entered the room, and asked in a low singing voice:

"Shall I serve supper?"

"Bring it in, Rayisa Petrovna."

"A new boy?"

"Yes, new. His name is Yevsey."

The woman walked out.

"Close the door," ordered the old man. Yevsey obeyed, and he continued in a lower voice. "She is the landlady. I rent the rooms from her with dinner and supper. You understand?"

"I understand."

"But you have one master – me. You understand?"

"Yes."

"That is to say, you must listen only to me. Open the door, and go into the kitchen and wash yourself."

The master's voice echoed drily in the boy's bosom, causing his alarmed heart to palpitate. The old man, it seemed to Yevsey, was hiding something dangerous behind his words, something of which he himself was afraid.

While washing in the kitchen he surreptitiously tried to look at the mistress of the apartment. The woman was preparing the supper noiselessly but briskly. As she arranged plates, knives, and bread on an ample tray her large round face seemed kind. Her smoothly combed dark hair; her unwinking eyes with thin

lashes, and her broad nose made the boy think, "She looks to be a gentle person."

Noticing that she, in her turn, was looking at him, the thin red lips of her small mouth tightly compressed, he grew confused, and spilt some water on the floor.

"Wipe it," she said without anger. "There's a cloth under the chair."

When he returned, the old man looked at him and asked:

"What did she tell you?"

But Yevsey had no time to answer before the woman brought in the tray.

"Well, I'll go," she said after setting it on the table.

"Very well," replied the master.

She raised her hand to smooth the hair over her temples – her fingers were long – and left.

The old man and the boy sat down to their supper. The master ate slowly, noisily munching his food and at times sighing wearily. When they began to eat the finely chopped roast meat, he said:

"You see what good food? I always have only good food."

After supper he told Yevsey to carry the dishes into the kitchen, and showed him how to light the lamp.

"Now, go to sleep. You will find a piece of padding in the wardrobe and a pillow and a blanket. They belong to you. Tomorrow I'll buy you new clothes, good clothes. Go, now."

When he was half asleep the master came in to Yevsey.

"Are you comfortable?"

Though the chest made a hard bed, Yevsey answered:

"Yes."

"If it is too hot, open the window."

The boy at once opened the window, which looked out upon the roof of the next house. He counted the chimneys. There were four, all alike. He looked at the stars with the dim gaze of a timid animal in a cage. But the stars said nothing to his heart. He flung himself on the chest again, drew the blanket over his head, and closed his eyes tightly. He began to feel stifled, thrust his head out, and without opening his eyes listened. In his master's room something rustled monotonously, then Yevsey heard a dry, distinct voice:

"Behold, God is mine helper; the Lord is with them that uphold – "

Yevsey realized that the old man was reciting the Psalter; and listening attentively to the familiar words of King David, which, however, he did not comprehend, the boy fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

Yevsey's life passed smoothly and evenly.

He wanted to please his master, even realized this would be of advantage to him, and he felt he would succeed, though he behaved with watchful circumspection and no warmth in his heart for the old man. The fear of people engendered in him a desire to suit them, a readiness for all kinds of services, in order to defend himself against the possibility of attack. The constant expectation of danger developed a keen power of observation, which still more deepened his mistrust.

He observed the strange life in the house without understanding it. From basement to roof people lived close packed, and every day, from morning until night, they crawled about in the tenement like crabs in a basket. Here they worked more than in the village, and, it seemed, were imbued with even keener bitterness. They lived restlessly, noisily, and hurriedly, as if to get through all the work as soon as possible in preparation of a holiday, which they wanted to meet as free people, washed, clean, peaceful, and tranquilly joyous. The heart of the boy sank within him, and the question constantly recurred:

"Will it pass away?"

But the holiday never came. The people spurred one another on, wrangled, and sometimes fought. Scarcely a day passed on which they did not speak ill of one another.

In the mornings the master went down to the shop, while Yevsey remained in the apartment to put it in order. This accomplished, he washed himself, went to the tavern for boiling water, and then returned to the shop, where he drank the morning tea with his master. While breakfasting the old man almost invariably asked him:

"Well, what now?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing is little."

Once, however, Yevsey had a different answer.

"To-day the watchmaker told the furrier's cook that you received stolen articles."

Yevsey said this unexpectedly to himself, and was instantly seized with a tremble of fear. He bowed his head. The old man laughed quietly, and said in a drawling voice without sincerity:

"The scoundrel!" His dark, dry lips quivered. "Thank you for telling me. Thank you! You see how the people don't love me."

From that time Yevsey began to pay close attention to the conversation of the tenants, and promptly repeated everything he heard to his master, speaking in a quiet, calm voice and looking straight into his face. Several days later, while putting his master's room into order, he found a crumpled paper ruble on the floor, and when at tea the old man asked him, "Well, what now?" Yevsey replied, "Here I have found a ruble."

"You found a ruble, did you? I found a gold piece," said the master laughing.

Another time Yevsey picked up a twenty-kopek piece in the entrance to the shop, which he also gave to the master. The old man slid his glasses to the end of his nose, and rubbing the coin with his fingers looked into the boy's face for a few seconds without speaking.

"According to the law," he said thoughtfully, "a third of what you find, six kopeks, belongs to you." He was silent, sighed, and stuck the coin into his vest pocket. "But anyway you're a stupid boy." Yevsey did not get the six kopeks.

Quiet, unnoticed, and when noticed, obliging, Yevsey Klimkov scarcely ever drew the attention of the people to himself, though he stubbornly followed them with the broad, empty gaze of his owl-like eyes, with the look that did not abide in the memory of those who met it.

From the first days the reticent quiet Rayisa Petrovna interested him strongly. Every evening she put on a dark, rustling dress and a black hat, and sallied forth. In the morning when he put the rooms in order she was still asleep. He saw her only in the evening before supper, and that not every day. Her life seemed mysterious to him, and her entire taciturn being, her white face and stationary eyes, roused in him vague suggestions of something peculiar. He persuaded himself that she lived better and knew more than everybody else. A kindly feeling which he did not understand sprang up in his heart for this woman. Every day she appeared to him more and more beautiful.

Once he awoke at daybreak, and walked into the kitchen for

a drink. Suddenly he heard someone entering the door of the vestibule. He rushed to his room in fright, lay down, and covered himself with the blanket, trying to press himself to the chest as closely as possible. In a few minutes he stuck out his ear, and in the kitchen heard heavy steps, the rustle of a dress, and the voice of Rayisa Petrovna.

"Oh, oh, you – " she was saying.

Yevsey rose, walked to the door on tiptoe, and looked into the kitchen. The quiet woman was sitting at the window taking off her hat. Her face seemed whiter than ever, and tears streamed from her eyes. Her large body swayed, her hands moved slowly.

"I know you!" she said, shaking her head. She rose to her feet, supporting herself on the window-sill.

The bed in the master's room creaked. Yevsey quickly jumped back on his chest, lay down, and wrapped himself up.

"They've done something bad to her," he thought, full of keen pity. At the same time, however, he was inwardly glad of her tears. They brought this woman, who lived a secret nocturnal existence, nearer to him.

The next moment someone seemed to be passing by him with sly steps. He raised his head, and suddenly jumped from the chest, as if burned by the thin angry shout:

"Ugh! Go away!"

Then there was some hissing. The master in his nightgown hastily came out of the kitchen, stopped, and said to Yevsey in a whistling voice:

"Sleep! Sleep! What's the matter? Sleep!"

The next morning in the shop the old man asked him:

"Were you frightened last night?"

"Yes."

"She was in her cups. It happens to her sometimes."

Though the question trembled on his lips, Yevsey did not dare to ask what her occupation was. Some minutes later the old man asked:

"Do you like her?"

"I do."

"Well," said the master sternly, "even if you do, you ought to know that she's an extremely shrewd woman. She is silent, but bad. She's a sinner. Yes, that's what she is. Do you know what she does? She's a musician. She plays the piano." The old man accurately described a piano, and added didactically, "A person who plays the piano is called a pianist. And do you know what a house of ill fame is?"

From the talk of the furriers and glaziers in the yard Yevsey already knew something about disreputable resorts; but desiring to learn more he answered:

"I don't know."

The old man gave him a lengthy explanation in words very intelligible to Yevsey. He spoke with heat, occasionally spitting and wrinkling up his face to express his disgust of the abomination. Yevsey regarded the old man with his watery eyes, and for some reason did not believe in his aversion.

"So you see, every evening she plays in a house like that, and depraved women dance with drunken men to the accompaniment of her music. The men are all crooks, some of them, maybe, even murderers." Raspopov sighed in exhaustion, and wiped his perspiring face. "Don't trust her. You understand? I tell you, she's a cunning woman, and she's mean."

The boy believed everything the master told him about the piano and the house of ill fame, but failed to be impressed by a single word regarding the woman. In fact, everything the old man said of her merely increased the cautious, ever-watchful feeling of mistrust with which Yevsey treated his master, and by coloring Rayisa Petrovna with a still deeper tinge of the unusual, made her seem even more beautiful in his eyes.

Another object of Yevsey's curiosity besides Rayisa was Anatol, apprentice to the glazier, Kuzin, a thin, flat-nosed boy with ragged hair, dirty, always jolly, and always steeped in the odor of oil. He had a high ringing voice, which Yevsey liked very much to hear when he shouted:

"Wi-i-ndow pa-anes."

He spoke to Yevsey first. Yevsey was sweeping the stairway when he suddenly heard from below the loud question:

"Say there, kid, what government are you from?"

"From this government," answered Yevsey.

"I am from the government of Kostrom. How old are you?"

"Thirteen."

"I am, too. Come along with me."

"Where to?"

"To the river to go in bathing."

"I have to stay in the shop."

"To-day is Sunday."

"That doesn't make any difference."

"Well, go to the devil."

The glazier boy disappeared. Yevsey was not offended by his oath.

Anatol was off the whole day carrying a box of glass about the city, and usually returned home just as the shop was being closed. Then almost the entire evening his indefatigable voice, his laughter, whistling, and singing would rise from the yard. Everybody scolded him, yet all loved to meddle with him and laugh at his pranks. Yevsey was surprised at the boldness with which the ragged, snub-nosed boy behaved toward the grown-up folk, and he experienced a sense of envy when he saw the gold-embroidery girl run about the yard in chase of the jolly, insolent fellow. He was powerfully drawn to the glazier boy, for whom he found a place in his vague fancies of a clean and quiet life.

Once, after supper, Yevsey asked the master:

"May I go down in the yard?"

The old man consented reluctantly.

"Go, but don't stay long. Be sure not to stay long."

Another time when Yevsey put the same request the master added:

"No good will come of your being in the yard."

Yevsey ran down the stairway quickly, and seated himself in the shade to observe Anatol. The yard was small and hemmed in on all sides by the high houses. The tenants, workingmen and women, and servants, sat resting on the rubbish heaps against the walls. In the center of the ring Anatol was giving a performance.

"The furrier Zvorykin going to church!" he shouted.

To his astonishment Yevsey saw the little stout furrier with hanging lower lip and eyes painfully screwed up. Thrusting out his abdomen and leaning his head to one side, Anatol struggled toward the gate in short steps, reluctance depicted in his walk. The people sitting around laughed and shouted approval.

"Zvorykin returning from the saloon!"

Now Anatol swayed through the yard, his feet dragging along feebly, his arms hanging limp, a dull look in his wide-open eyes, his mouth gaping hideously yet comically. He stopped, tapped himself on the chest, and said in a wheezy pitiful voice:

"God – how satisfied I am with everything and everybody! Lord, how good and pleasant everything is to Thy servant, Yakov Ivanich. But the glazier Kuzin is a blackguard – a scamp before God, a jackass before all the people – that's true, God – "

The audience roared, but Yevsey did not laugh. He was oppressed by a twofold feeling of astonishment and envy. The desire to see this boy frightened and wronged mingled with the expectation of new pranks. He felt vexed and unpleasant because the glazier boy did not show up men who inflicted hurt, but merely funny men. Yevsey sat there with mouth agape and a

stupid expression on his face, his owlish eyes staring.

"Here goes glazier Kuzin!"

Before Yevsey appeared the gaunt red muzhik always half drunk, the sleeves of his dirty shirt tucked up, his right hand thrust in the breast of his apron, his left hand deliberately stroking his beard – Kuzin had a reddish forked beard. He was frowning and surly and moved slowly, like a heavy cart-load. Looking sidewise he screeched in a cracked, hoarse voice:

"You are carrying on again, you heretic? Am I to listen to this nonsense for long? You blasted, confounded – "

"Skinflint Raspopov!" announced Anatol.

The smooth, sharp little figure of Yevsey's master crept past him moving his feet noiselessly. He worked his nose as if smelling something, nodded his head quickly, and kept tugging at the tuft on his chin with his little hand. In this characterization something loathsome, pitiful, and laughable became quite apparent to Yevsey, whose vexation rose. He felt sure his master was not such as the young glazier represented him to be.

Next, Anatol took to mimicking members of the audience. Inexhaustible, stimulated by the applause, he tinkled until late at night like a little bell, evoking kindly, cheerful laughter. Sometimes the man who was touched would rush to catch him, and a noisy chase about the yard would ensue.

Yevsey sighed. Anatol noticed him, and pulled him by the hand into the middle of the yard, where he introduced him to

the audience.

"Here he is – sugar and soap. Skinflint Raspopov's cousin morel."

Turning the boy's little figure in all directions, he poured forth a flowing stream of strange comic words about his master, about Rayisa Petrovna, and about Yevsey himself.

"Let me go!" Yevsey quietly demanded, trying to tear his hand from Anatol's strong grip, in the meantime listening attentively in the endeavor to understand the hints, the filth of which he felt. Whenever Yevsey struggled hard to tear himself away, the audience, usually the women, said lazily to Anatol:

"Let him go."

For some reason their intercession was disagreeable to Yevsey. It exasperated Anatol, too, who began to push and pinch his victim and challenge him to a fight. Some of the men urged the boys on.

"Well – fight! See which will do the other up."

The women objected:

"A fight! Thanks, we're not interested. Don't."

Yevsey again felt something unpleasant in these words.

Finally Anatol scornfully pushed Yevsey aside.

"Oh, you kid!"

The next morning Yevsey met Anatol outside the house carrying his box of glass, and suddenly, without desiring to do it, he said to him:

"Why do you make fun of me?"

The glazier boy looked at him.

"What of it?"

Yevsey was unable to reply.

"Do you want to fight?" asked Anatol again. "Come to our shed. I will wait for you until evening."

He spoke calmly and in a business-like way.

"No, I don't want to fight," replied Yevsey quietly.

"Then you needn't! I'd lick you anyway," said the glazier, and added with assurance, "I certainly would."

Yevsey sighed. He could not understand this boy, but he longed to understand him. So he asked a second time:

"I say, why do you make fun of me?"

Anatol apparently felt awkward. He winked his lively eyes, smiled, and suddenly shouted in anger:

"Go to the devil! What are you bothering me about? I'll give it to you so – "

Yevsey quickly ran into the shop, and for a whole day felt the itching of an undeserved insult. This did not put an end to his inclination for Anatol, but it forced him to leave the yard whenever Anatol noticed him, and he dismissed the glazier boy from the sphere of his dreams.

CHAPTER IV

Soon after this unsuccessful attempt to draw near to a human being Yevsey was one evening awakened by talking in his master's room. He listened and thought he distinguished Rayisa's voice. Desiring to convince himself of her presence there he rose and quietly slipped over to the tightly closed door, and put his eyes to the keyhole.

His sleepy glance first perceived the light of the candle, which blinded him. Then he saw the large rotund body of the woman on the black sofa. She lay face upward entirely naked. Her hair was spread over her breast, and her long fingers slowly weaved it into a braid. The light quivered on her fair body. Clean and bright, it seemed like a light cloud which rocked and breathed. It was very beautiful. She was saying something. Yevsey could not catch the words, but heard only the singing, tired, plaintive voice. The master was sitting in his nightgown upon a chair by the sofa, and was pouring wine into a glass with a trembling hand. The tuft of grey hair on his chin also trembled. He had removed his glasses, and his face was loathsome.

"Yes, yes, yes! Hm! What a woman you are!"

Yevsey moved away from the door, lay down on his bed, and thought:

"They have gotten married."

He pitied Rayisa Petrovna for having become the wife of a

man who spoke ill of her, and he pitied her because it must have been very cold for her to lie naked on the leather sofa. An evil thought flashed through his mind, which confirmed the words of the old man about her, but Yevsey anxiously drove it away.

The evening of the next day Rayisa Petrovna brought in supper as always, and said in her usual voice:

"I am going."

The master, too, spoke to her in his usual voice, dry and careless.

Several days passed by. The relation between the master and Rayisa did not change, and Yevsey began to think he had seen the naked woman in a dream. He was very reluctant to believe his master's words about her.

Once his Uncle Piotr appeared unexpectedly and, so it seemed to Yevsey, needlessly. He had grown grey, wrinkled, and shorter.

"I am getting blind, Orphan," he said sipping tea from a saucer noisily and smiling with his wet eyes. "I cannot work anymore, so I will have to go begging. Yashka is unmanageable. He wants to go to the city, and if I don't let him, he will run away. That's the kind of a chap he is."

Everything the blacksmith said was wearisome and difficult to listen to. He seemed to have grown duller. He looked guilty, and Yevsey felt awkward and ashamed for him in the presence of his master. When he got ready to go, Yevsey quietly thrust three rubles into his hand, and saw him out with pleasure.

Though Yevsey endeavored as before to please his master in

every way, he became afraid to agree with him. The bookshop after a time aroused a dim suspicion by its resemblance to a tomb tightly packed with dead books. They were all loose, chewed up, and sucked out, and emanated a mouldy, putrid odor. Few were sold; which did not surprise Yevsey. What stirred his curiosity was the attitude of the master to the purchasers and the books.

The old man would take a book in his hand, carefully turn over its musty pages, stroke the covers with his dark fingers, smile quietly, and nod his head. He seemed to fondle the book as though it were alive, to play with it as with a kitten or a puppy. While reading a book he carried on with it a quiet, querulous conversation, like Uncle Piotr with the furnace-fire. His lips moved in good-humored derision, his head kept nodding, and now and then he mumbled and laughed.

"So, so – yes – hmm – see – what's that? Ha, ha! Ah, the impudence – I understand, I understand – it'll never come about – no-o-o – ha, ha!"

These strange exclamations coming from the old man as if he were disputing with somebody both astonished and frightened Yevsey, and pointed to the secret duplicity in his master's life.

"You don't read books," said the master to him once. "That's good. Books are always lechery, the child of a prostituted mind. They deal with everything, they excite the imagination, and create useless agitation and disturbance. Formerly we used to have good historical books, stories of quiet people about the past. But now every book wants to inspire you with hostility to life

and to lay bare man, who ought always to be covered up both in the flesh and in the spirit in order to defend him from the devil, from curiosity, and from the imagination, which destroys faith. It's only in old age that books do no harm to a man, when he is guarded against their violence by his experience."

Though Yevsey did not understand these talks he remembered them well, and though they met with no response in him, they confirmed his sense of mystery – the mystery that invested all human life, as it were, in a hostile envelope.

When he sold a book, the old man regarded it with regret, and fairly smelled the purchaser, with whom he talked in an extremely loud and rapid voice. Sometimes, however, he lowered his voice to a whisper, when his dark glasses would fix themselves upon the face of the customer. Often on seeing to the door a student who had bought a book, he followed him with a smile, and nodded his head queerly. Once he shook his finger at the back of a man who had just left, a short, handsome fellow with fine black tendrils on a pale face. The largest number of customers were students and people having a certain resemblance to them. Sometimes old men came. These rummaged long among the books, and haggled sharply over the prices.

An almost daily visitor was a man who wore a chimney-pot and on his right hand a large gold ring set with a stone. He had a broad pimply nose on a stout flat shaven face. When Dorimedont Lukin played chess with the master, he snuffled loud and tugged

at his ear with his left hand. He often brought books and paper parcels, over which the master nodded his head approvingly and smiled quietly. He would then hide them in the table, or in a corner on a shelf in back of him. Yevsey did not see his master pay for these books, but he did see him sell them.

One of the students began to visit the shop more frequently than the others. He was a tall, blue-eyed young man with a carrot-colored mustache and a cap stuck back on his neck, leaving bare a large white forehead. He spoke in a thick voice, laughed aloud, and always bought many old journals.

Once the master pointed out a book to him that Dorimedont had brought; and while the student glanced through it, the old man told him something in a quick whisper.

"Interesting!" exclaimed the student, smiling amiably. "Ah, you old sinner, aren't you afraid, eh?"

The master sighed and answered:

"If you absolutely feel it's the truth, you ought to help it along in whatever little ways you can."

They whispered a long time. Finally the student said aloud:

"Well, then, agreed! Remember my address."

The old man took the address down on a piece of paper, and when Dorimedont came and asked, "Well, what's new, Matvey Matveyevich?" the master handed him the address, and said with a smile:

"There's the new thing."

"S-so – Nikodim Arkhangelsky," read Dorimedont. "That's

business. We'll look up this Nikodim."

Sometime after, upon sitting down to play chess, he announced to the master:

"That Nikodim turned out to be a fish with plenty of roe. We found something of pretty nearly everything in his place."

"Return the books to me," said the master.

"Certainly," and Dorimedont snuffled.

The blue-eyed student never appeared again. The short young man with the black mustache also vanished after the master had given Dorimedont his address. All this was strange. It fed the boy's suspicions, and indicated some mystery and enigma.

Once, when the master was absent from the shop, Yevsey, while dusting the shelves, saw the books brought by Dorimedont. They were small, soiled, and ragged. He carefully and quickly put them back in the same order, scenting something dangerous in them. Books in general did not arouse his interest. He tried to read, but never succeeded in concentrating his mind, which, already burdened by a mass of observation, dwelt upon minutiæ. His thoughts drifted apart, and finally disappeared evaporating like a thin stream of water upon a stone on a hot day. When he worked and stirred about he was altogether incapable of thinking; the motion, as it were, tore the cobweb of his ideas. The boy did his work slowly and accurately, like an automaton, without putting anything of himself into it, and scarcely understanding its meaning.

When he was free and sat motionless he was carried away

by a pleasant sensation of flight in a transparent mist, which enveloped the whole of life and softened everything, changing the boisterous reality into a quiet, sweetly sounding half-slumber.

When Yevsey was in this mood the days passed rapidly, in a flight not to be stayed. His external life was monotonous. Thought-stirring events happened rarely, and his brain insensibly became clogged with the dust of the work-day. He seldom went about in the city, for he did not like it. The ceaseless motion tired his eyes, the noise filled his head with heavy, dulling confusion. The endless city at first seemed like a monster in a fairy-tale, displaying a hundred greedy mouths, bellowing with hundreds of insatiable throats. But when Yevsey regarded the varied tumult of the street life he saw in it merely painful and wearisome monotony.

In the morning when he tidied his master's room, Yevsey put his head out of the window for several minutes, and looked down to the bottom of the deep, narrow street. Everywhere he saw the same people, and already knew what each of them would be doing in an hour or the next day. The cabmen drove in the same indolent fashion, and sat on the box each like the other; the shop boys, all of whom he knew, were unpleasant. Their insolence was a source of danger. Every man seemed chained to his business like a dog to his kennel. Occasionally something new flashed by, or whispered to him, but it was difficult for him to see and understand it in the thick mass of all that was familiar, ordinary, and unpleasant.

Even the churches in the city did not please him. They were not cosy, nor bright, but close and penetrated by extremely powerful odors of incense, oil, and sweat. Yevsey could not bear strong smells. They made his head turn, and filled him with confused anxious desires.

Sometimes on a holiday the master closed the shop, and took Yevsey through the city. They walked long and slowly. The old man pointed out the houses of the rich and eminent people, and told of their lives. His recitals were replete with accounts of women who ran away from their husbands, of dead people, and of funerals. He talked about them in a dry solemn voice, criticizing and condemning everything. He grew animated only when telling how and from what this or that man died. In his opinion, apparently, matters of disease and death were the most edifying and interesting of earthly subjects.

At the end of every walk he treated Yevsey to tea in a tavern, where musical machines played. Here everybody knew the old man, and behaved toward him with timid respect. Yevsey grown tired, his brain dizzied by the cloud of heavy odors, would fall into drowsy silence under the rattle and din of the music.

Once, however, the master took him to a house which contained numerous articles of gold and silver, marvellous weapons, and garments of silk brocade. Suddenly the mother's forgotten tales began to beat in the boy's breast, and a winged hope trembled in his heart. He walked silently through the rooms for a long time, disconcertedly blinking his eyes, which burned

greedily.

When they returned home he asked the master:

"Whose are they?"

"They are public property – the Czar's," the old man explained impressively.

The boy put more questions.

"Who wore such coats and sabres?"

"Czars, boyars, and various imperial persons."

"There are no such people to-day?"

"How so? Of course there are. It would be impossible to be without them. Only now they dress differently."

"Why differently?"

"More cheaply. Formerly Russia was richer. But now it has been robbed by various foreign people, Jews, Poles, and Germans."

Raspopov talked for a long time about how nobody loved Russia, how all robbed it, and wished it every kind of harm. When he spoke much Yevsey ceased to believe him or understand him. Nevertheless he asked:

"Am I an imperial person, too?"

"In a sense. In our country all are imperial people, all are subjects of the Czar. The whole earth is God's, and the whole of Russia is the Czar's."

Before Yevsey's eyes handsome, stately personages in glittering garb circled in a bright, many-colored round dance. They belonged to another fabulous life, which remained with

him after he had lain down to sleep. He saw himself in this life clad in a sky-blue robe embroidered with gold, with red boots of Morocco leather on his feet. Rayisa was there, too, in brocade and adorned with precious gems.

"So it will pass away," he thought.

To-day this thought gave rise not to hope in a different future but to quiet regret for the past.

On the other side of the door he heard the dry even voice of his master:

"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain – "

CHAPTER V

One day after closing the shop Yevsey and his master went to the yard where they were met by an anxious ringing shout. It came from Anatol.

"I won't do it again, dear uncle, never!"

Yevsey started, and instinctively exclaimed in quiet triumph:

"Aha!"

It was pleasant to hear the shouts of fear and pain coming from the breast of the cheerful boy, who was everybody's favorite.

"May I stay here in the yard?" Yevsey asked the master.

"We must get our supper. But I'll stay here, too, and see how they punish a rascally good-for-nothing."

The people had gathered at the door of the brick shed behind the stairway. The sound of heavy blows and the wailing voice of Anatol issued from the shed.

"Little uncle, I didn't do it. Oh, God! I won't do it, I won't! Stop, for Christ's sake!"

"That's right! Give it to him!" said watchmaker Yakubov, lighting a cigarette.

The squint-eyed embroiderer Zina upheld the tall, yellow-faced watchmaker.

"Perhaps we shall have peace after this. You couldn't have a single quiet moment in the yard."

Raspopov turned to Yevsey, and said:

"They say he's a wonder at imitating people."

"Of course," rejoined the furrier's cook. "Such a little devil! He makes sport of everybody."

A dull scraping sound came from the shed, as if a sack filled with something soft were being dragged over the old boards of the floor. At the same time the people heard the panting, hoarse voice of Kuzin and Anatol's cries, which now grew feebler and less frequent.

"Forgive me! Oh! Help me – I won't do it again – Oh, God!"

His words became indistinct and flowed together into a thick choking groan. Yevsey trembled, remembering the pain of the beatings he used to receive. The talk of the onlookers stirred a confused feeling in him. It was fearful to stand among people who only the day before had willingly and gaily taken delight in the lively little fellow, and who now looked on with pleasure while he was being beaten. At this moment these half-sick people, surly and worn out with work, seemed more comprehensible to him. He believed that now none of them shammed, but were sincere in the curiosity with which they witnessed the torture of a human being. He felt a little sorry for Anatol, yet it was pleasant to hear his groans. The thought passed through his mind that now he would become quieter and more companionable.

Suddenly Nikolay the furrier appeared, a short black curly-headed man with long arms. As always daring and respecting nobody, he thrust the people aside, walked into the shed, and from there his coarse voice was heard crying out twice:

"Stop! Get away!"

Everybody suddenly moved back from the door. Kuzin bolted out of the shed, seated himself on the ground, clutched his head with both hands, and opening his eyes wide, bawled hoarsely:

"Police!"

"Let's get away from evil, Yevsey," said the master withdrawing to one side.

The boy retreated to a corner by the stairway, and stood there looking on.

Nikolay came out of the shed with the little trampled body of the glazier's boy hanging limply over his arm. The furrier laid him on the ground then he straightened himself and shouted:

"Water, women, you rotten carrion!"

Zina and the cook ran off for water.

Kuzin lolling his head back snorted dully.

"Murder! Police!"

Nikolay turned to him, and gave him a kick on the breast which laid him flat on his back.

"You dirty dogs!" he shouted, the whites of his black eyes flashing. "You dirty dogs! A child is being killed, and it's a show to you! I'll smash every one of your ugly mugs!"

Oaths from all sides answered him, but nobody dared to approach him.

"Let's go," said the master, taking Yevsey by the hand.

As they walked away they saw Kuzin run noiselessly in a stooping position to the gates.

"To call the police," the master explained to Yevsey.

When Yevsey was alone he felt that his jealousy of Anatol had left him. He strained his slow mind to explain to himself what he had seen. It merely *seemed* that the people liked Anatol, who amused them. In reality it was not so. All people enjoyed fighting, enjoyed looking on while others fought, enjoyed being cruel. Nikolay had interceded for Anatol because he liked to beat Kuzin, and actually did beat him on almost every holiday. Very bold and strong he could lick any man in the house. In his turn he was beaten by the police. So to sum up, whether you are quiet or daring, you'll be beaten and insulted all the same.

Several days passed. The tenants talking in the yard, said that the glazier boy, who had been taken to the hospital, had gone insane. Then Yevsey remembered how the boy's eyes had burned when he gave his performances, how vehement his gestures and motions had been, and how quickly the expression of his face had changed. He thought with dread that perhaps Anatol had always been insane. He soon forgot the glazier boy.

CHAPTER VI

In the rainy nights of autumn short broken sounds came from the roof under Yevsey's window. They disquieted him and prevented him from sleeping. On one such night he heard the angry exclamations of his master:

"You vile woman!"

Rayisa Petrovna answered as always in a low singing voice:

"I cannot permit you, Matvey Matveyevich."

"You low creature! Look at the money I am paying you!"

The door to the master's room was open, and the voices came in clearly to Yevsey. The fine rain sang a tearful song outside the window. The wind crept over the roof, panting like a large homeless bird fatigued by the bad weather and softly flapping its wet wings against the panes. The boy sat up in bed, put his hands around his knees, and listened shivering.

"Give me back the twenty-five rubles, you thief!"

"I do not deny it. Dorimedont Lukin gave me the money."

"Aha! You see, you hussy!"

"No, permit me – when you asked me to spy on the man – "

"Hush! What are you screaming for?"

Now the door was closed, but even through the wall Yevsey could hear almost everything that was said.

"Remember, you vile woman, you, that you are in my hands," said the master, rapping his fingers on the table. "And if I notice

that you've struck up relations with Dorimedont – "

The woman's voice was warm and flexible like the supple movements of a kitten, and it stole in softly, coiled around the old man's malicious words, wiping them from Yevsey's memory.

The woman must be right. Her composure and the master's entire relation to her convinced the boy that she was. Yevsey was now in his fifteenth year, and his inclination for this gentle and beautiful woman began to be marked by a pleasant sense of agitation. Since he met Rayisa very rarely and for only a minute at a time, he always looked into her face with a secret feeling of bashful joy. Her kindly way of speaking to him caused a grateful tumult in his breast, and drew him to her more and more powerfully.

While still in the village he had learned the hard truth of the relation between man and woman. The city bespattered this truth with mud, but it did not sully the boy himself. His being a timid nature, he did not dare to believe what was said about women, and such talk instead of exciting any feeling of temptation aroused painful aversion. Now, as he was sitting up in bed, Yevsey remembered Rayisa's amiable smile, her kind words; and carried away by the thought of them he had no time to lie down before the door to the master's room opened, and she stood before him, half dressed, with loose hair, her hand pressed to her breast. He grew frightened and faint. The woman wanted to open the door again to the old man's room and had already put out her hand, but suddenly smiling she withdrew it and shook

a threatening finger at Yevsey. Then she walked into her room. Yevsey fell asleep with a smile.

In the morning as he was sweeping the kitchen floor he saw Rayisa at the door of her room. He straightened himself up before her with the broom in his hands.

"Good morning," she said. "Will you take coffee with me?"

Rejoiced and embarrassed, the boy replied:

"I haven't washed yet. One minute."

In a few minutes he was sitting at the table in her room, seeing nothing but the fair face with the dark brows, and the good, moist eyes with the smile in them.

"Do you like me?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"You are good and beautiful."

He answered as in a dream. It was strange to hear her questions. Her eyes fixed upon him vanquished him. They must know everything that went on in his soul.

"And do you like Matvey Matveyevich?" Rayisa asked in a slow undertone.

"No," Yevsey answered simply.

"Is that so? He loves you. He told me so himself."

"No," rejoined the boy.

Rayisa raised her brows, moved a little nearer to him, and asked:

"Don't you believe me?"

"I believe you, but I don't believe my master, not a bit."

"Why? Why?" she asked in a quick whisper, moving still nearer to him. The warm gleam of her look penetrated the boy's heart, and stirred within him little thoughts never yet expressed to anybody. He quickly uttered them to this woman.

"I am afraid of him. I am afraid of everybody except you."

"Why are you afraid?"

"You know."

"What do I know?"

"You, too, are wronged, not by one master. I saw you cry. You were not crying then because you had been drinking. I understand. I understand much. Only I do not understand everything together. I see everything separately in its tiniest details, but side by side with them something different, not even resembling them. I understand this, too. But what is it all for? One thing is at variance with the other, and they do not go together. There is one kind of life and another besides."

"What are you talking about?" Rayisa asked in amazement.

"That's true."

For several moments they looked at each other in silence. The boy's heart beat quickly. His cheeks grew red with embarrassment.

"Well, now, go," said Rayisa quietly arising. "Go, or else he will ask you why you stayed away so long. Don't tell him you were with me. You won't, will you?"

Yevsey walked away filled with the tender sound of the

singing voice, and warmed by the sympathetic look. The woman's words rang in his memory enveloping his heart in quiet joy.

That day was strangely long. Over the roofs of the houses and the Circle hung a grey cloud. The day, weary and dull, seemed to have become entangled in its grey mass, and, like the cloud, to have halted over the city. After dinner two customers entered the shop, one a stooping lean man with a pretty, grizzled mustache, the other a man with a red beard and spectacles. Both pottered about among the books long and minutely. The lean man kept whistling softly through his quivering mustache, while the red-bearded man spoke with the master.

Yevsey knew beforehand just what the master would say and how he would say it. The boy was bored. He was impatient for the evening to come, and he tried to relieve the tedium by listening to the words of the old man Raspopov, and verifying his conjectures while he arranged in a row the books the customers had selected.

"You are buying these books for a library?" the old man inquired affably.

"For the library of the Teachers' Association," replied the red-bearded man. "Why?"

"Now he'll praise them up," thought Yevsey, and he was not mistaken.

"You show extremely good judgment in your choice. It is pleasant to see a correct estimate of books."

"Pleasant?"

"Now he'll smile," thought Yevsey.

"Yes, indeed," said the old man, smiling graciously. "You get used to these books, so that you get to love them. You see they aren't dead wood, but products of the mind. So when a customer also respects books, it is pleasant. Our average customer is a comical fellow. He comes and asks, 'Have you any interesting books?' It's all the same to him. He seeks amusement, play, but no benefit. But occasionally someone will suddenly ask for a prohibited book."

"How's that? Prohibited?" asked the man screwing up his small eyes.

"Prohibited from libraries – published abroad, or secretly in Russia."

"Are such books for sale?"

"Now he will speak real low." Again Yevsey was not mistaken.

Fixing his glasses upon the face of the red-bearded man, the master lowered his voice almost to a whisper.

"Why not? Sometimes you buy a whole library, and you come across everything there, everything."

"Have you such books now?"

"Several."

"Let me see them, please."

"Only I must ask you not to say anything about them. You see it's not for the sake of profit, but as a courtesy. One likes to do favors now and then."

The stooping man stopped whistling, adjusted his spectacles,

and looked attentively at the old man.

To-day the master was utterly loathsome to Yevsey, who kept looking at him with cold, gloomy malice. And now when Raspopov went over to the corner of the shop to show the red-bearded man some books there, the boy suddenly and quite involuntarily said in a whisper to the stooping customer:

"Don't buy those books."

Yevsey trembled with fright the moment he had spoken. The man raised his glasses, and peered into the boy's face with his bright eyes.

"Why?"

With a great effort Yevsey answered after a pause:

"I don't know."

The customer readjusted his glasses, moved away from him, and began to whistle louder, looking sidewise at the old man. Then he raised his hand, which made him straighter and taller, stroked his grey mustache, and without haste walked up to his companion, from whom he took the book. He looked it over, and dropped it on the table. Yevsey followed his movements expecting some calamity to befall himself. But the stooping man merely touched his companion's arm, and said simply and calmly:

"Well, let's go."

"But the books?" exclaimed the other.

"Let's go. I won't buy any books here."

The red-bearded man looked at him, then at the master, his

small eyes winking rapidly. Then he walked to the door, and out into the street.

"You don't want the books?" demanded Raspopov.

Yevsey realized by his tone that the old man was surprised.

"I don't," answered the customer, his eyes fixed upon the face of the master.

Raspopov shrank. He went to his chair, and suddenly said with a wave of his hand in an unnaturally loud voice, which was new to Yevsey:

"As you please, of course. Still – excuse me, I don't understand."

"What don't you understand?" asked the stooping man, smiling.

"You looked through the books for two hours or more, agreed on a price, and suddenly – why?" cried the old man in excitement.

"Well, because I recollected your disgusting face. You haven't given up the ghost yet? What a pity!"

The stooping man pronounced his words slowly, not loud, and precisely. He left the shop deliberately, with a heavy tread.

For a minute the old man looked after him, then tore himself from where he was standing, and advanced upon Yevsey with short steps.

"Follow him, find out where he lives," he said in a rapid whisper, clutching the boy's shoulder. "Go! Don't let him see you! You understand? Quick!"

Yevsey swayed from side to side, and would have fallen, had

the old man not held him firmly on his feet. He felt a void in his breast, and his master's words crackled there drily like peas in a rattle.

"What are you trembling about, you donkey? I tell you – "

When Yevsey felt his master's hand release his shoulder, he ran to the door.

"Stop, you fool!" Yevsey stood still. "Where are you going? Why, you won't be able – oh, my God! Get out of my sight!"

Yevsey darted into a corner. It was the first time he had seen his master so violent. He realized that his annoyance was tinged with much fear, a feeling very familiar to himself; and notwithstanding the fact that his own soul was desolate with fear, it pleased him to see Raspopov's alarm.

The little dusty old man threw himself about in the shop like a rat in a trap. He ran to the door, thrust his head into the street, stretched his neck out, and again turned back into the shop. His hands groped over his body impotently, and he mumbled and hissed, shaking his head till his glasses jumped from his nose.

"Umm, well, well – the dirty blackguard – the idea! The dirty blackguard! I'm alive – alive!" Several minutes later he shouted to Yevsey. "Close the shop!"

On entering his room the old man crossed himself. He drew a deep breath, and flung himself on the black sofa. Usually so sleek and smooth, he was now all ruffled. His face had grown wrinkled, his clothes had suddenly become too large for him, and hung in folds from his agitated body.

"Tell Rayisa to give me some peppered brandy, a large glassful." When Yevsey brought the brandy the master rose, drank it down in one gulp, and opening his mouth wide looked a long time into Yevsey's face.

"Do you understand that he insulted me?"

"Yes."

"And do you understand why?"

"No."

The old man raised his hand, and silently shook his finger.

"I know him – I know a great deal," he said in a broken voice.

Removing his black cap he rubbed his bare skull with his hands, looked about the room, again touched his head with his hands, and lay down on the sofa.

Rayisa Petrovna brought in supper.

"Are you tired?" she asked as she set the table.

"It seems I am a little under the weather. Fever, I think. Give me another glass of brandy. Sit down with us. It's too early for you to go."

He talked rapidly. Rayisa sat down, the old man raised his glasses, and scanned her suspiciously from head to foot. At supper he suddenly lifted his spoon and said:

"Impossible for me to eat. I'll tell you about something that happened." Bending over the plate he was silent for some time as if considering whether or not to speak of the incident. Then he began with a sigh. "Suppose a man has a wife, his own house, not a large house, a garden, and a vegetable garden, a cook, all

acquired by hard labor without sparing himself. Then comes a young man, sickly, consumptive, who rents a room in the garret, and takes meals with the master and mistress."

Rayisa listened calmly and attentively. Yevsey felt bored. While looking into the woman's face he stubbornly endeavored to comprehend what had happened in the shop that day. He felt as if he had unexpectedly struck a match and set fire to something old and long dried, which began to burn alarmingly and almost consumed him in its sudden malicious blaze.

"I must keep quiet," he thought.

"Were you the man?" asked Rayisa.

Raspopov quickly raised his head.

"Why I?" he asked. He struck his breast, and exclaimed with angry heat, "The question here is, not about the man but about the law. Ought a man uphold the law? Yes, he ought. Without law it is impossible to live. You people are stupid, because man is in every respect like a beast. He is greedy, malicious, cruel."

The old man rose a little from his armchair, and shouted his words in Rayisa's face. His bald pate reddened. Yevsey listened to his exclamations without believing in their sincerity. He reflected on how people are bound together and enmeshed by some unseen threads, and how if one thread is accidentally pulled, they twist and turn, rage and cry out. So he said to himself:

"I must be more careful."

The old man continued:

"Words bring no harm if you do not listen to them. But when

the fellow in the garret began to trouble her heart with his ideas, she, a stupid young woman, and that friend of his who – who to-day – " The old man suddenly came to a stop, and looked at Yevsey. "What are you thinking about?" he asked in a low suspicious tone.

Yevsey rose and answered in embarrassment:

"I am not thinking."

"Well, then, go. You've had your supper. So go. Clear the table."

Desiring to vex his master Yevsey was intentionally slow in removing the dishes from the table.

"Go, I tell you!" the old man screamed in a squeaking voice. "Oh, what a fool you are!"

Yevsey went to his room, and seated himself on the chest. Having left the door slightly ajar, he could hear his master's rapid talk.

"They came for him one night. She got frightened, began to shiver, understood then on what road these people had put her. I told her – "

"So it was you?" Rayisa asked aloud.

The old man now began to speak in a low voice, almost a whisper. Then Yevsey heard Rayisa's clear voice:

"Did he die?"

"Well, what of it?" the old man shouted excitedly. "You can't cure a man of consumption. He would have died at any rate."

Yevsey sat upon the chest listening to the low rasping sound

of his talk.

"What are you sitting there for?"

The boy turned around, and saw the master's head thrust through the door.

"Lie down and sleep."

The master withdrew his head, and the door was tightly closed.

"Who died?" Yevsey thought as he lay in bed.

The dry words of the old man came fluttering down and fluttering down, like autumn leaves upon a grave. The boy felt more and more distinctly that he lived in a circle of dread mystery. Sometimes the old man grew angry, and shouted; which prevented the boy from thinking or sleeping. He was sorry for Rayisa, who kept peacefully silent in answer to his ejaculations. At last Yevsey heard her go to her own room. Perfect stillness then prevailed in the master's room for several minutes, after which Raspopov's voice sounded again, but now even as usual:

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sit – "

With these reassuring words ringing in his ears Yevsey fell asleep.

The next morning Rayisa again called him to her.

"What happened in the shop yesterday?" she asked with a smile when he had seated himself.

Yevsey told her everything in detail, and she laughed contentedly and happily. She suddenly drew her brows together and asked in an undertone:

"Do you understand who he is?"

"No."

"A spy," she whispered, her eyes growing wide with fright.

Yevsey was silent. She rose and went to him.

"What a tragic fellow you are!" she said thoughtfully and kindly, stroking his head. "You don't understand anything. You're so droll. What was the stuff you told me the other day? What other life?"

The question animated him; he wanted very much to talk about it. Raising his head and looking into her face with the fathomless stare of blind eyes, he began to speak rapidly.

"Of course there's another life. From where else do the fairy-tales come? And not only the fairy-tales, but – "

The woman smiled, and rumpled his hair with her warm fingers.

"You little stupid! They'll seize you," she added seriously, even sternly, "they'll lead you wherever they want to, and do with you whatever they want to. That will be your life."

Yevsey nodded his head, silently assenting to Rayisa's words.

She sighed and looked through the window upon the street. When she turned to Yevsey, her face surprised him. It was red, and her eyes had become smaller and darker.

"If you were smarter," she said in an indolent, hollow voice, "or more alert, maybe I would tell you something. But you're such a queer chappie there's no use telling you anything, and your master ought to be choked to death. There, now, go tell him what

I've said – you tell him everything."

Yevsey rose from the table, feeling as if a cold stream of insult had been poured over him. He inclined his head and mumbled:

"I'll never tell anything about you – to nobody. I love you very much, and – even if you choked him, I wouldn't tell anybody. That's how I love you."

He shuffled to the door, but the woman's hands caught him like warm white wings, and turned him back.

"Did I insult you?" he heard. "Well, excuse me. If you knew what a devil he is, how he tortures me, and how I hate him. Dear me!" She pressed his face tightly to her breast, and kissed him twice. "So you love me?"

"Yes," whispered Yevsey, feeling himself turning around lightly in a hot whirlpool of unknown bliss.

"How?"

"I don't know. I love you very much."

Laughing and fondling him, she said:

"You'll tell me about it. Ah, you little baby!"

Going down the stairs he heard her satisfied laugh, and smiled in response. His head turned, his entire body was suffused with sweet lassitude. He walked quietly and cautiously, as if afraid of spilling the hot joy of his heart.

"Why have you been so long?" asked the master.

Yevsey looked at him, but saw only a confused, formless blur.

"I have a headache," he answered slowly.

"And I, too. What does it mean? Has Rayisa gotten up?"

"Yes."

"Did she speak to you?"

"Yes."

"What about?" the master asked hastily.

The question was like a slap in Yevsey's face. He recovered, however, and answered indifferently:

"She said I hadn't swept the kitchen clean."

A few moments later Yevsey heard the old man's low dejected exclamation:

"That woman is a dangerous creature! Yes, yes! She tries to find everything out, and makes you tell her whatever she wants."

Yevsey looked at him from a distance, and thought:

"I wish you were dead."

The days passed rapidly, fused in a jumbled mass, as if joy were lying in wait ahead. But every day grew more and more exciting.

CHAPTER VII

The old man became sulky and taciturn. He peered around strangely, suddenly burst into a passion, shouted, and howled dismally, like a sick dog. He constantly complained of a pain in his head and nausea. At meals he smelt of the food suspiciously, crumbled the bread into small pieces with his shaking fingers, and held the tea and brandy up to the light. His nightly scoldings of Rayisa, in which he threatened to bring ruin upon her, became more and more frequent. But she answered all his outcries with soft composure.

Yevsey's love for the woman waxed stronger, and his sad, embittered heart was filled with hatred of his master.

"Don't I understand what you're up to, you low-down woman?" raged the old man. "What does my sickness come from? What are you poisoning me with?"

"What are you saying? What are you saying?" exclaimed the woman, her calm voice quivering. "You are sick from old age."

"You lie! You lie!"

"And from fright besides."

"You miserable creature, keep quiet!"

"You suffer from the weight of years."

"You lie!"

"And it's time you thought of death."

"Aha! That's what you want! You lie! You hope in vain! I'm

not the only one to know all about you. I told Dorimedont Lukin about you." He burst again into a loud tearful whine. "I know he's your paramour. It's he who talked you over into poisoning me. You think you'll have it easier with him, don't you? You won't, you won't!"

Once at night, during a similar scene, Rayisa left the old man's room with a candle in her hand, half dressed, white and voluptuous. She walked as in a dream, swaying from side to side and treading uncertainly with her bare feet. Her eyes were half closed, the fingers of her out-stretched right hand clawed the air convulsively. The little smoky red tongue of the candle inclined toward her breast, almost touching her shirt. It illuminated her lips parted in exhaustion and sickness, and set her teeth agleam.

After she had passed Yevsey without noticing him, he instinctively followed her to the door of the kitchen, where the sight that met his gaze numbed him with horror. The woman was holding a large kitchen knife in her hand, testing its sharp edge with her finger. She bent her head, and put her hand to her full neck near the ear, where she sought something with her long fingers. Then she drew a breath, and quietly returned the knife to the table. Her hands fell at her sides.

Yevsey clutched the doorpost. At the sound the woman started and turned.

"What do you want?" she demanded in an angry whisper.

Yevsey answered breathlessly.

"He'll die soon. Why are you doing that to yourself? Please

don't do it. You mustn't."

"Hush!"

She put her hands on Yevsey as if for support, and walked back into the old man's room.

Soon the master became unable to leave his bed. His voice grew feeble, and frequently a rattle sounded in his throat. His face darkened, his weak neck failed to sustain his head, and the grey tuft on his chin stuck up oddly. The physician came every day. Each time Rayisa gave the sick man medicine, he groaned hoarsely:

"With poison, eh? Oh, oh, you wicked thing!"

"If you don't take it, I'll throw it away."

"No, no! Leave it! and to-morrow I'll call the police. I'll ask them what you are poisoning me with."

Yevsey stood at the door, sticking first his eye, then his ear to the chink. He was ready to cry out in amazement at Rayisa's patience. His pity for her rose in his breast more and more irrepressibly, and an ever keener desire for the death of the old man. It was difficult for him to breathe, as on a dry icy-cold day.

The bed creaked. Yevsey heard the thin sounds of a spoon knocking against glass.

"Mix it, mix it! You carrion!" mumbled the master.

Once he ordered Rayisa to carry him to the sofa. She picked him up in her arms as if he were a baby. His yellow head lay upon her rosy shoulder, and his dark, shrivelled feet dangled limply in the folds of her white skirt.

"God!" wailed the old man, lolling back on the broad sofa. "God, why hast Thou given over Thy servant into the hands of the wicked? Are my sins more grievous than their sins, O Lord? And can it be that the hour of my death is come?" He lost breath and his throat rattled. "Get away!" he went on in a wheezing voice. "You have poisoned one man – I saved you from hard labor, and now you are poisoning me – ugh, ugh, you lie!"

Rayisa slowly moved aside. Yevsey now could see his master's little dry body. His stomach rose and fell, his feet twitched, and his lips twisted spasmodically, as he opened and closed them, greedily gasping for air, and licked them with his thin tongue, at the same time displaying the black hollow of his mouth. His forehead and cheeks glistened with sweat, his little eyes, now looking large and deep, constantly followed Rayisa.

"And I have nobody, no one near me on earth, no true friend. Why, O Lord?" The voice of the old man wheezed and broke. "You wanton, swear before the ikon that you are not poisoning me."

Rayisa turned to the corner, and crossed herself.

"I don't believe you, I don't believe you," he muttered, clutching at the underwear on his breast and at the back of the sofa, and digging his nails into them.

"Drink your medicine. It will be better for you," Rayisa suddenly almost shrieked.

"It will be better," the old man repeated. "My dear, my only one, I will give you everything, my own Ray – "

He stretched his bony arm toward her and beckoned to her to draw near him, shaking his black fingers.

"Ah, I am sick of you, you detestable creature," Rayisa cried in a stifled voice; and snatching the pillow from under his head she flung it over the old man's face, threw herself upon it, and held his thin arms, which flashed in the air.

"You have made me sick of you," she cried again. "I can't stand you any more. Go to the devil! Go, go!"

Yevsey dropped to the floor. He heard the stifled rattle, the low squeak, the hollow blows; he understood that Rayisa was choking and squeezing the old man, and that his master kept beating his feet upon the sofa. He felt neither pity nor fear. He merely desired everything to be accomplished more quickly. So he covered his eyes and ears with his hands.

The pain of a blow caused by the opening of the door compelled him to jump to his feet. Before him stood Rayisa arranging her hair, which hung over her shoulders.

"Well, did you see it?" she asked gruffly. Her face was red, but now more calm. Her hands did not tremble.

"I did," replied Yevsey, nodding his head. He moved closer to Rayisa.

"Well, if you want to, you can inform the police."

She turned and walked into the room leaving the door open. Yevsey remained at the door, trying not to look at the sofa.

"Is he dead, quite dead?" he asked in a whisper.

"Yes," answered the woman distinctly.

Then Yevsey turned his head, and regarded the little body of his master with indifferent eyes. Flat and dry it lay upon the sofa as if glued there. He looked at the corpse, then at Rayisa, and breathed a sigh of relief.

In the corner near the bed the clock on the wall softly and irresolutely struck one and two. The woman started at each stroke. The last time she went up to the clock, and stopped the halting pendulum with an uncertain hand. Then she seated herself on the bed, putting her elbows on her knees and pressing her head in her hands. Her hair falling down, covered her face and hands as with a dense dark veil.

Scarcely touching the floor with his toes, so as not to break the stern silence, Yevsey went over to Rayisa, and stationed himself at her side, dully looking at her white round shoulder. The woman's posture roused the desire to say something soothing to her.

"That's what he deserved," he uttered in a low grave voice.

The stillness round about was startled, but instantly settled down again, listening, expecting.

"Open the window," said Rayisa sternly. But when Yevsey walked away from her, she stopped him with a low question, "Are you afraid?"

"No."

"Why not? You are a timid boy."

"When you are around, I'm not afraid."

"Are you sorry for him?"

"No."

"Open the window."

The cold night air streamed into the room, and blew out the lamplight. The shadows quickly flickered on the wall and disappeared. The woman tossed her hair back and straightened herself to look at Yevsey with her large eyes.

"Why am I going to ruin?" she asked in perplexity. "It has been this way all my life. From one pit to another, each deeper than the one before."

Yevsey again stationed himself beside her; they were silent for a long time. Finally she put her soft, but cool hand around his waist, and pressing him to her asked softly:

"Listen, will you tell?"

"No," he answered, closing his eyes.

"You won't tell? To nobody? Never?" the woman asked in a mournful tone.

"Never!" he repeated quietly but firmly.

"Don't tell. I'll be helpful to you," she urged him, kindly stroking his cheek.

She rose, looked around, and spoke to him in a businesslike way:

"Dress yourself. It's cold. And the room must be put in order a little. Go, get dressed."

When Yevsey returned he saw the master's body completely covered with a blanket. Rayisa remained as she had been, half dressed with bare shoulders. This touched him. They set the

room to rights, working without haste and looking at each other now and then silently and gravely.

The boy felt that this silent nocturnal activity in the close room bound him more firmly to the woman, who was just as solitary as himself, and like him, knew terror. He tried to remain as near her as possible, and avoided looking at the master's body.

It began to dawn. Rayisa listened to the sound of the waking house and city. She sighed, and beckoned to Yevsey.

"Now, go lie down and sleep. I will wake you soon, and send you with a note to Dorimedont Lukin. Go!" She led him to the chest upon which he slept and felt the bedding with her hand. "Oh, what a hard bed you have!"

When he had lain down, she seated herself beside him, and stroked his head and shoulders with her soft smooth hand, while she spoke in a gentle chant.

"Give him the note. And if he asks you how it happened, tell him you don't know. Tell him you were asleep and didn't see anything."

She was silent, and knit her brows. Overcome by exhaustion Yevsey, warmed by the woman's body and lulled by her even speech, began to drowse.

"No," she continued, "that's not right."

She gave her directions calmly and intelligently, and her caresses, warm and sweet, awakened memories of his mother. He felt good. He smiled.

"Dorimedont Lukin is a spy, too," he heard her lulling, even

voice. "Be on your guard. Be careful. If he gets it out of you, I'll say you knew everything and helped me. Then you'll be put in prison, too." Now she, too, smiled, and repeated, "In prison, and then hard labor. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Yevsey answered happily, looking into her face with half-closed eyes.

"You are falling asleep. Well, sleep." Happy and grateful he heard the words in his slumber. "Will you forget everything I told you? What a weak, thin little fellow you are! Sleep!"

Yevsey fell asleep, but soon a stern voice awoke him.

"Boy, get up! Quick! Boy!"

He rose with a start of his whole body, and stretched out his hand. At his bed stood Dorimedont Lukin holding a cane.

"Why are you sleeping? Your master died, yet you sleep."

"He's tired. We didn't sleep the whole night," said Rayisa, who was looking in from the kitchen with her hat on and her umbrella in her hand.

"Tired? On the day of your benefactor's death you must weep, not sleep. Dress yourself."

The flat pimply face of the spy was stern. His words compelled Yevsey imperiously, like reins steering a docile horse.

"Run to the police station. Here's a note. Don't lose it."

In a half fainting condition Yevsey dressed himself wearily, and went out in the street. He forced his eyes open as he ran over the pavement bumping into everyone he met.

"I wish he would be buried soon," he thought disconnectedly.

"Dorimedont will frighten her, and she'll tell him everything. Then I'll go to prison, too. But if I am there with her, I won't be afraid. She went after him herself, she didn't send me, she was sorry to wake me up – or maybe she was afraid – how am I going to live now?"

When he returned he found a black-bearded policeman and a grey old man in a long frock coat sitting in the room. Dorimedont was speaking to the policeman in a commanding voice.

"Do you hear, Ivan Ivanovich, what the doctor says? So it was a cancer. Aha, there's the boy. Hey, boy, go fetch half a dozen bottles of beer. Quick!"

Rayisa was preparing coffee and an omelet in the kitchen. Her sleeves were drawn up over her elbow, and her white hands darted about dexterously.

"When you come back, I'll give you coffee," she promised Yevsey, smiling.

Yevsey was kept running all day. He had no chance to observe what was happening in the house, but felt that everything was going well with Rayisa. She was more beautiful than ever. Everybody looked at her with satisfaction.

At night when almost sick with exhaustion Yevsey lay down in bed with an unpleasant sticky taste in his mouth, he heard Dorimedont say to Rayisa in an emphatic, authoritative tone:

"We mustn't let that boy out of our sight, you understand? He's stupid."

Then he and Rayisa entered Yevsey's room. The spy put out

his hand with an important air, and said snuffling:

"Get up! Tell us how you're going to live now."

"I don't know."

"If you don't know, who is to know?" The spy's eyes bulged, his face and nose grew purple. He breathed hotly and noisily, resembling an overheated oven. "I know," he answered himself, raising the finger on which was the ring.

"You will live with us, with me," said Rayisa kindly.

"Yes, you will live with us, and I will find a good place for you."

Yevsey was silent.

"Well, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," said Yevsey after a pause.

"You ought to thank me, you little fool," Dorimedont explained condescendingly.

Yevsey felt that the little grey eyes held him fast to something as if with nails.

"We'll be better to you than relatives," continued Dorimedont, walking away, and leaving behind the heavy odor of beer, sweat, and grease.

Yevsey opened the window, and listened to the grumbling and stirring of the dark, exhausted city sinking into sleep. A sharp aching pain stole up from somewhere. Faintness seized the boy's body. A thin cord, as it were, cut at his heart, and made breathing difficult. He lay down and groaned and peered into the darkness with frightened eyes. Wardrobes and trunks

moved about in the obscurity, black dancing spots rocking to and fro. Walls scarcely visible turned and twisted. All this oppressed Yevsey with unconquerable fear, and pushed him into a stifling corner, from which it was impossible to escape.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.