# МАКСИМ ГОРЬКИЙ

# MOTHER

Максим Горький

# Mother

**Горький М.**

Mother / М. Горький — «Public Domain»,

# Содержание

# Maksim Gorky
# Mother

## PART I

## CHAPTER I

Every day the factory whistle bellowed forth its shrill, roaring, trembling noises into the smoke-begrimed and greasy atmosphere of the workingmen's suburb; and obedient to the summons of the power of steam, people poured out of little gray houses into the street. With somber faces they hastened forward like frightened roaches, their muscles stiff from insufficient sleep. In the chill morning twilight they walked through the narrow, unpaved street to the tall stone cage that waited for them with cold assurance, illumining their muddy road with scores of greasy, yellow, square eyes. The mud plashed under their feet as if in mocking commiseration. Hoarse exclamations of sleepy voices were heard; irritated, peevish, abusive language rent the air with malice; and, to welcome the people, deafening sounds floated about – the heavy whir of machinery, the dissatisfied snort of steam. Stern and somber, the black chimneys stretched their huge, thick sticks high above the village.

In the evening, when the sun was setting, and red rays languidly glimmered upon the windows of the houses, the factory ejected its people like burned-out ashes, and again they walked through the streets, with black, smoke-covered faces, radiating the sticky odor of machine oil, and showing the gleam of hungry teeth. But now there was animation in their voices, and even gladness. The servitude of hard toil was over for the day. Supper awaited them at home, and respite.

The day was swallowed up by the factory; the machine sucked out of men's muscles as much vigor as it needed. The day was blotted out from life, not a trace of it left. Man made another imperceptible step toward his grave; but he saw close before him the delights of rest, the joys of the odorous tavern, and he was satisfied.

On holidays the workers slept until about ten o'clock. Then the staid and married people dressed themselves in their best clothes and, after duly scolding the young folks for their indifference to church, went to hear mass. When they returned from church, they ate pirogs, the Russian national pastry, and again lay down to sleep until the evening. The accumulated exhaustion of years had robbed them of their appetites, and to be able to eat they drank, long and deep, goading on their feeble stomachs with the biting, burning lash of vodka.

In the evening they amused themselves idly on the street; and those who had overshoes put them on, even if it was dry, and those who had umbrellas carried them, even if the sun was shining. Not everybody has overshoes and an umbrella, but everybody desires in some way, however small, to appear more important than his neighbor.

Meeting one another they spoke about the factory and the machines, had their fling against their foreman, conversed and thought only of matters closely and manifestly connected with their work. Only rarely, and then but faintly, did solitary sparks of impotent thought glimmer in the wearisome monotony of their talk. Returning home they quarreled with their wives, and often beat them, unsparing of their fists. The young people sat in the taverns, or enjoyed evening parties at one another's houses, played the accordion, sang vulgar songs devoid of beauty, danced, talked ribaldry, and drank.

Exhausted with toil, men drank swiftly, and in every heart there awoke and grew an incomprehensible, sickly irritation. It demanded an outlet. Clutching tenaciously at every pretext for unloading themselves of this disquieting sensation, they fell on one another for mere trifles, with the

spiteful ferocity of beasts, breaking into bloody quarrels which sometimes ended in serious injury and on rare occasions even in murder.

This lurking malice steadily increased, inveterate as the incurable weariness in their muscles. They were born with this disease of the soul inherited from their fathers. Like a black shadow it accompanied them to their graves, spurring on their lives to crime, hideous in its aimless cruelty and brutality.

On holidays the young people came home late at night, dirty and dusty, their clothes torn, their faces bruised, boasting maliciously of the blows they had struck their companions, or the insults they had inflicted upon them; enraged or in tears over the indignities they themselves had suffered; drunken and piteous, unfortunate and repulsive. Sometimes the boys would be brought home by the mother or the father, who had picked them up in the street or in a tavern, drunk to insensibility. The parents scolded and swore at them peevishly, and beat their spongelike bodies, soaked with liquor; then more or less systematically put them to bed, in order to rouse them to work early next morning, when the bellow of the whistle should sullenly course through the air.

They scolded and beat the children soundly, notwithstanding the fact that drunkenness and brawls among young folk appeared perfectly legitimate to the old people. When they were young they, too, had drunk and fought; they, too, had been beaten by their mothers and fathers. Life had always been like that. It flowed on monotonously and slowly somewhere down the muddy, turbid stream, year after year; and it was all bound up in strong ancient customs and habits that led them to do one and the same thing day in and day out. None of them, it seemed, had either the time or the desire to attempt to change this state of life.

Once in a long while a stranger would come to the village. At first he attracted attention merely because he was a stranger. Then he aroused a light, superficial interest by the stories of the places where he had worked. Afterwards the novelty wore off, the people got used to him, and he remained unnoticed. From his stories it was clear that the life of the workingmen was the same everywhere. And if so, then what was there to talk about?

Occasionally, however, some stranger spoke curious things never heard of in the suburb. The men did not argue with him, but listened to his odd speeches with incredulity. His words aroused blind irritation in some, perplexed alarm in others, while still others were disturbed by a feeble, shadowy glimmer of the hope of something, they knew not what. And they all began to drink more in order to drive away the unnecessary, meddlesome excitement.

Noticing in the stranger something unusual, the villagers cherished it long against him and treated the man who was not like them with unaccountable apprehension. It was as if they feared he would throw something into their life which would disturb its straight, dismal course. Sad and difficult, it was yet even in its tenor. People were accustomed to the fact that life always oppressed them with the same power. Unhopeful of any turn for the better, they regarded every change as capable only of increasing their burden.

And the workingmen of the suburb tacitly avoided people who spoke unusual things to them. Then these people disappeared again, going off elsewhere, and those who remained in the factory lived apart, if they could not blend and make one whole with the monotonous mass in the village.

Living a life like that for some fifty years, a workman died.

Thus also lived Michael Vlasov, a gloomy, sullen man, with little eyes which looked at everybody from under his thick eyebrows suspiciously, with a mistrustful, evil smile. He was the best locksmith in the factory, and the strongest man in the village. But he was insolent and disrespectful toward the foreman and the superintendent, and therefore earned little; every holiday he beat somebody, and everyone disliked and feared him.

More than one attempt was made to beat him in turn, but without success. When Vlasov found himself threatened with attack, he caught a stone in his hand, or a piece of wood or iron, and spreading out his legs stood waiting in silence for the enemy. His face overgrown with a dark beard from his

eyes to his neck, and his hands thickly covered with woolly hair, inspired everybody with fear. People were especially afraid of his eyes. Small and keen, they seemed to bore through a man like steel gimlets, and everyone who met their gaze felt he was confronting a beast, a savage power, inaccessible to fear, ready to strike unmercifully.

"Well, pack off, dirty vermin!" he said gruffly. His coarse, yellow teeth glistened terribly through the thick hair on his face. The men walked off uttering coward abuse.

"Dirty vermin!" he snapped at them, and his eyes gleamed with a smile sharp as an awl. Then holding his head in an attitude of direct challenge, with a short, thick pipe between his teeth, he walked behind them, and now and then called out: "Well, who wants death?"

No one wanted it.

He spoke little, and "dirty vermin" was his favorite expression. It was the name he used for the authorities of the factory, and the police, and it was the epithet with which he addressed his wife: "Look, you dirty vermin, don't you see my clothes are torn?"

When Pavel, his son, was a boy of fourteen, Vlasov was one day seized with the desire to pull him by the hair once more. But Pavel grasped a heavy hammer, and said curtly:

"Don't touch me!"

"What!" demanded his father, bending over the tall, slender figure of his son like a shadow on a birch tree.

"Enough!" said Pavel. "I am not going to give myself up any more."

And opening his dark eyes wide, he waved the hammer in the air.

His father looked at him, folded his shaggy hands on his back, and, smiling, said:

"All right." Then he drew a heavy breath and added: "Ah, you dirty vermin!"

Shortly after this he said to his wife:

"Don't ask me for money any more. Pasha will feed you now."

"And you will drink up everything?" she ventured to ask.

"None of your business, dirty vermin!" From that time, for three years, until his death, he did not notice, and did not speak to his son.

Vlasov had a dog as big and shaggy as himself. She accompanied him to the factory every morning, and every evening she waited for him at the gate. On holidays Vlasov started off on his round of the taverns. He walked in silence, and stared into people's faces as if looking for somebody. His dog trotted after him the whole day long. Returning home drunk he sat down to supper, and gave his dog to eat from his own bowl. He never beat her, never scolded, and never petted her. After supper he flung the dishes from the table – if his wife was not quick enough to remove them in time – put a bottle of whisky before him, and leaning his back against the wall, began in a hoarse voice that spread anguish about him to bawl a song, his mouth wide open and his eyes closed. The doleful sounds got entangled in his mustache, knocking off the crumbs of bread. He smoothed down the hair of his beard and mustache with his thick fingers and sang – sang unintelligible words, long drawn out. The melody recalled the wintry howl of wolves. He sang as long as there was whisky in the bottle, then he dropped on his side upon the bench, or let his head sink on the table, and slept in this way until the whistle began to blow. The dog lay at his side.

When he died, he died hard. For five days, turned all black, he rolled in his bed, gnashing his teeth, his eyes tightly closed. Sometimes he would say to his wife: "Give me arsenic. Poison me."

She called a physician. He ordered hot poultices, but said an operation was necessary and the patient must be taken at once to the hospital.

"Go to the devil! I will die by myself, dirty vermin!" said Michael.

And when the physician had left, and his wife with tears in her eyes began to insist on an operation, he clenched his fists and announced threateningly:

"Don't you dare! It will be worse for you if I get well."

He died in the morning at the moment when the whistle called the men to work. He lay in the coffin with open mouth, his eyebrows knit as if in a scowl. He was buried by his wife, his son, the dog, an old drunkard and thief, Daniel Vyesovshchikov, a discharged smelter, and a few beggars of the suburb. His wife wept a little and quietly; Pavel did not weep at all. The villagers who met the funeral in the street stopped, crossed themselves, and said to one another: "Guess Pelagueya is glad he died!" And some corrected: "He didn't die; he rotted away like a beast."

When the body was put in the ground, the people went away, but the dog remained for a long time, and sitting silently on the fresh soil, she sniffed at the grave.

# CHAPTER II

Two weeks after the death of his father, on a Sunday, Pavel came home very drunk. Staggering he crawled to a corner in the front of the room, and striking his fist on the table as his father used to do, shouted to his mother:

"Supper!"

The mother walked up to him, sat down at his side, and with her arm around her son, drew his head upon her breast. With his hand on her shoulder he pushed her away and shouted:

"Mother, quick!"

"You foolish boy!" said the mother in a sad and affectionate voice, trying to overcome his resistance.

"I am going to smoke, too. Give me father's pipe," mumbled Pavel indistinctly, wagging his tongue heavily.

It was the first time he had been drunk. The alcohol weakened his body, but it did not quench his consciousness, and the question knocked at his brain: "Drunk? Drunk?"

The fondling of his mother troubled him, and he was touched by the sadness in her eyes. He wanted to weep, and in order to overcome this desire he endeavored to appear more drunk than he actually was.

The mother stroked his tangled hair, and said in a low voice:

"Why did you do it? You oughtn't to have done it."

He began to feel sick, and after a violent attack of nausea the mother put him to bed, and laid a wet towel over his pale forehead. He sobered a little, but under and around him everything seemed to be rocking; his eyelids grew heavy; he felt a bad, sour taste in his mouth; he looked through his eyelashes on his mother's large face, and thought disjointedly:

"It seems it's too early for me. Others drink and nothing happens – and I feel sick."

Somewhere from a distance came the mother's soft voice:

"What sort of a breadgiver will you be to me if you begin to drink?"

He shut his eyes tightly and answered:

"Everybody drinks."

The mother sighed. He was right. She herself knew that besides the tavern there was no place where people could enjoy themselves; besides the taste of whisky there was no other gratification. Nevertheless she said:

"But don't you drink. Your father drank for both of you. And he made enough misery for me. Take pity on your mother, then, will you not?"

Listening to the soft, pitiful words of his mother, Pavel remembered that in his father's lifetime she had remained unnoticed in the house. She had been silent and had always lived in anxious expectation of blows. Desiring to avoid his father, he had been home very little of late; he had become almost unaccustomed to his mother, and now, as he gradually sobered up, he looked at her fixedly.

She was tall and somewhat stooping. Her heavy body, broken down with long years of toil and the beatings of her husband, moved about noiselessly and inclined to one side, as if she were in constant fear of knocking up against something. Her broad oval face, wrinkled and puffy, was lighted up with a pair of dark eyes, troubled and melancholy as those of most of the women in the village. On her right eyebrow was a deep scar, which turned the eyebrow upward a little; her right ear, too, seemed to be higher than the left, which gave her face the appearance of alarmed listening. Gray locks glistened in her thick, dark hair, like the imprints of heavy blows. Altogether she was soft, melancholy, and submissive.

Tears slowly trickled down her cheeks.

"Wait, don't cry!" begged the son in a soft voice. "Give me a drink."

She rose and said:

"I'll give you some ice water."

But when she returned he was already asleep. She stood over him for a minute, trying to breathe lightly. The cup in her hand trembled, and the ice knocked against the tin. Then, setting the cup on the table, she knelt before the sacred image upon the wall, and began to pray in silence. The sounds of dark, drunken life beat against the window panes; an accordion screeched in the misty darkness of the autumn night; some one sang a loud song; some one was swearing with ugly, vile oaths, and the excited sounds of women's irritated, weary voices cut the air.

Life in the little house of the Vlasovs flowed on monotonously, but more calmly and undisturbed than before, and somewhat different from everywhere else in the suburb.

The house stood at the edge of the village, by a low but steep and muddy declivity. A third of the house was occupied by the kitchen and a small room used for the mother's bedroom, separated from the kitchen by a partition reaching partially to the ceiling. The other two thirds formed a square room with two windows. In one corner stood Pavel's bed, in front a table and two benches. Some chairs, a washstand with a small looking-glass over it, a trunk with clothes, a clock on the wall, and two ikons – this was the entire outfit of the household.

Pavel tried to live like the rest. He did all a young lad should do – bought himself an accordion, a shirt with a starched front, a loud-colored necktie, overshoes, and a cane. Externally he became like all the other youths of his age. He went to evening parties and learned to dance a quadrille and a polka. On holidays he came home drunk, and always suffered greatly from the effects of liquor. In the morning his head ached, he was tormented by heartburns, his face was pale and dull.

Once his mother asked him:

"Well, did you have a good time yesterday?"

He answered dismally and with irritation:

"Oh, dreary as a graveyard! Everybody is like a machine. I'd better go fishing or buy myself a gun."

He worked faithfully, without intermission and without incurring fines. He was taciturn, and his eyes, blue and large like his mother's, looked out discontentedly. He did not buy a gun, nor did he go a-fishing; but he gradually began to avoid the beaten path trodden by all. His attendance at parties became less and less frequent, and although he went out somewhere on holidays, he always returned home sober. His mother watched him unobtrusively but closely, and saw the tawny face of her son grow keener and keener, and his eyes more serious. She noticed that his lips were compressed in a peculiar manner, imparting an odd expression of austerity to his face. It seemed as if he were always angry at something, or as if a canker gnawed at him. At first his friends came to visit him, but never finding him at home, they remained away.

The mother was glad to see her son turning out different from all the other factory youth; but a feeling of anxiety and apprehension stirred in her heart when she observed that he was obstinately and resolutely directing his life into obscure paths leading away from the routine existence about him – that he turned in his career neither to the right nor the left.

He began to bring books home with him. At first he tried to escape attention when reading them; and after he had finished a book, he hid it. Sometimes he copied a passage on a piece of paper, and hid that also.

"Aren't you well, Pavlusha?" the mother asked once.

"I'm all right," he answered.

"You are so thin," said the mother with a sigh.

He was silent.

They spoke infrequently, and saw each other very little. In the morning he drank tea in silence, and went off to work; at noon he came for dinner, a few insignificant remarks were passed at the table, and he again disappeared until the evening. And in the evening, the day's work ended, he washed

himself, took supper, and then fell to his books, and read for a long time. On holidays he left home in the morning and returned late at night. She knew he went to the city and the theater; but nobody from the city ever came to visit him. It seemed to her that with the lapse of time her son spoke less and less; and at the same time she noticed that occasionally and with increasing frequency he used new words unintelligible to her, and that the coarse, rude, and hard expressions dropped from his speech. In his general conduct, also, certain traits appeared, forcing themselves upon his mother's attention. He ceased to affect the dandy, but became more attentive to the cleanliness of his body and dress, and moved more freely and alertly. The increasing softness and simplicity of his manner aroused a disquieting interest in his mother.

Once he brought a picture and hung it on the wall. It represented three persons walking lightly and boldly, and conversing.

"This is Christ risen from the dead, and going to Emmaus," explained Pavel.

The mother liked the picture, but she thought:

"You respect Christ, and yet you do not go to church."

Then more pictures appeared on the walls, and the number of books increased on the shelves neatly made for him by one of his carpenter friends. The room began to look like a home.

He addressed his mother with the reverential plural "you," and called her "mother" instead of "mamma." But sometimes he turned to her suddenly, and briefly used the simple and familiar form of the singular: "Mamma, please be not thou disturbed if I come home late to-night."

This pleased her; in such words she felt something serious and strong.

But her uneasiness increased. Since her son's strangeness was not clarified with time, her heart became more and more sharply troubled with a foreboding of something unusual. Every now and then she felt a certain dissatisfaction with him, and she thought: "All people are like people, and he is like a monk. He is so stern. It's not according to his years." At other times she thought: "Maybe he has become interested in some sort of a girl down there."

But to go about with girls, money is needed, and he gave almost all his earnings to her.

Thus weeks and months elapsed; and imperceptibly two years slipped by, two years of a strange, silent life, full of disquieting thoughts and anxieties that kept continually increasing.

Once, when after supper Pavel drew the curtain over the window, sat down in a corner, and began to read, his tin lamp hanging on the wall over his head, the mother, after removing the dishes, came out from the kitchen and carefully walked up to him. He raised his head, and without speaking looked at her with a questioning expression.

"Nothing, Pasha, just so!" she said hastily, and walked away, moving her eyebrows agitatedly. But after standing in the kitchen for a moment, motionless, thoughtful, deeply preoccupied, she washed her hands and approached her son again.

"I want to ask you," she said in a low, soft voice, "what you read all the time."

He put his book aside and said to her:

"Sit down, mother."

The mother sat down heavily at his side, and straightening herself into an attitude of intense, painful expectation waited for something momentous.

Without looking at her, Pavel spoke, not loudly, but for some reason very sternly:

"I am reading forbidden books. They are forbidden to be read because they tell the truth about our – about the workingmen's life. They are printed in secret, and if I am found with them I will be put in prison – I will be put in prison because I want to know the truth."

Breathing suddenly became difficult for her. Opening her eyes wide she looked at her son, and he seemed to her new, as if a stranger. His voice was different, lower, deeper, more sonorous. He pinched his thin, downy mustache, and looked oddly askance into the corner. She grew anxious for her son and pitied him.

"Why do you do this, Pasha?"

He raised his head, looked at her, and said in a low, calm voice:

"I want to know the truth."

His voice sounded placid, but firm; and his eyes flashed resolution. She understood with her heart that her son had consecrated himself forever to something mysterious and awful. Everything in life had always appeared to her inevitable; she was accustomed to submit without thought, and now, too, she only wept softly, finding no words, but in her heart she was oppressed with sorrow and distress.

"Don't cry," said Pavel, kindly and softly; and it seemed to her that he was bidding her farewell.

"Think what kind of a life you are leading. You are forty years old, and have you lived? Father beat you. I understand now that he avenged his wretchedness on your body, the wretchedness of his life. It pressed upon him, and he did not know whence it came. He worked for thirty years; he began to work when the whole factory occupied but two buildings; now there are seven of them. The mills grow, and people die, working for them."

She listened to him eagerly and awestruck. His eyes burned with a beautiful radiance. Leaning forward on the table he moved nearer to his mother, and looking straight into her face, wet with tears, he delivered his first speech to her about the truth which he had now come to understand. With the *naïveté* of youth, and the ardor of a young student proud of his knowledge, religiously confiding in its truth, he spoke about everything that was clear to him, and spoke not so much for his mother as to verify and strengthen his own opinions. At times he halted, finding no words, and then he saw before him a disturbed face, in which dimly shone a pair of kind eyes clouded with tears. They looked on with awe and perplexity. He was sorry for his mother, and began to speak again, about herself and her life.

"What joys did you know?" he asked. "What sort of a past can you recall?"

She listened and shook her head dolefully, feeling something new, unknown to her, both sorrowful and gladsome, like a caress to her troubled and aching heart. It was the first time she had heard such language about herself, her own life. It awakened in her misty, dim thoughts, long dormant; gently roused an almost extinct feeling of rebellion, perplexed dissatisfaction – thoughts and feelings of a remote youth. She often discussed life with her neighbors, spoke a great deal about everything; but all, herself included, only complained; no one explained why life was so hard and burdensome.

And now her son sat before her; and what he said about her – his eyes, his face, his words – it all clutched at her heart, filling her with a sense of pride for her son, who truly understood the life of his mother, and spoke the truth about her and her sufferings, and pitied her.

Mothers are not pitied. She knew it. She did not understand Pavel when speaking about matters not pertaining to herself, but all he said about her own woman's existence was bitterly familiar and true. Hence it seemed to her that every word of his was perfectly true, and her bosom throbbed with a gentle sensation which warmed it more and more with an unknown, kindly caress.

"What do you want to do, then?" she asked, interrupting his speech.

"Study and then teach others. We workingmen must study. We must learn, we must understand why life is so hard for us."

It was sweet to her to see that his blue eyes, always so serious and stern, now glowed with warmth, softly illuminating something new within him. A soft, contented smile played around her lips, although the tears still trembled in the wrinkles of her face. She wavered between two feelings: pride in her son who desired the good of all people, had pity for all, and understood the sorrow and affliction of life; and the involuntary regret for his youth, because he did not speak like everybody else, because he resolved to enter alone into a fight against the life to which all, including herself, were accustomed.

She wanted to say to him: "My dear, what can you do? People will crush you. You will perish."

But it was pleasant to her to listen to his speeches, and she feared to disturb her delight in her son, who suddenly revealed himself so new and wise, even if somewhat strange.

Pavel saw the smile around his mother's lips, the attention in her face, the love in her eyes; and it seemed to him that he compelled her to understand his truth; and youthful pride in the power of his word heightened his faith in himself. Seized with enthusiasm, he continued to talk, now smiling, now frowning. Occasionally hatred sounded in his words; and when his mother heard its bitter, harsh accents she shook her head, frightened, and asked in a low voice:

"Is it so, Pasha?"

"It is so!" he answered firmly. And he told her about people who wanted the good of men, and who sowed truth among them; and because of this the enemies of life hunted them down like beasts, thrust them into prisons, and exiled them, and set them to hard labor.

"I have seen such people!" he exclaimed passionately. "They are the best people on earth!"

These people filled the mother with terror, and she wanted to ask her son: "Is it so, Pasha?"

But she hesitated, and leaning back she listened to the stories of people incomprehensible to her, who taught her son to speak and think words and thoughts so dangerous to him. Finally she said:

"It will soon be daylight. You ought to go to bed. You've got to go to work."

"Yes, I'll go to bed at once," he assented. "Did you understand me?"

"I did," she said, drawing a deep breath. Tears rolled down from her eyes again, and breaking into sobs she added: "You will perish, my son!"

Pavel walked up and down the room.

"Well, now you know what I am doing and where I am going. I told you all. I beg of you, mother, if you love me, do not hinder me!"

"My darling, my beloved!" she cried, "maybe it would be better for me not to have known anything!"

He took her hand and pressed it firmly in his. The word "mother," pronounced by him with feverish emphasis, and that clasp of the hand so new and strange, moved her.

"I will do nothing!" she said in a broken voice. "Only be on your guard! Be on your guard!" Not knowing what he should be on his guard against, nor how to warn him, she added mournfully: "You are getting so thin."

And with a look of affectionate warmth, which seemed to embrace his firm, well-shaped body, she said hastily, and in a low voice:

"God be with you! Live as you want to. I will not hinder you. One thing only I beg of you – do not speak to people unguardedly! You must be on the watch with people; they all hate one another. They live in greed and envy; all are glad to do injury; people persecute out of sheer amusement. When you begin to accuse them and to judge them, they will hate you, and will hound you to destruction!"

Pavel stood in the doorway listening to the melancholy speech, and when the mother had finished he said with a smile:

"Yes, people are sorry creatures; but when I came to recognize that there is truth in the world, people became better." He smiled again and added: "I do not know how it happened myself! From childhood I feared everybody; as I grew up I began to hate everybody, some for their meanness, others – well, I do not know why – just so! And now I see all the people in a different way. I am grieved for them all! I cannot understand it; but my heart turned softer when I recognized that there is truth in men, and that not all are to blame for their foulness and filth."

He was silent as if listening to something within himself. Then he said in a low voice and thoughtfully:

"That's how truth lives."

She looked at him tenderly.

"May God protect you!" she sighed. "It is a dangerous change that has come upon you."

When he had fallen asleep, the mother rose carefully from her bed and came gently into her son's room. Pavel's swarthy, resolute, stern face was clearly outlined against the white pillow. Pressing

her hand to her bosom, the mother stood at his bedside. Her lips moved mutely, and great tears rolled down her cheeks.

# CHAPTER III

Again they lived in silence, distant and yet near to each other. Once, in the middle of the week, on a holiday, as he was preparing to leave the house he said to his mother:

"I expect some people here on Saturday."

"What people?" she asked.

"Some people from our village, and others from the city."

"From the city?" repeated the mother, shaking her head. And suddenly she broke into sobs.

"Now, mother, why this?" cried Pavel resentfully. "What for?"

Drying her face with her apron, she answered quietly:

"I don't know, but it is the way I feel."

He paced up and down the room, then halting before her, said:

"Are you afraid?"

"I am afraid," she acknowledged. "Those people from the city – who knows them?"

He bent down to look in her face, and said in an offended tone, and, it seemed to her, angrily, like his father:

"This fear is what is the ruin of us all. And some dominate us; they take advantage of our fear and frighten us still more. Mark this: as long as people are afraid, they will rot like the birches in the marsh. We must grow bold; it is time!

"It's all the same," he said, as he turned from her; "they'll meet in my house, anyway."

"Don't be angry with me!" the mother begged sadly. "How can I help being afraid? All my life I have lived in fear!"

"Forgive me!" was his gentler reply, "but I cannot do otherwise," and he walked away.

For three days her heart was in a tremble, sinking in fright each time she remembered that strange people were soon to come to her house. She could not picture them to herself, but it seemed to her they were terrible people. It was they who had shown her son the road he was going.

On Saturday night Pavel came from the factory, washed himself, put on clean clothes, and when walking out of the house said to his mother without looking at her:

"When they come, tell them I'll be back soon. Let them wait a while. And please don't be afraid. They are people like all other people."

She sank into her seat almost fainting.

Her son looked at her soberly. "Maybe you'd better go away somewhere," he suggested.

The thought offended her. Shaking her head in dissent, she said:

"No, it's all the same. What for?"

It was the end of November. During the day a dry, fine snow had fallen upon the frozen earth, and now she heard it crunching outside the window under her son's feet as he walked away. A dense crust of darkness settled immovably upon the window panes, and seemed to lie in hostile watch for something. Supporting herself on the bench, the mother sat and waited, looking at the door.

It seemed to her that people were stealthily and watchfully walking about the house in the darkness, stooping and looking about on all sides, strangely attired and silent. There around the house some one was already coming, fumbling with his hands along the wall.

A whistle was heard. It circled around like the notes of a fine chord, sad and melodious, wandered musingly into the wilderness of darkness, and seemed to be searching for something. It came nearer. Suddenly it died away under the window, as if it had entered into the wood of the wall. The noise of feet was heard on the porch. The mother started, and rose with a strained, frightened look in her eyes.

The door opened. At first a head with a big, shaggy hat thrust itself into the room; then a slender, bending body crawled in, straightened itself out, and deliberately raised its right hand.

"Good evening!" said the man, in a thick, bass voice, breathing heavily.

The mother bowed in silence.

"Pavel is not at home yet?"

The stranger leisurely removed his short fur jacket, raised one foot, whipped the snow from his boot with his hat, then did the same with the other foot, flung his hat into a corner, and rocking on his thin legs walked into the room, looking back at the imprints he left on the floor. He approached the table, examined it as if to satisfy himself of its solidity, and finally sat down and, covering his mouth with his hand, yawned. His head was perfectly round and close-cropped, his face shaven except for a thin mustache, the ends of which pointed downward.

After carefully scrutinizing the room with his large, gray, protuberant eyes, he crossed his legs, and, leaning his head over the table, inquired:

"Is this your own house, or do you rent it?"

The mother, sitting opposite him, answered:

"We rent it."

"Not a very fine house," he remarked.

"Pasha will soon be here; wait," said the mother quietly.

"Why, yes, I am waiting," said the man.

His calmness, his deep, sympathetic voice, and the candor and simplicity of his face encouraged the mother. He looked at her openly and kindly, and a merry sparkle played in the depths of his transparent eyes. In the entire angular, stooping figure, with its thin legs, there was something comical, yet winning. He was dressed in a blue shirt, and dark, loose trousers thrust into his boots. She was seized with the desire to ask him who he was, whence he came, and whether he had known her son long. But suddenly he himself put a question, leaning forward with a swing of his whole body.

"Who made that hole in your forehead, mother?"

His question was uttered in a kind voice and with a noticeable smile in his eyes; but the woman was offended by the sally. She pressed her lips together tightly, and after a pause rejoined with cold civility:

"And what business is it of yours, sir?"

With the same swing of his whole body toward her, he said:

"Now, don't get angry! I ask because my foster mother had her head smashed just exactly like yours. It was her man who did it for her once, with a last – he was a shoemaker, you see. She was a washerwoman and he was a shoemaker. It was after she had taken me as her son that she found him somewhere, a drunkard, and married him, to her great misfortune. He beat her – I tell you, my skin almost burst with terror."

The mother felt herself disarmed by his openness. Moreover, it occurred to her that perhaps her son would be displeased with her harsh reply to this odd personage. Smiling guiltily she said:

"I am not angry, but – you see – you asked so very soon. It was my good man, God rest his soul! who treated me to the cut. Are you a Tartar?"

The stranger stretched out his feet, and smiled so broad a smile that the ends of his mustache traveled to the nape of his neck. Then he said seriously:

"Not yet. I'm not a Tartar yet."

"I asked because I rather thought the way you spoke was not exactly Russian," she explained, catching his joke.

"I am better than a Russian, I am!" said the guest laughingly. "I am a Little Russian from the city of Kanyev."

"And have you been here long?"

"I lived in the city about a month, and I came to your factory about a month ago. I found some good people, your son and a few others. I will live here for a while," he said, twirling his mustache.

The man pleased the mother, and, yielding to the impulse to repay him in some way for his kind words about her son, she questioned again:

"Maybe you'd like to have a glass of tea?"

"What! An entertainment all to myself!" he answered, raising his shoulders. "I'll wait for the honor until we are all here."

This allusion to the coming of others recalled her fear to her.

"If they all are only like this one!" was her ardent wish.

Again steps were heard on the porch. The door opened quickly, and the mother rose. This time she was taken completely aback by the newcomer in her kitchen – a poorly and lightly dressed girl of medium height, with the simple face of a peasant woman, and a head of thick, dark hair. Smiling she said in a low voice:

"Am I late?"

"Why, no!" answered the Little Russian, looking out of the living room. "Come on foot?"

"Of course! Are you the mother of Pavel Vlasov? Good evening! My name is Natasha."

"And your other name?" inquired the mother.

"Vasilyevna. And yours?"

"Pelagueya Nilovna."

"So here we are all acquainted."

"Yes," said the mother, breathing more easily, as if relieved, and looking at the girl with a smile.

The Little Russian helped her off with her cloak, and inquired:

"Is it cold?"

"Out in the open, very! The wind – goodness!"

Her voice was musical and clear, her mouth small and smiling, her body round and vigorous. Removing her wraps, she rubbed her ruddy cheeks briskly with her little hands, red with the cold, and walking lightly and quickly she passed into the room, the heels of her shoes rapping sharply on the floor.

"She goes without overshoes," the mother noted silently.

"Indeed it is cold," repeated the girl. "I'm frozen through – ooh!"

"I'll warm up the samovar for you!" the mother said, bustling and solicitous. "Ready in a moment," she called from the kitchen.

Somehow it seemed to her she had known the girl long, and even loved her with the tender, compassionate love of a mother. She was glad to see her; and recalling her guest's bright blue eyes, she smiled contentedly, as she prepared the samovar and listened to the conversation in the room.

"Why so gloomy, Nakhodka?" asked the girl.

"The widow has good eyes," answered the Little Russian. "I was thinking maybe my mother has such eyes. You know, I keep thinking of her as alive."

"You said she was dead?"

"That's my adopted mother. I am speaking now of my real mother. It seems to me that perhaps she may be somewhere in Kiev begging alms and drinking whisky."

"Why do you think such awful things?"

"I don't know. And the policemen pick her up on the street drunk and beat her."

"Oh, you poor soul," thought the mother, and sighed.

Natasha muttered something hotly and rapidly; and again the sonorous voice of the Little Russian was heard.

"Ah, you are young yet, comrade," he said. "You haven't eaten enough onions yet. Everyone has a mother, none the less people are bad. For although it is hard to rear children, it is still harder to teach a man to be good."

"What strange ideas he has," the mother thought, and for a moment she felt like contradicting the Little Russian and telling him that here was she who would have been glad to teach her son good,

but knew nothing herself. The door, however, opened and in came Nikolay Vyesovshchikov, the son of the old thief Daniel, known in the village as a misanthrope. He always kept at a sullen distance from people, who retaliated by making sport of him.

"You, Nikolay! How's that?" she asked in surprise.

Without replying he merely looked at the mother with his little gray eyes, and wiped his pockmarked, high-cheeked face with the broad palm of his hand.

"Is Pavel at home?" he asked hoarsely.

"No."

He looked into the room and said:

"Good evening, comrades."

"He, too. Is it possible?" wondered the mother resentfully, and was greatly surprised to see Natasha put her hand out to him in a kind, glad welcome.

The next to come were two young men, scarcely more than boys. One of them the mother knew. He was Yakob, the son of the factory watchman, Somov. The other, with a sharp-featured face, high forehead, and curly hair, was unknown to her; but he, too, was not terrible.

Finally Pavel appeared, and with him two men, both of whose faces she recognized as those of workmen in the factory.

"You've prepared the samovar! That's fine. Thank you!" said Pavel as he saw what his mother had done.

"Perhaps I should get some vodka," she suggested, not knowing how to express her gratitude to him for something which as yet she did not understand.

"No, we don't need it!" he responded, removing his coat and smiling affectionately at her.

It suddenly occurred to her that her son, by way of jest, had purposely exaggerated the danger of the gathering.

"Are these the ones they call illegal people?" she whispered.

"The very ones!" answered Pavel, and passed into the room.

She looked lovingly after him and thought to herself condescendingly:

"Mere children!"

When the samovar boiled, and she brought it into the room, she found the guests sitting in a close circle around the table, and Natasha installed in the corner under the lamp with a book in her hands.

"In order to understand why people live so badly," said Natasha.

"And why they are themselves so bad," put in the Little Russian.

"It is necessary to see how they began to live – "

"See, my dears, see!" mumbled the mother, making the tea.

They all stopped talking.

"What is the matter, mother?" asked Pavel, knitting his brows.

"What?" She looked around, and seeing the eyes of all upon her she explained with embarrassment, "I was just speaking to myself."

Natasha laughed and Pavel smiled, but the Little Russian said: "Thank you for the tea, mother."

"Hasn't drunk it yet and thanks me already," she commented inwardly. Looking at her son, she asked: "I am not in your way?"

"How can the hostess in her own home be in the way of her guests?" replied Natasha, and then continuing with childish plaintiveness: "Mother dear, give me tea quick! I am shivering with cold; my feet are all frozen."

"In a moment, in a moment!" exclaimed the mother, hurrying.

Having drunk a cup of tea, Natasha drew a long breath, brushed her hair back from her forehead, and began to read from a large yellow-covered book with pictures. The mother, careful not to make a noise with the dishes, poured tea into the glasses, and strained her untrained mind to listen to the

girl's fluent reading. The melodious voice blended with the thin, musical hum of the samovar. The clear, simple narrative of savage people who lived in caves and killed the beasts with stones floated and quivered like a dainty ribbon in the room. It sounded like a tale, and the mother looked up to her son occasionally, wishing to ask him what was illegal in the story about wild men. But she soon ceased to follow the narrative and began to scrutinize the guests, unnoticed by them or her son.

Pavel sat at Natasha's side. He was the handsomest of them all. Natasha bent down very low over the book. At times she tossed back the thin curls that kept running down over her forehead, and lowered her voice to say something not in the book, with a kind look at the faces of her auditors. The Little Russian bent his broad chest over a corner of the table, and squinted his eyes in the effort to see the worn ends of his mustache, which he constantly twirled. Vyesovshchikov sat on his chair straight as a pole, his palms resting on his knees, and his pockmarked face, browless and thin-lipped, immobile as a mask. He kept his narrow-eyed gaze stubbornly fixed upon the reflection of his face in the glittering brass of the samovar. He seemed not even to breathe. Little Somov moved his lips mutely, as if repeating to himself the words in the book; and his curly-haired companion, with bent body, elbows on knees, his face supported on his hands, smiled abstractedly. One of the men who had entered at the same time as Pavel, a slender young chap with red, curly hair and merry green eyes, apparently wanted to say something; for he kept turning around impatiently. The other, light-haired and closely cropped, stroked his head with his hand and looked down on the floor so that his face remained invisible.

It was warm in the room, and the atmosphere was genial. The mother responded to this peculiar charm, which she had never before felt. She was affected by the purling of Natasha's voice, mingled with the quavering hum of the samovar, and recalled the noisy evening parties of her youth – the coarseness of the young men, whose breath always smelled of vodka – their cynical jokes. She remembered all this, and an oppressive sense of pity for her own self gently stirred her worn, outraged heart.

Before her rose the scene of the wooing of her husband. At one of the parties he had seized her in a dark porch, and pressing her with his whole body to the wall asked in a gruff, vexed voice:

"Will you marry me?"

She had been pained and had felt offended; but he rudely dug his fingers into her flesh, snorted heavily, and breathed his hot, humid breath into her face. She struggled to tear herself out of his grasp.

"Hold on!" he roared. "Answer me! Well?"

Out of breath, shamed and insulted, she remained silent.

"Don't put on airs now, you fool! I know your kind. You are mighty pleased."

Some one opened the door. He let her go leisurely, saying:

"I will send a matchmaker to you next Sunday."

And he did.

The mother covered her eyes and heaved a deep sigh.

"I do not want to know how people used to live, but how they ought to live!" The dull, dissatisfied voice of Vyesovshchikov was heard in the room.

"That's it!" corroborated the red-headed man, rising.

"And I disagree!" cried Somov. "If we are to go forward, we must know everything."

"True, true!" said the curly-headed youth in a low tone.

A heated discussion ensued; and the words flashed like tongues of fire in a wood pile. The mother did not understand what they were shouting about. All faces glowed in an aureole of animation, but none grew angry, no one spoke the harsh, offensive words so familiar to her.

"They restrain themselves on account of a woman's presence," she concluded.

The serious face of Natasha pleased her. The young woman looked at all these young men so considerately, with the air of an elder person toward children.

"Wait, comrades," she broke out suddenly. And they all grew silent and turned their eyes upon her.

"Those who say that we ought to know everything are right. We ought to illumine ourselves with the light of reason, so that the people in the dark may see us; we ought to be able to answer every question honestly and truly. We must know all the truth, all the falsehood."

The Little Russian listened and nodded his head in accompaniment to her words. Vyesovshchikov, the red-haired fellow, and the other factory worker, who had come with Pavel, stood in a close circle of three. For some reason the mother did not like them.

When Natasha ceased talking, Pavel arose and asked calmly:

"Is filling our stomachs the only thing we want?"

"No!" he answered himself, looking hard in the direction of the three. "We want to be people. We must show those who sit on our necks, and cover up our eyes, that we see everything, that we are not foolish, we are not animals, and that we do not want merely to eat, but also to live like decent human beings. We must show our enemies that our life of servitude, of hard toil which they impose upon us, does not hinder us from measuring up to them in intellect, and as to spirit, that we rise far above them!"

The mother listened to his words, and a feeling of pride in her son stirred her bosom – how eloquently he spoke!

"People with well-filled stomachs are, after all, not a few, but honest people there are none," said the Little Russian. "We ought to build a bridge across the bog of this rotten life to a future of soulful goodness. That's our task, that's what we have to do, comrades!"

"When the time is come to fight, it's not the time to cure the finger," said Vyesovshchikov dully.

"There will be enough breaking of our bones before we get to fighting!" the Little Russian put in merrily.

It was already past midnight when the group began to break up. The first to go were Vyesovshchikov and the red-haired man – which again displeased the mother.

"Hm! How they hurry!" she thought, nodding them a not very friendly farewell.

"Will you see me home, Nakhodka?" asked Natasha.

"Why, of course," answered the Little Russian.

When Natasha put on her wraps in the kitchen, the mother said to her: "Your stockings are too thin for this time of the year. Let me knit some woolen ones for you, will you, please?"

"Thank you, Pelagueya Nilovna. Woolen stockings scratch," Natasha answered, smiling.

"I'll make them so they won't scratch."

Natasha looked at her rather perplexedly, and her fixed serious glance hurt the mother.

"Pardon me my stupidity; like my good will, it's from my heart, you know," she added in a low voice.

"How kind you are!" Natasha answered in the same voice, giving her a hasty pressure of the hand and walking out.

"Good night, mother!" said the Little Russian, looking into her eyes. His bending body followed Natasha out to the porch.

The mother looked at her son. He stood in the room at the door and smiled.

"The evening was fine," he declared, nodding his head energetically. "It was fine! But now I think you'd better go to bed; it's time."

"And it's time for you, too. I'm going in a minute."

She busied herself about the table gathering the dishes together, satisfied and even glowing with a pleasurable agitation. She was glad that everything had gone so well and had ended peaceably.

"You arranged it nicely, Pavlusha. They certainly are good people. The Little Russian is such a hearty fellow. And the young lady, what a bright, wise girl she is! Who is she?"

"A teacher," answered Pavel, pacing up and down the room.

"Ah! Such a poor thing! Dressed so poorly! Ah, so poorly! It doesn't take long to catch a cold. And where are her relatives?"

"In Moscow," said Pavel, stopping before his mother. "Look! her father is a rich man; he is in the hardware business, and owns much property. He drove her out of the house because she got into this movement. She grew up in comfort and warmth, she was coddled and indulged in everything she desired – and now she walks four miles at night all by herself."

The mother was shocked. She stood in the middle of the room, and looked mutely at her son. Then she asked quietly:

"Is she going to the city?"

"Yes."

"And is she not afraid?"

"No," said Pavel smiling.

"Why did she go? She could have stayed here overnight, and slept with me."

"That wouldn't do. She might have been seen here to-morrow morning, and we don't want that; nor does she."

The mother recollected her previous anxieties, looked thoughtfully through the window, and asked:

"I cannot understand, Pasha, what there is dangerous in all this, or illegal. Why, you are not doing anything bad, are you?"

She was not quite assured of the safety and propriety of his conduct, and was eager for a confirmation from her son. But he looked calmly into her eyes, and declared in a firm voice:

"There is nothing bad in what we're doing, and there's not going to be. And yet the prison is awaiting us all. You may as well know it."

Her hands trembled. "Maybe God will grant you escape somehow," she said with sunken voice.

"No," said the son kindly, but decidedly. "I cannot lie to you. We will not escape." He smiled. "Now go to bed. You are tired. Good night."

Left alone, she walked up to the window, and stood there looking into the street. Outside it was cold and cheerless. The wind howled, blowing the snow from the roofs of the little sleeping houses. Striking against the walls and whispering something, quickly it fell upon the ground and drifted the white clouds of dry snowflakes across the street.

"O Christ in heaven, have mercy upon us!" prayed the mother.

The tears began to gather in her eyes, as fear returned persistently to her heart, and like a moth in the night she seemed to see fluttering the woe of which her son spoke with such composure and assurance.

Before her eyes as she gazed a smooth plain of snow spread out in the distance. The wind, carrying white, shaggy masses, raced over the plain, piping cold, shrill whistles. Across the snowy expanse moved a girl's figure, dark and solitary, rocking to and fro. The wind fluttered her dress, clogged her footsteps, and drove pricking snowflakes into her face. Walking was difficult; the little feet sank into the snow. Cold and fearful the girl bent forward, like a blade of grass, the sport of the wanton wind. To the right of her on the marsh stood the dark wall of the forest; the bare birches and aspens quivered and rustled with a mournful cry. Yonder in the distance, before her, the lights of the city glimmered dimly.

"Lord in heaven, have mercy!" the mother muttered again, shuddering with the cold and horror of an unformed fear.

# CHAPTER IV

The days glided by one after the other, like the beads of a rosary, and grew into weeks and months. Every Saturday Pavel's friends gathered in his house; and each meeting formed a step up a long stairway, which led somewhere into the distance, gradually lifting the people higher and higher. But its top remained invisible.

New people kept coming. The small room of the Vlasovs became crowded and close. Natasha arrived every Saturday night, cold and tired, but always fresh and lively, in inexhaustible good spirits. The mother made stockings, and herself put them on the little feet. Natasha laughed at first; but suddenly grew silent and thoughtful, and said in a low voice to the mother:

"I had a nurse who was also ever so kind. How strange, Pelagueya Nilovna! The workingmen live such a hard, outraged life, and yet there is more heart, more goodness in them than in – those!" And she waved her hand, pointing somewhere far, very far from herself.

"See what sort of a person you are," the older woman answered. "You have left your own family and everything – " She was unable to finish her thought, and heaving a sigh looked silently into Natasha's face with a feeling of gratitude to the girl for she knew not what. She sat on the floor before Natasha, who smiled and fell to musing.

"I have abandoned my family?" she repeated, bending her head down. "That's nothing. My father is a stupid, coarse man – my brother also – and a drunkard, besides. My oldest sister – unhappy, wretched thing – married a man much older than herself, very rich, a bore and greedy. But my mother I am sorry for! She's a simple woman like you, a beaten-down, frightened creature, so tiny, like a little mouse – she runs so quickly and is afraid of everybody. And sometimes I want to see her so – my mother!"

"My poor thing!" said the mother sadly, shaking her head.

The girl quickly threw up her head and cried out:

"Oh, no! At times I feel such joy, such happiness!"

Her face paled and her blue eyes gleamed. Placing her hands on the mother's shoulders she said with a deep voice issuing from her very heart, quietly as if in an ecstasy:

"If you knew – if you but understood what a great, joyous work we are doing! You will come to feel it!" she exclaimed with conviction.

A feeling akin to envy touched the heart of the mother. Rising from the floor she said plaintively:

"I am too old for that – ignorant and old."

Pavel spoke more and more often and at greater length, discussed more and more hotly, and – grew thinner and thinner. It seemed to his mother that when he spoke to Natasha or looked at her his eyes turned softer, his voice sounded fonder, and his entire bearing became simpler.

"Heaven grant!" she thought; and imagining Natasha as her daughter-in-law, she smiled inwardly.

Whenever at the meetings the disputes waxed too hot and stormy, the Little Russian stood up, and rocking himself to and fro like the tongue of a bell, he spoke in his sonorous, resonant voice simple and good words which allayed their excitement and recalled them to their purpose. Vyesovshchikov always kept hurrying everybody on somewhere. He and the red-haired youth called Samoylov were the first to begin all disputes. On their side were always Ivan Bukin, with the round head and the white eyebrows and lashes, who looked as if he had been hung out to dry, or washed out with lye; and the curly-headed, lofty-browed Fedya Mazin. Modest Yakob Somov, always smoothly combed and clean, spoke little and briefly, with a quiet, serious voice, and always took sides with Pavel and the Little Russian.

Sometimes, instead of Natasha, Alexey Ivanovich, a native of some remote government, came from the city. He wore eyeglasses, his beard was shiny, and he spoke with a peculiar singing voice. He produced the impression of a stranger from a far-distant land. He spoke about simple matters – about family life, about children, about commerce, the police, the price of bread and meat – about everything by which people live from day to day; and in everything he discovered fraud, confusion, and stupidity, sometimes setting these matters in a humorous light, but always showing their decided disadvantage to the people.

To the mother, too, it seemed that he had come from far away, from another country, where all the people lived a simple, honest, easy life, and that here everything was strange to him, that he could not get accustomed to this life and accept it as inevitable, that it displeased him, and that it aroused in him a calm determination to rearrange it after his own model. His face was yellowish, with thin, radiate wrinkles around his eyes, his voice low, and his hands always warm. In greeting the mother he would enfold her entire hand in his long, powerful fingers, and after such a vigorous hand clasp she felt more at ease and lighter of heart.

Other people came from the city, oftenest among them a tall, well-built young girl with large eyes set in a thin, pale face. She was called Sashenka. There was something manly in her walk and movements; she knit her thick, dark eyebrows in a frown, and when she spoke the thin nostrils of her straight nose quivered.

She was the first to say, "We are socialists!" Her voice when she said it was loud and strident.

When the mother heard this word, she stared in dumb fright into the girl's face. But Sashenka, half closing her eyes, said sternly and resolutely: "We must give up all our forces to the cause of the regeneration of life; we must realize that we will receive no recompense."

The mother understood that the socialists had killed the Czar. It had happened in the days of her youth; and people had then said that the landlords, wishing to revenge themselves on the Czar for liberating the peasant serfs, had vowed not to cut their hair until the Czar should be killed. These were the persons who had been called socialists. And now she could not understand why it was that her son and his friends were socialists.

When they had all departed, she asked Pavel:

"Pavlusha, are you a socialist?"

"Yes," he said, standing before her, straight and stalwart as always. "Why?"

The mother heaved a heavy sigh, and lowering her eyes, said:

"So, Pavlusha? Why, they are against the Czar; they killed one."

Pavel walked up and down the room, ran his hand across his face, and, smiling, said:

"We don't need to do that!"

He spoke to her for a long while in a low, serious voice. She looked into his face and thought:

"He will do nothing bad; he is incapable of doing bad!"

And thereafter the terrible word was repeated with increasing frequency; its sharpness wore off, and it became as familiar to her ear as scores of other words unintelligible to her. But Sashenka did not please her, and when she came the mother felt troubled and ill at ease.

Once she said to the Little Russian, with an expression of dissatisfaction about the mouth:

"What a stern person this Sashenka is! Flings her commands around! – You must do this and you must do that!"

The Little Russian laughed aloud.

"Well said, mother! You struck the nail right on the head! Hey, Pavel?"

And with a wink to the mother, he said with a jovial gleam in his eyes:

"You can't drain the blue blood out of a person even with a pump!"

Pavel remarked dryly:

"She is a good woman!" His face glowered.

"And that's true, too!" the Little Russian corroborated. "Only she does not understand that she ought to – "

They started up an argument about something the mother did not understand. The mother noticed, also, that Sashenka was most stern with Pavel, and that sometimes she even scolded him. Pavel smiled, was silent, and looked in the girl's face with that soft look he had formerly given Natasha. This likewise displeased the mother.

The gatherings increased in number, and began to be held twice a week; and when the mother observed with what avidity the young people listened to the speeches of her son and the Little Russian, to the interesting stories of Sashenka, Natasha, Alexey Ivanovich, and the other people from the city, she forgot her fears and shook her head sadly as she recalled the days of her youth.

Sometimes they sang songs, the simple, familiar melodies, aloud and merrily. But often they sang new songs, the words and music in perfect accord, sad and quaint in tune. These they sang in an undertone, pensively and seriously as church hymns are chanted. Their faces grew pale, yet hot, and a mighty force made itself felt in their ringing words.

"It is time for us to sing these songs in the street," said Vyesovshchikov somberly.

And sometimes the mother was struck by the spirit of lively, boisterous hilarity that took sudden possession of them. It was incomprehensible to her. It usually happened on the evenings when they read in the papers about the working people in other countries. Then their eyes sparkled with bold, animated joy; they became strangely, childishly happy; the room rang with merry peals of laughter, and they struck one another on the shoulder affectionately.

"Capital fellows, our comrades the French!" cried some one, as if intoxicated with his own mirth.

"Long live our comrades, the workingmen of Italy!" they shouted another time.

And sending these calls into the remote distance to friends who did not know them, who could not have understood their language, they seemed to feel confident that these people unknown to them heard and comprehended their enthusiasm and their ecstasy.

The Little Russian spoke, his eyes beaming, his love larger than the love of the others:

"Comrades, it would be well to write to them over there! Let them know that they have friends living in far-away Russia, workingmen who confess and believe in the same religion as they, comrades who pursue the same aims as they, and who rejoice in their victories!"

And all, with smiles on their faces dreamily spoke at length of the Germans, the Italians, the Englishmen, and the Swedes, of the working people of all countries, as of their friends, as of people near to their hearts, whom without seeing they loved and respected, whose joys they shared, whose pain they felt.

In the small room a vast feeling was born of the universal kinship of the workers of the world, at the same time its masters and its slaves, who had already been freed from the bondage of prejudice and who felt themselves the new masters of life. This feeling blended all into a single soul; it moved the mother, and, although inaccessible to her, it straightened and emboldened her, as it were, with its force, with its joys, with its triumphant, youthful vigor, intoxicating, caressing, full of hope.

"What queer people you are!" said the mother to the Little Russian one day. "All are your comrades – the Armenians and the Jews and the Austrians. You speak about all as of your friends; you grieve for all, and you rejoice for all!"

"For all, mother dear, for all! The world is ours! The world is for the workers! For us there is no nation, no race. For us there are only comrades and foes. All the workingmen are our comrades; all the rich, all the authorities are our foes. When you see how numerous we workingmen are, how tremendous the power of the spirit in us, then your heart is seized with such joy, such happiness, such a great holiday sings in your bosom! And, mother, the Frenchman and the German feel the same way when they look upon life, and the Italian also. We are all children of one mother – the great, invincible idea of the brotherhood of the workers of all countries over all the earth. This idea grows,

it warms us like the sun; it is a second sun in the heaven of justice, and this heaven resides in the workingman's heart. Whoever he be, whatever his name, a socialist is our brother in spirit now and always, and through all the ages forever and ever!"

This intoxicated and childish joy, this bright and firm faith came over the company more and more frequently; and it grew ever stronger, ever mightier.

And when the mother saw this, she felt that in very truth a great dazzling light had been born into the world like the sun in the sky and visible to her eyes.

On occasions when his father had stolen something again and was in prison, Nikolay would announce to his comrades: "Now we can hold our meetings at our house. The police will think us thieves, and they love thieves!"

Almost every evening after work one of Pavel's comrades came to his house, read with him, and copied something from the books. So greatly occupied were they that they hardly even took the time to wash. They ate their supper and drank tea with the books in their hands; and their talks became less and less intelligible to the mother.

"We must have a newspaper!" Pavel said frequently.

Life grew ever more hurried and feverish; there was a constant rushing from house to house, a passing from one book to another, like the flirting of bees from flower to flower.

"They are talking about us!" said Vyesovshchikov once. "We must get away soon."

"What's a quail for but to be caught in the snare?" retorted the Little Russian.

Vlasova liked the Little Russian more and more. When he called her "mother," it was like a child's hand patting her on the cheek. On Sunday, if Pavel had no time, he chopped wood for her; once he came with a board on his shoulder, and quickly and skillfully replaced the rotten step on the porch. Another time he repaired the tottering fence with just as little ado. He whistled as he worked. It was a beautifully sad and wistful whistle.

Once the mother said to the son:

"Suppose we take the Little Russian in as a boarder. It will be better for both of you. You won't have to run to each other so much!"

"Why need you trouble and crowd yourself?" asked Pavel, shrugging his shoulders.

"There you have it! All my life I've had trouble for I don't know what. For a good person it's worth the while."

"Do as you please. If he comes I'll be glad."

And the Little Russian moved into their home.

# CHAPTER V

The little house at the edge of the village aroused attention. Its walls already felt the regard of scores of suspecting eyes. The motley wings of rumor hovered restlessly above them.

People tried to surprise the secret hidden within the house by the ravine. They peeped into the windows at night. Now and then somebody would rap on the pane, and quickly take to his heels in fright.

Once the tavern keeper stopped Vlasova on the street. He was a dapper old man, who always wore a black silk neckerchief around his red, flabby neck, and a thick, lilac-colored waistcoat of velvet around his body. On his sharp, glistening nose there always sat a pair of glasses with tortoise-shell rims, which secured him the sobriquet of "bony eyes."

In a single breath and without awaiting an answer, he plied Vlasova with dry, crackling words:

"How are you, Pelagueya Nilovna, how are you? How is your son? Thinking of marrying him off, hey? He's a youth full ripe for matrimony. The sooner a son is married off, the safer it is for his folks. A man with a family preserves himself better both in the spirit and the flesh. With a family he is like mushrooms in vinegar. If I were in your place I would marry him off. Our times require a strict watch over the animal called man; people are beginning to live in their brains. Men have run amuck with their thoughts, and they do things that are positively criminal. The church of God is avoided by the young folk; they shun the public places, and assemble in secret in out-of-the-way corners. They speak in whispers. Why speak in whispers, pray? All this they don't dare say before people in the tavern, for example. What is it, I ask? A secret? The secret place is our holy church, as old as the apostles. All the other secrets hatched in the corners are the offspring of delusions. I wish you good health."

Raising his hand in an affected manner, he lifted his cap, and waving it in the air, walked away, leaving the mother to her perplexity.

Vlasova's neighbor, Marya Korsunova, the blacksmith's widow, who sold food at the factory, on meeting the mother in the market place also said to her:

"Look out for your son, Pelagueya!"

"What's the matter?"

"They're talking!" Marya tendered the information in a hushed voice. "And they don't say any good, mother of mine! They speak as if he's getting up a sort of union, something like those Flagellants – sects, that's the name! They'll whip one another like the Flagellants – "

"Stop babbling nonsense, Marya! Enough!"

"I'm not babbling nonsense! I talk because I know."

The mother communicated all these conversations to her son. He shrugged his shoulders in silence, and the Little Russian laughed with his thick, soft laugh.

"The girls also have a crow to pick with you!" she said. "You'd make enviable bridegrooms for any of them; you're all good workers, and you don't drink – but you don't pay any attention to them. Besides, people are saying that girls of questionable character come to you."

"Well, of course!" exclaimed Pavel, his brow contracting in a frown of disgust.

"In the bog everything smells of rottenness!" said the Little Russian with a sigh. "Why don't you, mother, explain to the foolish girls what it is to be married, so that they shouldn't be in such a hurry to get their bones broken?"

"Oh, well," said the mother, "they see the misery in store for them, they understand, but what can they do? They have no other choice!"

"It's a queer way they have of understanding, else they'd find a choice," observed Pavel.

The mother looked into his austere face.

"Why don't you teach them? Why don't you invite some of the cleverer ones?"

"That won't do!" the son replied dryly.

"Suppose we try?" said the Little Russian.

After a short silence Pavel said:

"Couples will be formed; couples will walk together; then some will get married, and that's all."

The mother became thoughtful. Pavel's austerity worried her. She saw that his advice was taken even by his older comrades, such as the Little Russian; but it seemed to her that all were afraid of him, and no one loved him because he was so stern.

Once when she had lain down to sleep, and her son and the Little Russian were still reading, she overheard their low conversation through the thin partition.

"You know I like Natasha," suddenly ejaculated the Little Russian in an undertone.

"I know," answered Pavel after a pause.

"Yes!"

The mother heard the Little Russian rise and begin to walk. The tread of his bare feet sounded on the floor, and a low, mournful whistle was heard. Then he spoke again:

"And does she notice it?"

Pavel was silent.

"What do you think?" the Little Russian asked, lowering his voice.

"She does," replied Pavel. "That's why she has refused to attend our meetings."

The Little Russian dragged his feet heavily over the floor, and again his low whistle quivered in the room. Then he asked:

"And if I tell her?"

"What?" The brief question shot from Pavel like the discharge of a gun.

"That I am – " began the Little Russian in a subdued voice.

"Why?" Pavel interrupted.

The mother heard the Little Russian stop, and she felt that he smiled.

"Yes, you see, I consider that if you love a girl you must tell her about it; else there'll be no sense to it!"

Pavel clapped the book shut with a bang.

"And what sense do you expect?"

Both were silent for a long while.

"Well?" asked the Little Russian.

"You must be clear in your mind, Andrey, as to what you want to do," said Pavel slowly. "Let us assume that she loves you, too – I do not think so, but let us assume it. Well, you get married. An interesting union – the intellectual with the workingman! Children come along; you will have to work all by yourself and very hard. Your life will become the ordinary life of a struggle for a piece of bread and a shelter for yourself and children. For the cause, you will become nonexistent, both of you!"

Silence ensued. Then Pavel began to speak again in a voice that sounded softer:

"You had better drop all this, Andrey. Keep quiet, and don't worry her. That's the more honest way."

"And do you remember what Alexey Ivanovich said about the necessity for a man to live a complete life – with all the power of his soul and body – do you remember?"

"That's not for us! How can you attain completion? It does not exist for you. If you love the future you must renounce everything in the present – everything, brother!"

"That's hard for a man!" said the Little Russian in a lowered voice.

"What else can be done? Think!"

The indifferent pendulum of the clock kept chopping off the seconds of life, calmly and precisely. At last the Little Russian said:

"Half the heart loves, and the other half hates! Is that a heart?"

"I ask you, what else can we do?"

The pages of a book rustled. Apparently Pavel had begun to read again. The mother lay with closed eyes, and was afraid to stir. She was ready to weep with pity for the Little Russian; but she was grieved still more for her son.

"My dear son! My consecrated one!" she thought.

Suddenly the Little Russian asked:

"So I am to keep quiet?"

"That's more honest, Andrey," answered Pavel softly.

"All right! That's the road we will travel." And in a few seconds he added, in a sad and subdued voice: "It will be hard for you, Pasha, when you get to that yourself."

"It is hard for me already."

"Yes?"

"Yes."

The wind brushed along the walls of the house, and the pendulum marked the passing time.

"Um," said the Little Russian leisurely, at last. "That's too bad."

The mother buried her head in the pillow and wept inaudibly.

In the morning Andrey seemed to her to be lower in stature and all the more winning. But her son towered thin, straight, and taciturn as ever. She had always called the Little Russian Andrey Stepanovich, in formal address, but now, all at once, involuntarily and unconsciously she said to him:

"Say, Andriusha, you had better get your boots mended. You are apt to catch cold."

"On pay day, mother, I'll buy myself a new pair," he answered, smiling. Then suddenly placing his long hand on her shoulder, he added: "You know, you are my real mother. Only you don't want to acknowledge it to people because I am so ugly."

She patted him on the hand without speaking. She would have liked to say many endearing things, but her heart was wrung with pity, and the words would not leave her tongue.

They spoke in the village about the socialists who distributed broadcast leaflets in blue ink. In these leaflets the conditions prevailing in the factory were trenchantly and pointedly depicted, as well as the strikes in St. Petersburg and southern Russia; and the workingmen were called upon to unite and fight for their interests.

The staid people who earned good pay waxed wroth as they read the literature, and said abusively: "Breeders of rebellion! For such business they ought to get their eyes blacked." And they carried the pamphlets to the office.

The young people read the proclamations eagerly, and said excitedly: "It's all true!"

The majority, broken down with their work, and indifferent to everything, said lazily: "Nothing will come of it. It is impossible!"

But the leaflets made a stir among the people, and when a week passed without their getting any, they said to one another:

"None again to-day! It seems the printing must have stopped."

Then on Monday the leaflets appeared again; and again there was a dull buzz of talk among the workingmen.

In the taverns and the factory strangers were noticed, men whom no one knew. They asked questions, scrutinized everything and everybody; looked around, ferreted about, and at once attracted universal attention, some by their suspicious watchfulness, others by their excessive obtrusiveness.

The mother knew that all this commotion was due to the work of her son Pavel. She saw how all the people were drawn together about him. He was not alone, and therefore it was not so dangerous. But pride in her son mingled with her apprehension for his fate; it was his secret labors that discharged themselves in fresh currents into the narrow, turbid stream of life.

One evening Marya Korsunova rapped at the window from the street, and when the mother opened it, she said in a loud whisper:

"Now, take care, Pelagueya; the boys have gotten themselves into a nice mess! It's been decided to make a search to-night in your house, and Mazin's and Vyesovshchikov's – "

The mother heard only the beginning of the woman's talk; all the rest of the words flowed together in one stream of ill-boding, hoarse sounds.

Marya's thick lips flapped hastily one against the other. Snorts issued from her fleshy nose, her eyes blinked and turned from side to side as if on the lookout for somebody in the street.

"And, mark you, I do not know anything, and I did not say anything to you, mother dear, and did not even see you to-day, you understand?"

Then she disappeared.

The mother closed the window and slowly dropped on a chair, her strength gone from her, her brain a desolate void. But the consciousness of the danger threatening her son quickly brought her to her feet again. She dressed hastily, for some reason wrapped her shawl tightly around her head, and ran to Fedya Mazin, who, she knew, was sick and not working. She found him sitting at the window reading a book, and moving his right hand to and fro with his left, his thumb spread out. On learning the news he jumped up nervously, his lips trembled, and his face paled.

"There you are! And I have an abscess on my finger!" he mumbled.

"What are we to do?" asked Vlasova, wiping the perspiration from her face with a hand that trembled nervously.

"Wait a while! Don't be afraid," answered Fedya, running his sound hand through his curly hair.

"But you are afraid yourself!"

"I?" He reddened and smiled in embarrassment. "Yes – h-m – I had a fit of cowardice, the devil take it! We must let Pavel know. I'll send my little sister to him. You go home. Never mind! They're not going to beat us."

On returning home she gathered together all the books, and pressing them to her bosom walked about the house for a long time, looking into the oven, under the oven, into the pipe of the samovar, and even into the water vat. She thought Pavel would at once drop work and come home; but he did not come. Finally she sat down exhausted on the bench in the kitchen, putting the books under her; and she remained in that position, afraid to rise, until Pavel and the Little Russian returned from the factory.

"Do you know?" she exclaimed without rising.

"We know!" said Pavel with a composed smile. "Are you afraid?"

"Oh, I'm so afraid, so afraid!"

"You needn't be afraid," said the Little Russian. "That won't help anybody."

"Didn't even prepare the samovar," remarked Pavel.

The mother rose, and pointed to the books with a guilty air.

"You see, it was on account of them – all the time – I was – "

The son and the Little Russian burst into laughter; and this relieved her. Then Pavel picked out some books and carried them out into the yard to hide them, while the Little Russian remained to prepare the samovar.

"There's nothing terrible at all in this, mother. It's only a shame for people to occupy themselves with such nonsense. Grown-up men in gray come in with sabers at their sides, with spurs on their feet, and rummage around, and dig up and search everything. They look under the bed, and climb up to the garret; if there is a cellar they crawl down into it. The cobwebs get on their faces, and they puff and snort. They are bored and ashamed. That's why they put on the appearance of being very wicked and very mad with us. It's dirty work, and they understand it, of course they do! Once they turned everything topsy-turvy in my place, and went away abashed, that's all. Another time they took me along with them. Well, they put me in prison, and I stayed there with them for about four months. You sit and sit, then you're called out, taken to the street under an escort of soldiers, and you're asked certain questions. They're stupid people, they talk such incoherent stuff. When they're done with you,

they tell the soldiers to take you back to prison. So they lead you here, and they lead you there – they've got to justify their salaries somehow. And then they let you go free. That's all."

"How you always do speak, Andriusha!" exclaimed the mother involuntarily.

Kneeling before the samovar he diligently blew into the pipe; but presently he turned his face, red with exertion, toward her, and smoothing his mustache with both hands inquired:

"And how do I speak, pray?"

"As if nobody had ever done you any wrong."

He rose, approached her, and shaking his head, said:

"Is there an unwronged soul anywhere in the wide world? But I have been wronged so much that I have ceased to feel wronged. What's to be done if people cannot help acting as they do? The wrongs I undergo hinder me greatly in my work. It is impossible to avoid them. But to stop and pay attention to them is useless waste of time. Such a life! Formerly I would occasionally get angry – but I thought to myself: all around me I see people broken in heart. It seemed as if each one were afraid that his neighbor would strike him, and so he tried to get ahead and strike the other first. Such a life it is, mother dear."

His speech flowed on serenely. He resolutely distracted her mind from alarm at the expected police search. His luminous, protuberant eyes smiled sadly. Though ungainly, he seemed made of stuff that bends but never breaks.

The mother sighed and uttered the warm wish:

"May God grant you happiness, Andriusha!"

The Little Russian stalked to the samovar with long strides, sat in front of it again on his heels, and mumbled:

"If he gives me happiness, I will not decline it; ask for it I won't, to seek it I have no time."

And he began to whistle.

Pavel came in from the yard and said confidently:

"They won't find them!" He started to wash himself. Then carefully rubbing his hands dry, he added: "If you show them, mother, that you are frightened, they will think there must be something in this house because you tremble. And we have done nothing as yet, nothing! You know that we don't want anything bad; on our side is truth, and we will work for it all our lives. This is our entire guilt. Why, then, need we fear?"

"I will pull myself together, Pasha!" she assured him. And the next moment, unable to repress her anxiety, she exclaimed: "I wish they'd come soon, and it would all be over!"

But they did not come that night, and in the morning, in anticipation of the fun that would probably be poked at her for her alarm, the mother began to joke at herself.

# CHAPTER VI

The searchers appeared at the very time they were not expected, nearly a month after this anxious night. Nikolay Vyesovshchikov was at Pavel's house talking with him and Andrey about their newspaper. It was late, about midnight. The mother was already in bed. Half awake, half asleep, she listened to the low, busy voices. Presently Andrey got up and carefully picked his way through and out of the kitchen, quietly shutting the door after him. The noise of the iron bucket was heard on the porch. Suddenly the door was flung wide open; the Little Russian entered the kitchen, and announced in a loud whisper:

"I hear the jingling of spurs in the street!"

The mother jumped out of bed, catching at her dress with a trembling hand; but Pavel came to the door and said calmly:

"You stay in bed; you're not feeling well."

A cautious, stealthy sound was heard on the porch. Pavel went to the door and knocking at it with his hand asked:

"Who's there?"

A tall, gray figure tumultuously precipitated itself through the doorway; after it another; two gendarmes pushed Pavel back, and stationed themselves on either side of him, and a loud mocking voice called out:

"No one you expect, eh?"

The words came from a tall, lank officer, with a thin, black mustache. The village policeman, Fedyakin, appeared at the bedside of the mother, and, raising one hand to his cap, pointed the other at her face and, making terrible eyes, said:

"This is his mother, your honor!" Then, waving his hand toward Pavel: "And this is he himself."

"Pavel Vlasov?" inquired the officer, screwing up his eyes; and when Pavel silently nodded his head, he announced, twirling his mustache:

"I have to make a search in your house. Get up, old woman!"

"Who is there?" he asked, turning suddenly and making a dash for the door.

"Your name?" His voice was heard from the other room.

Two other men came in from the porch: the old smelter Tveryakov and his lodger, the stoker Rybin, a staid, dark-colored peasant. He said in a thick, loud voice:

"Good evening, Nilovna."

She dressed herself, all the while speaking to herself in a low voice, so as to give herself courage:

"What sort of a thing is this? They come at night. People are asleep and they come – "

The room was close, and for some reason smelled strongly of shoe blacking. Two gendarmes and the village police commissioner, Ryskin, their heavy tread resounding on the floor, removed the books from the shelves and put them on the table before the officer. Two others rapped on the walls with their fists, and looked under the chairs. One man clumsily clambered up on the stove in the corner. Nikolay's pockmarked face became covered with red patches, and his little gray eyes were steadfastly fixed upon the officer. The Little Russian curled his mustache, and when the mother entered the room, he smiled and gave her an affectionate nod of the head.

Striving to suppress her fear, she walked, not sideways as always, but erect, her chest thrown out, which gave her figure a droll, stilted air of importance. Her shoes made a knocking sound on the floor, and her brows trembled.

The officer quickly seized the books with the long fingers of his white hand, turned over the pages, shook them, and with a dexterous movement of the wrist flung them aside. Sometimes a book fell to the floor with a light thud. All were silent. The heavy breathing of the perspiring gendarmes was audible; the spurs clanked, and sometimes the low question was heard: "Did you look here?"

The mother stood by Pavel's side against the wall. She folded her arms over her bosom, like her son, and both regarded the officer. The mother felt her knees trembling, and her eyes became covered with a dry mist.

Suddenly the piercing voice of Nikolay cut into the silence:

"Why is it necessary to throw the books on the floor?"

The mother trembled. Tveryakov rocked his head as if he had been struck on the back. Rybin uttered a peculiar cluck, and regarded Nikolay attentively.

The officer threw up his head, screwed up his eyes, and fixed them for a second upon the pockmarked, mottled, immobile face. His fingers began to turn the leaves of the books still more rapidly. His face was yellow and pale; he twisted his lips continually. At times he opened his large gray eyes wide, as if he suffered from an intolerable pain, and was ready to scream out in impotent anguish.

"Soldier!" Vyesovshchikov called out again. "Pick the books up!"

All the gendarmes turned their eyes on him, then looked at the officer. He again raised his head, and taking in the broad figure of Nikolay with a searching stare, he drawled:

"Well, well, pick up the books."

One gendarme bent down, and, looking slantwise at Vyesovshchikov, began to collect the books scattered on the floor.

"Why doesn't Nikolay keep quiet?" the mother whispered to Pavel. He shrugged his shoulders. The Little Russian drooped his head.

"What's the whispering there? Silence, please! Who reads the Bible?"

"I!" said Pavel.

"Aha! And whose books are all these?"

"Mine!" answered Pavel.

"So!" exclaimed the officer, throwing himself on the back of the chair. He made the bones of his slender hand crack, stretched his legs under the table, and adjusting his mustache, asked Nikolay: "Are you Andrey Nakhodka?"

"Yes!" answered Nikolay, moving forward. The Little Russian put out his hand, took him by the shoulder, and pulled him back.

"He made a mistake; I am Andrey!"

The officer raised his hand, and threatening Vyesovshchikov with his little finger, said:

"Take care!"

He began to search among his papers. From the street the bright, moonlit night looked on through the window with soulless eyes. Some one was loafing about outside the window, and the snow crunched under his tread.

"You, Nakhodka, you have been searched for political offenses before?" asked the officer.

"Yes, I was searched in Rostov and Saratov. Only there the gendarmes addressed me as 'Mr.'"

The officer winked his right eye, rubbed it, and showing his fine teeth, said:

"And do you happen to know, *Mr.* Nakhodka – yes, you, *Mr.* Nakhodka – who those scoundrels are who distribute criminal proclamations and books in the factory, eh?"

The Little Russian swayed his body, and with a broad smile on his face was about to say something, when the irritating voice of Nikolay again rang out:

"This is the first time we have seen scoundrels here!"

Silence ensued. There was a moment of breathless suspense. The scar on the mother's face whitened, and her right eyebrow traveled upward. Rybin's black beard quivered strangely. He dropped his eyes, and slowly scratched one hand with the other.

"Take this dog out of here!" said the officer.

Two gendarmes seized Nikolay under the arm and rudely pulled him into the kitchen. There he planted his feet firmly on the floor and shouted:

"Stop! I am going to put my coat on."

The police commissioner came in from the yard and said:

"There is nothing out there. We searched everywhere!"

"Well, of course!" exclaimed the officer, laughing. "I knew it! There's an experienced man here, it goes without saying."

The mother listened to his thin, dry voice, and looking with terror into the yellow face, felt an enemy in this man, an enemy without pity, with a heart full of aristocratic disdain of the people. Formerly she had but rarely seen such persons, and now she had almost forgotten they existed.

"Then this is the man whom Pavel and his friends have provoked," she thought.

"I place you, *Mr.* Andrey Onisimov Nakhodka, under arrest."

"What for?" asked the Little Russian composedly.

"I will tell you later!" answered the officer with spiteful civility, and turning to Vlasova, he shouted:

"Say, can you read or write?"

"No!" answered Pavel.

"I didn't ask you!" said the officer sternly, and repeated: "Say, old woman, can you read or write?"

The mother involuntarily gave way to a feeling of hatred for the man. She was seized with a sudden fit of trembling, as if she had jumped into cold water. She straightened herself, her scar turned purple, and her brow drooped low.

"Don't shout!" she said, flinging out her hand toward him. "You are a young man still; you don't know misery or sorrow – "

"Calm yourself, mother!" Pavel intervened.

"In this business, mother, you've got to take your heart between your teeth and hold it there tight," said the Little Russian.

"Wait a moment, Pasha!" cried the mother, rushing to the table and then addressing the officer: "Why do you snatch people away thus?"

"That does not concern you. Silence!" shouted the officer, rising.

"Bring in the prisoner Vyesovshchikov!" he commanded, and began to read aloud a document which he raised to his face.

Nikolay was brought into the room.

"Hats off!" shouted the officer, interrupting his reading.

Rybin went up to Vlasova, and patting her on the back, said in an undertone:

"Don't get excited, mother!"

"How can I take my hat off if they hold my hands?" asked Nikolay, drowning the reading.

The officer flung the paper on the table.

"Sign!" he said curtly.

The mother saw how everyone signed the document, and her excitement died down, a softer feeling taking possession of her heart. Her eyes filled with tears – burning tears of insult and impotence – such tears she had wept for twenty years of her married life, but lately she had almost forgotten their acid, heart-corroding taste.

The officer regarded her contemptuously. He scowled and remarked:

"You bawl ahead of time, my lady! Look out, or you won't have tears left for the future!"

"A mother has enough tears for everything, everything! If you have a mother, she knows it!"

The officer hastily put the papers into his new portfolio with its shining lock.

"How independent they all are in your place!" He turned to the police commissioner.

"An impudent pack!" mumbled the commissioner.

"March!" commanded the officer.

"Good-by, Andrey! Good-by, Nikolay!" said Pavel warmly and softly, pressing his comrades' hands.

"That's it! Until we meet again!" the officer scoffed.

Vyesovshchikov silently pressed Pavel's hands with his short fingers and breathed heavily. The blood mounted to his thick neck; his eyes flashed with rancor. The Little Russian's face beamed with a sunny smile. He nodded his head, and said something to the mother; she made the sign of the cross over him.

"God sees the righteous," she murmured.

At length the throng of people in the gray coats tumbled out on the porch, and their spurs jingled as they disappeared. Rybin went last. He regarded Pavel with an attentive look of his dark eyes and said thoughtfully: "Well, well – good-by!" and coughing in his beard he leisurely walked out on the porch.

Folding his hands behind his back, Pavel slowly paced up and down the room, stepping over the books and clothes tumbled about on the floor. At last he said somberly:

"You see how it's done! With insult – disgustingly – yes! They left me behind."

Looking perplexedly at the disorder in the room, the mother whispered sadly:

"They will take you, too, be sure they will. Why did Nikolay speak to them the way he did?"

"He got frightened, I suppose," said Pavel quietly. "Yes – It's impossible to speak to them, absolutely impossible! They cannot understand!"

"They came, snatched, and carried off!" mumbled the mother, waving her hands. As her son remained at home, her heart began to beat more lightly. Her mind stubbornly halted before one fact and refused to be moved. "How he scoffs at us, that yellow ruffian! How he threatens us!"

"All right, mamma!" Pavel suddenly said with resolution. "Let us pick all this up!"

He called her "mamma," the word he used only when he came nearer to her. She approached him, looked into his face, and asked softly:

"Did they insult you?"

"Yes," he answered. "That's – hard! I would rather have gone with them."

It seemed to her that she saw tears in his eyes, and wishing to soothe him, with an indistinct sense of his pain, she said with a sigh:

"Wait a while – they'll take you, too!"

"They will!" he replied.

After a pause the mother remarked sorrowfully:

"How hard you are, Pasha! If you'd only reassure me once in a while! But you don't. When I say something horrible, you say something worse."

He looked at her, moved closer to her, and said gently:

"I cannot, mamma! I cannot lie! You have to get used to it."

# CHAPTER VII

The next day they knew that Bukin, Samoylov, Somov, and five more had been arrested. In the evening Fedya Mazin came running in upon them. A search had been made in his house also. He felt himself a hero.

"Were you afraid, Fedya?" asked the mother.

He turned pale, his face sharpened, and his nostrils quivered.

"I was afraid the officer might strike me. He has a black beard, he's stout, his fingers are hairy, and he wears dark glasses, so that he looks as if he were without eyes. He shouted and stamped his feet. He said I'd rot in prison. And I've never been beaten either by my father or mother; they love me because I'm their only son. Everyone gets beaten everywhere, but I never!"

He closed his eyes for a moment, compressed his lips, tossed his hair back with a quick gesture of both hands, and looking at Pavel with reddening eyes, said:

"If anybody ever strikes me, I will thrust my whole body into him like a knife – I will bite my teeth into him – I'd rather he'd kill me at once and be done!"

"To defend yourself is your right," said Pavel. "But take care not to attack!"

"You are delicate and thin," observed the mother. "What do you want with fighting?"

"I *will* fight!" answered Fedya in a low voice.

When he left, the mother said to Pavel:

"This young man will go down sooner than all the rest."

Pavel was silent.

A few minutes later the kitchen door opened slowly and Rybin entered.

"Good evening!" he said, smiling. "Here I am again. Yesterday they brought me here; to-day I come of my own accord. Yes, yes!" He gave Pavel a vigorous handshake, then put his hand on the mother's shoulder, and asked: "Will you give me tea?"

Pavel silently regarded his swarthy, broad countenance, his thick, black beard, and dark, intelligent eyes. A certain gravity spoke out of their calm gaze; his stalwart figure inspired confidence.

The mother went into the kitchen to prepare the samovar. Rybin sat down, stroked his beard, and placing his elbows on the table, scanned Pavel with his dark look.

"That's the way it is," he said, as if continuing an interrupted conversation. "I must have a frank talk with you. I observed you long before I came. We live almost next door to each other. I see many people come to you, and no drunkenness, no carrying on. That's the main thing. If people don't raise the devil, they immediately attract attention. What's that? There you are! That's why all eyes are on me, because I live apart and give no offense."

His speech flowed along evenly and freely. It had a ring that won him confidence.

"So. Everybody prates about you. My masters call you a heretic; you don't go to church. I don't, either. Then the papers appeared, those leaflets. Was it you that thought them out?"

"Yes, I!" answered Pavel, without taking his eyes off Rybin's face. Rybin also looked steadily into Pavel's eyes.

"You alone!" exclaimed the mother, coming into the room. "It wasn't you alone."

Pavel smiled; Rybin also.

The mother sniffed, and walked away, somewhat offended because they did not pay attention to her words.

"Those leaflets are well thought out. They stir the people up. There were twelve of them, weren't there?"

"Yes."

"I have read them all! Yes, yes. Sometimes they are not clear, and some things are superfluous. But when a man speaks a great deal, it's natural he should occasionally say things out of the way."

Rybin smiled. His teeth were white and strong.

"Then the search. That won me over to you more than anything else. You and the Little Russian and Nikolay, you all got caught!" He paused for the right word and looked at the window, rapping the table with his fingers. "They discovered your resolve. You attend to your business, your honor, you say, and we'll attend to ours. The Little Russian's a fine fellow, too. The other day I heard how he speaks in the factory, and thinks I to myself: that man isn't going to be vanquished; it's only one thing will knock him out, and that's death! A sturdy chap! Do you trust me, Pavel?"

"Yes, I trust you!" said Pavel, nodding.

"That's right. Look! I am forty years old; I am twice as old as you, and I've seen twenty times as much as you. For three years long I wore my feet to the bone marching in the army. I have been married twice. I've been in the Caucasus, I know the Dukhobors. They're not masters of life, no, they aren't!"

The mother listened eagerly to his direct speech. It pleased her to have an older man come to her son and speak to him just as if he were confessing to him. But Pavel seemed to treat the guest too curtly, and the mother, to introduce a softer element, asked Rybin:

"Maybe you'll have something to eat."

"Thank you, mother! I've had my supper already. So then, Pavel, you think that life does not go as it should?"

Pavel arose and began to pace the room, folding his hands behind his back.

"It goes all right," he said. "Just now, for instance, it has brought you here to me with an open heart. We who work our whole life long – it unites us gradually and more and more every day. The time will come when we shall all be united. Life is arranged unjustly for us and is made a burden. At the same time, however, life itself is opening our eyes to its bitter meaning and is itself showing man the way to accelerate its pace. We all of us think just as we live."

"True. But wait!" Rybin stopped him. "Man ought to be renovated – that's what I think! When a man grows scabby, take him to the bath, give him a thorough cleaning, put clean clothes on him – and he will get well. Isn't it so? And if the heart grows scabby, take its skin off, even if it bleeds, wash it, and dress it up all afresh. Isn't it so? How else can you clean the inner man? There now!"

Pavel began to speak hotly and bitterly about God, about the Czar, about the government authorities, about the factory, and how in foreign countries the workingmen stand up for their rights. Rybin smiled occasionally; sometimes he struck a finger on the table as if punctuating a period. Now and then he cried out briefly: "So!" And once, laughing out, he said quietly: "You're young. You know people but little!"

Pavel stopping before him said seriously:

"Let's not talk of being old or being young. Let us rather see whose thoughts are truer."

"That is, according to you, we've been fooled about God also. So! I, too, think that our religion is false and injurious to us."

Here the mother intervened. When her son spoke about God and about everything that she connected with her faith in him, which was dear and sacred to her, she sought to meet his eyes, she wanted to ask her son mutely not to chafe her heart with the sharp, bitter words of his unbelief. And she felt that Rybin, an older man, would also be displeased and offended. But when Rybin calmly put his question to Pavel, she could no longer contain herself, and said firmly: "When you speak of God, I wish you were more careful. You can do whatever you like. You have your compensation in your work." Catching her breath she continued with still greater vehemence: "But I, an old woman, I will have nothing to lean upon in my distress if you take my God away from me."

Her eyes filled with tears. She was washing the dishes, and her fingers trembled.

"You did not understand us, mother!" Pavel said softly and kindly.

"Beg your pardon, mother!" Rybin added in a slow, thick voice. He looked at Pavel and smiled. "I forgot that you're too old to cut out your warts."

"I did not speak," continued Pavel, "about that good and gracious God in whom you believe, but about the God with whom the priests threaten us as with a stick, about the God in whose name they want to force all of us to the evil will of the few."

"That's it, right you are!" exclaimed Rybin, striking his fingers upon the table. "They have mutilated even our God for us, they have turned everything in their hands against us. Mark you, mother, God created man in his own image and after his own likeness. Therefore he is like man if man is like him. But we have become, not like God, but like wild beasts! In the churches they set up a scarecrow before us. We have got to change our God, mother; we must cleanse him! They have dressed him up in falsehood and calumny; they have distorted his face in order to destroy our souls!"

He talked composedly and very distinctly and intelligibly. Every word of his speech fell upon the mother's ears like a blow. And his face set in the frame of his black beard, his broad face attired, as it were, in mourning, frightened her. The dark gleam of his eyes was insupportable to her. He aroused in her a sense of anguish, and filled her heart with terror.

"No, I'd better go away," she said, shaking her head in negation. "It's not in my power to listen to this. I cannot!"

And she quickly walked into the kitchen followed by the words of Rybin:

"There you have it, Pavel! It begins not in the head, but in the heart. The heart is such a place that nothing else will grow in it."

"Only reason," said Pavel firmly, "only reason will free mankind."

"Reason does not give strength!" retorted Rybin emphatically. "The heart gives strength, and not the head, I tell you."

The mother undressed and lay down in bed without saying her prayer. She felt cold and miserable. And Rybin, who at first seemed such a staid, wise man, now aroused in her a blind hostility.

"Heretic! Sedition-maker!" she thought, listening to his even voice flowing resonantly from his deep chest. He, too, had come – he was indispensable.

He spoke confidently and composedly:

"The holy place must not be empty. The spot where God dwells is a place of pain; and if he drops out from the heart, there will be a wound in it, mark my word! It is necessary, Pavel, to invent a new faith; it is necessary to create a God for all. Not a judge, not a warrior, but a God who shall be the friend of the people."

"You had one! There was Christ!"

"Wait a moment! Christ was not strong in spirit. 'Let the cup pass from me,' he said. And he recognized Cæsar. God cannot recognize human powers. He himself is the whole of power. He does not divide his soul saying: so much for the godly, so much for the human. If Christ came to affirm the divine he had no need for anything human. But he recognized trade, and he recognized marriage. And it was unjust of him to condemn the fig tree. Was it of its own will that it was barren of fruit? Neither is the soul barren of good of its own accord. Have I sown the evil in it myself? Of course not!"

The two voices hummed continuously in the room, as if clutching at each other and wrestling in exciting play. Pavel walked hurriedly up and down the room; the floor cracked under his feet. When he spoke all other sounds were drowned by his voice; but above the slow, calm flow of Rybin's dull utterance were heard the strokes of the pendulum and the low creaking of the frost, as of sharp claws scratching the walls of the house.

"I will speak to you in my own way, in the words of a stoker. God is like fire. He does not strengthen anything. He cannot. He merely burns and fuses when he gives light. He burns down churches, he does not raise them. He lives in the heart."

"And in the mind!" insisted Pavel.

"That's it! In the heart and in the mind. There's the rub. It's this that makes all the trouble and misery and misfortune. We have severed ourselves from our own selves. The heart was severed from the mind, and the mind has disappeared. Man is not a unit. It is God that makes him a unit, that

makes him a round, circular thing. God always makes things round. Such is the earth and all the stars and everything visible to the eye. The sharp, angular things are the work of men."

The mother fell asleep and did not hear Rybin depart.

But he began to come often, and if any of Pavel's comrades were present, Rybin sat in a corner and was silent, only occasionally interjecting: "That's so!"

And once looking at everybody from his corner with his dark glance he said somberly:

"We must speak about that which is; that which will be is unknown to us. When the people have freed themselves, they will see for themselves what is best. Enough, quite enough of what they do not want at all has been knocked into their heads. Let there be an end of this! Let them contrive for themselves. Maybe they will want to reject everything, all life, and all knowledge; maybe they will see that everything is arranged against them. You just deliver all the books into their hands, and they will find an answer for themselves, depend upon it! Only let them remember that the tighter the collar round the horse's neck, the worse the work."

But when Pavel was alone with Rybin they at once began an endless but always calm disputation, to which the mother listened anxiously, following their words in silence, and endeavoring to understand. Sometimes it seemed to her as if the broad-shouldered, black-bearded peasant and her well-built, sturdy son had both gone blind. In that little room, in the darkness, they seemed to be knocking about from side to side in search of light and an outlet, to be grasping out with powerful but blind hands; they seemed to fall upon the floor, and having fallen, to scrape and fumble with their feet. They hit against everything, groped about for everything, and flung it away, calm and composed, losing neither faith nor hope.

They got her accustomed to listen to a great many words, terrible in their directness and boldness; and these words had now ceased to weigh down on her so heavily as at first. She learned to push them away from her ears. And although Rybin still displeased her as before, he no longer inspired her with hostility.

Once a week she carried underwear and books to the Little Russian in prison. On one occasion they allowed her to see him and talk to him; and on returning home she related enthusiastically:

"He is as if he were at home there, too! He is good and kind to everybody; everybody jokes with him; just as if there were a holiday in his heart all the time. His lot is hard and heavy, but he does not want to show it."

"That's right! That's the way one should act," observed Rybin. "We are all enveloped in misery as in our skins. We breathe misery, we wear misery. But that's nothing to brag about. Not all people are blind; some close their eyes of their own accord, indeed! And if you are stupid you have to suffer for it."

# CHAPTER VIII

The little old gray house of the Vlasovs attracted the attention of the village more and more; and although there was much suspicious chariness and unconscious hostility in this notice, yet at the same time a confiding curiosity grew up also. Now and then some one would come over, and looking carefully about him would say to Pavel: "Well, brother, you are reading books here, and you know the laws. Explain to me, then – "

And he would tell Pavel about some injustice of the police or the factory administration. In complicated cases Pavel would give the man a note to a lawyer friend in the city, and when he could, he would explain the case himself.

Gradually people began to look with respect upon this young, serious man, who spoke about everything simply and boldly, and almost never laughed, who looked at everybody and listened to everybody with an attention which searched stubbornly into every circumstance, and always found a certain general and endless thread binding people together by a thousand tightly drawn knots.

Vlasova saw how her son had grown up; she strove to understand his work, and when she succeeded, she rejoiced with a childlike joy.

Pavel rose particularly in the esteem of the people after the appearance of his story about the "Muddy Penny."

Back of the factory, almost encircling it with a ring of putrescence, stretched a vast marsh grown over with fir trees and birches. In the summer it was covered with thick yellow and green scum, and swarms of mosquitoes flew from it over the village, spreading fever in their course. The marsh belonged to the factory, and the new manager, wishing to extract profit from it, conceived the plan of draining it and incidentally gathering in a fine harvest of peat. Representing to the workingmen how much this measure would contribute to the sanitation of the locality and the improvement of the general condition of all, the manager gave orders to deduct a kopeck from every ruble of their earnings, in order to cover the expense of draining the marsh. The workingmen rebelled; they especially resented the fact that the office clerks were exempted from paying the new tax.

Pavel was ill on the Saturday when posters were hung up announcing the manager's order in regard to the toll. He had not gone to work and he knew nothing about it. The next day, after mass, a dapper old man, the smelter Sizov, and the tall, vicious-looking locksmith Makhotin, came to him and told him of the manager's decision.

"A few of us older ones got together," said Sizov, speaking sedately, "talked the matter over, and our comrades, you see, sent us over to you, as you are a knowing man among us. Is there such a law as gives our manager the right to make war upon mosquitoes with our kopecks?"

"Think!" said Makhotin, with a glimmer in his narrow eyes. "Three years ago these sharpers collected a tax to build a bath house. Three thousand eight hundred rubles is what they gathered in. Where are those rubles? And where is the bath house?"

Pavel explained the injustice of the tax, and the obvious advantage of such a procedure to the factory owners; and both of his visitors went away in a surly mood.

The mother, who had gone with them to the door, said, laughing:

"Now, Pasha, the old people have also begun to come to seek wisdom from you."

Without replying, Pavel sat down at the table with a busy air and began to write. In a few minutes he said to her: "Please go to the city immediately and deliver this note."

"Is it dangerous?" she asked.

"Yes! A newspaper is being published for us down there! That 'Muddy Penny' story must go into the next issue."

"I'll go at once," she replied, beginning hurriedly to put on her wraps.

This was the first commission her son had given her. She was happy that he spoke to her so openly about the matter, and that she might be useful to him in his work.

"I understand all about it, Pasha," she said. "It's a piece of robbery. What's the name of the man? Yegor Ivanovich?"

"Yes," said Pavel, smiling kindly.

She returned late in the evening, exhausted but contented.

"I saw Sashenka," she told her son. "She sends you her regards. And this Yegor Ivanovich is such a simple fellow, such a joker! He speaks so comically."

"I'm glad you like them," said Pavel softly.

"They are simple people, Pasha. It's good when people are simple. And they all respect you."

Again, Monday, Pavel did not go to work. His head ached. But at dinner time Fedya Mazin came running in, excited, out of breath, happy, and tired.

"Come! The whole factory has arisen! They've sent for you. Sizov and Makhotin say you can explain better than anybody else. My! What a hullabaloo!"

Pavel began to dress himself silently.

"A crowd of women are gathered there; they are screaming!"

"I'll go, too," declared the mother. "You're not well, and – what are they doing? I'm going, too."

"Come," Pavel said briefly.

They walked along the street quickly and silently. The mother panted with the exertion of the rapid gait and her excitement. She felt that something big was happening. At the factory gates a throng of women were discussing the affair in shrill voices. When the three pushed into the yard, they found themselves in the thick of a crowd buzzing and humming in excitement. The mother saw that all heads were turned in the same direction, toward the blacksmith's wall, where Sizov, Makhotin, Vyalov, and five or six influential, solid workingmen were standing on a high pile of old iron heaped on the red brick paving of the court, and waving their hands.

"Vlasov is coming!" somebody shouted.

"Vlasov? Bring him along!"

Pavel was seized and pushed forward, and the mother was left alone.

"Silence!" came the shout from various directions. Near by the even voice of Rybin was heard:

"We must make a stand, not for the kopeck, but for justice. What is dear to us is not our kopeck, because it's no rounder than any other kopeck; it's only heavier; there's more human blood in it than in the manager's ruble. That's the truth!"

The words fell forcibly on the crowd and stirred the men to hot responses:

"That's right! Good, Rybin!"

"Silence! The devil take you!"

"Vlasov's come!"

The voices mingled in a confused uproar, drowning the ponderous whir of the machinery, the sharp snorts of the steam, and the flapping of the leather belts. From all sides people came running, waving their hands; they fell into arguments, and excited one another with burning, stinging words. The irritation that had found no vent, that had always lain dormant in tired breasts, had awakened, demanded an outlet, and burst from their mouths in a volley of words. It soared into the air like a great bird spreading its motley wings ever wider and wider, clutching people and dragging them after it, and striking them against one another. It lived anew, transformed into flaming wrath. A cloud of dust and soot hung over the crowd; their faces were all afire, and black drops of sweat trickled down their cheeks. Their eyes gleamed from darkened countenances; their teeth glistened.

Pavel appeared on the spot where Sizov and Makhotin were standing, and his voice rang out:

"Comrades!"

The mother saw that his face paled and his lips trembled; she involuntarily pushed forward, shoving her way through the crowd.

"Where are you going, old woman?"

She heard the angry question, and the people pushed her, but she would not stop, thrusting the crowd aside with her shoulders and elbows. She slowly forced her way nearer to her son, yielding to the desire to stand by his side. When Pavel had thrown out the word to which he was wont to attach a deep and significant meaning, his throat contracted in a sharp spasm of the joy of fight. He was seized with an invincible desire to give himself up to the strength of his faith; to throw his heart to the people. His heart kindled with the dream of truth.

"Comrades!" he repeated, extracting power and rapture from the word. "We are the people who build churches and factories, forge chains and coin money, make toys and machines. We are that living force which feeds and amuses the world from the cradle to the grave."

"There!" Rybin exclaimed.

"Always and everywhere we are first in work but last in life. Who cares for us? Who wishes us good? Who regards us as human beings? No one!"

"No one!" echoed from the crowd.

Pavel, mastering himself, began to talk more simply and calmly; the crowd slowly drew about him, blending into one dark, thick, thousand-headed body. It looked into his face with hundreds of attentive eyes; it sucked in his words in silent, strained attention.

"We will not attain to a better life until we feel ourselves as comrades, as one family of friends firmly bound together by one desire – the desire to fight for our rights."

"Get down to business!" somebody standing near the mother shouted rudely.

"Don't interrupt!" "Shut up!" The two muffled exclamations were heard in different places. The soot-covered faces frowned in sulky incredulity; scores of eyes looked into Pavel's face thoughtfully and seriously.

"A socialist, but no fool!" somebody observed.

"I say, he does speak boldly!" said a tall, crippled workingman, tapping the mother on the shoulder.

"It is time, comrades, to take a stand against the greedy power that lives by our labor. It is time to defend ourselves; we must all understand that no one except ourselves will help us. One for all and all for one – this is our law, if we want to crush the foe!"

"He's right, boys!" Makhotin shouted. "Listen to the truth!" And, with a broad sweep of his arm, he shook his fist in the air.

"We must call out the manager at once," said Pavel. "We must ask him."

As if struck by a tornado, the crowd rocked to and fro; scores of voices shouted:

"The manager! The manager! Let him come! Let him explain!"

"Send delegates for him! Bring him here!"

"No, don't; it's not necessary!"

The mother pushed her way to the front and looked up at her son. She was filled with pride. Her son stood among the old, respected workingmen; all listened to him and agreed with him! She was pleased that he was so calm and talked so simply; not angrily, not swearing, like the others. Broken exclamations, wrathful words and oaths descended like hail on iron. Pavel looked down on the people from his elevation, and with wide-open eyes seemed to be seeking something among them.

"Delegates!"

"Let Sizov speak!"

"Vlasov!"

"Rybin! He has a terrible tongue!"

Finally Sizov, Rybin, and Pavel were chosen for the interview with the manager. When just about to send for the manager, suddenly low exclamations were heard in the crowd:

"Here he comes himself!"

"The manager?"

"Ah!"

The crowd opened to make way for a tall, spare man with a pointed beard, an elongated face and blinking eyes.

"Permit me," he said, as he pushed the people aside with a short motion of his hand, without touching them. With the experienced look of a ruler of people, he scanned the workingmen's faces with a searching gaze. They took their hats off and bowed to him. He walked past them without acknowledging their greetings. His presence silenced and confused the crowd, and evoked embarrassed smiles and low exclamations, as of repentant children who had already come to regret their prank.

Now he passed by the mother, casting a stern glance at her face, and stopped before the pile of iron. Somebody from above extended a hand to him; he did not take it, but with an easy, powerful movement of his body he clambered up and stationed himself in front of Pavel and Sizov. Looking around the silent crowd, he asked:

"What's the meaning of this crowd? Why have you dropped your work?"

For a few seconds silence reigned. Sizov waved his cap in the air, shrugged his shoulders, and dropped his head.

"I am asking you a question!" continued the manager.

Pavel moved alongside of him and said in a low voice, pointing to Sizov and Rybin:

"We three are authorized by all the comrades to ask you to revoke your order about the kopeck discount."

"Why?" asked the manager, without looking at Pavel.

"We do not consider such a tax just!" Pavel replied loudly.

"So, in my plan to drain the marsh you see only a desire to exploit the workingmen and not a desire to better their conditions; is that it?"

"Yes!" Pavel replied.

"And you, also?" the manager asked Rybin.

"The very same!"

"How about you, my worthy friend?" The manager turned to Sizov.

"I, too, want to ask you to let us keep our kopecks." And drooping his head again, Sizov smiled guiltily. The manager slowly bent his look upon the crowd again, shrugged his shoulders, and then, regarding Pavel searchingly, observed:

"You appear to be a fairly intelligent man. Do you not understand the usefulness of this measure?"

Pavel replied loudly:

"If the factory should drain the marsh at its own expense, we would all understand it!"

"This factory is not in the philanthropy business!" remarked the manager dryly. "I order you all to start work at once!"

And he began to descend, cautiously feeling the iron with his feet, and without looking at anyone.

A dissatisfied hum was heard in the crowd.

"What!" asked the manager, halting.

All were silent; then from the distance came a solitary voice:

"You go to work yourself!"

"If in fifteen minutes you do not start work, I'll order every single one of you to be discharged!" the manager announced dryly and distinctly.

He again proceeded through the crowd, but now an indistinct murmur followed him, and the shouting grew louder as his figure receded.

"Speak to him!"

"That's what you call justice! Worse luck!"

Some turned to Pavel and shouted:

"Say, you great lawyer, you, what's to be done now? You talked and talked, but the moment he came it all went up in the air!"

"Well, Vlasov, what now?"

When the shouts became more insistent, Pavel raised his hand and said:

"Comrades, I propose that we quit work until he gives up that kopeck!"

Excited voices burst out:

"He thinks we're fools!"

"We ought to do it!"

"A strike?"

"For one kopeck?"

"Why not? Why not strike?"

"We'll all be discharged!"

"And who is going to do the work?"

"There are others!"

"Who? Judases?"

"Every year I would have to give three rubles and sixty kopecks to the mosquitoes!"

"All of us would have to give it!"

Pavel walked down and stood at the side of his mother. No one paid any attention to him now. They were all yelling and debating hotly with one another.

"You cannot get them to strike!" said Rybin, coming up to Pavel. "Greedy as these people are for a penny, they are too cowardly. You may, perhaps, induce about three hundred of them to follow you, no more. It's a heap of dung you won't lift with one toss of the pitchfork, I tell you!"

Pavel was silent. In front of him the huge black face of the crowd was rocking wildly, and fixed on him an importunate stare. His heart beat in alarm. It seemed to him as if all the words he had spoken vanished in the crowd without leaving any trace, like scattered drops of rain falling on parched soil. One after the other, workmen approached him praising his speech, but doubting the success of a strike, and complaining how little the people understood their own interests and realized their own strength.

Pavel had a sense of injury and disappointment as to his own power. His head ached; he felt desolate. Hitherto, whenever he pictured the triumph of his truth, he wanted to cry with the delight that seized his heart. But here he had spoken his truth to the people, and behold! when clothed in words it appeared so pale, so powerless, so incapable of affecting anyone. He blamed himself; it seemed to him that he had concealed his dream in a poor, disfiguring garment and no one could, therefore, detect its beauty.

He went home, tired and moody. He was followed by his mother and Sizov, while Rybin walked alongside, buzzing into his ear:

"You speak well, but you don't speak to the heart! That's the trouble! The spark must be thrown into the heart, into its very depths!"

"It's time we lived and were guided by reason," Pavel said in a low voice.

"The boot does not fit the foot; it's too thin and narrow! The foot won't get in! And if it does, it will wear the boot out mighty quick. That is the trouble."

Sizov, meanwhile, talked to the mother.

"It's time for us old folks to get into our graves. Nilovna! A new people is coming. What sort of a life have we lived? We crawled on our knees, and always crouched on the ground! But here are the new people. They have either come to their senses, or else are blundering worse than we; but they are not like us, anyway. Just look at those youngsters talking to the manager as to their equal! Yes, ma'am! Oh, if only my son Matvey were alive! Good-by, Pavel Vlasov! You stand up for the people all right, brother. God grant you his favor! Perhaps you'll find a way out. God grant it!" And he walked away.

"Yes, you may as well die straight off!" murmured Rybin. "You are no men, now. You are only putty – good to fill cracks with, that's all! Did you see, Pavel, who it was that shouted to make you a delegate? It was those who call you socialist – agitator – yes! – thinking you'd be discharged, and it would serve you right!"

"They are right, according to their lights!" said Pavel.

"So are wolves when they tear one another to pieces!" Rybin's face was sullen, his voice unusually tremulous.

The whole day Pavel felt ill at ease, as if he had lost something, he did not know what, and anticipated a further loss.

At night when the mother was asleep and he was reading in bed, gendarmes appeared and began to search everywhere – in the yard, in the attic. They were sullen; the yellow-faced officer conducted himself as on the first occasion, insultingly, derisively, delighting in abuse, endeavoring to cut down to the very heart. The mother, in a corner, maintained silence, never removing her eyes from her son's face. He made every effort not to betray his emotion; but whenever the officer laughed, his fingers twitched strangely, and the old woman felt how hard it was for him not to reply, and to bear the jesting. This time the affair was not so terrorizing to her as at the first search. She felt a greater hatred to these gray, spurred night callers, and her hatred swallowed up her alarm.

Pavel managed to whisper:

"They'll arrest me."

Inclining her head, she quietly replied:

"I understand."

She did understand – they would put him in jail for what he had said to the workingmen that day. But since all agreed with what he had said, and all ought to stand up for him, he would not be detained long.

She longed to embrace him and cry over him; but there stood the officer, watching her with a malevolent squint of his eyes. His lips trembled, his mustache twitched. It seemed to Vlasova that the officer was but waiting for her tears, complaints, and supplications. With a supreme effort endeavoring to say as little as possible, she pressed her son's hand, and holding her breath said slowly, in a low tone:

"Good-by, Pasha. Did you take everything you need?"

"Everything. Don't worry!"

"Christ be with you!"

# CHAPTER IX

When the police had led Pavel away, the mother sat down on the bench, and closing her eyes began to weep quietly. She leaned her back against the wall, as her husband used to do, her head thrown backward. Bound up in her grief and the injured sense of her impotence, she cried long, gently, and monotonously, pouring out all the pain of her wounded heart in her sobs. And before her, like an irremovable stain, hung that yellow face with the scant mustache, and the squinting eyes staring at her with malicious pleasure. Resentment and bitterness were winding themselves about her breast like black threads on a spool; resentment and bitterness toward those who tear a son away from his mother because he is seeking truth.

It was cold; the rain pattered against the window panes; something seemed to be creeping along the walls. She thought she heard, walking watchfully around the house, gray, heavy figures, with broad, red faces, without eyes, and with long arms. It seemed to her that she almost heard the jingling of their spurs.

"I wish they had taken me, too!" she thought.

The whistle blew, calling the people to work. This time its sounds were low, indistinct, uncertain. The door opened and Rybin entered. He stood before her, wiping the raindrops from his beard.

"They snatched him away, did they?" he asked.

"Yes, they did, the dogs!" she replied, sighing.

"That's how it is," said Rybin, with a smile; "they searched me, too; went all through me – yes! Abused me to their heart's content, but did me no harm beyond that. So they carried off Pavel, did they? The manager tipped the wink, the gendarme said 'Amen!' and lo! a man has disappeared. They certainly are thick together. One goes through the people's pockets while the other holds the gun."

"You ought to stand up for Pavel!" cried the mother, rising to her feet. "It's for you all that he's gone!"

"Who ought to stand up for him?" asked Rybin.

"All of you!"

"You want too much! We'll do nothing of the kind! Our masters have been gathering strength for thousands of years; they have driven our hearts full of nails. We cannot unite at once. We must first extract from ourselves, each from the other, the iron spikes that prevent us from standing close to one another."

And thus he departed, with his heavy gait, leaving the mother to her grief, aggravated by the stern hopelessness of his words.

The day passed in a thick mist of empty, senseless longing. She made no fire, cooked no dinner, drank no tea, and only late in the evening ate a piece of bread. When she went to bed it occurred to her that her life had never yet been so humiliating, so lonely and void. During the last years she had become accustomed to live constantly in the expectation of something momentous, something good. Young people were circling around her, noisy, vigorous, full of life. Her son's thoughtful and earnest face was always before her, and he seemed to be the master and creator of this thrilling and noble life. Now he was gone, everything was gone. In the whole day, no one except the disagreeable Rybin had called.

Beyond the window, the dense, cold rain was sighing and knocking at the panes. The rain and the drippings from the roof filled the air with a doleful, wailing melody. The whole house appeared to be rocking gently to and fro, and everything around her seemed aimless and unnecessary.

A gentle rap was heard at the door. It came once, and then a second time. She had grown accustomed to these noises; they no longer frightened her. A soft, joyous sensation thrilled her heart,

and a vague hope quickly brought her to her feet. Throwing a shawl over her shoulders, she hurried to the door and opened it.

Samoylov walked in, followed by another man with his face hidden behind the collar of his overcoat and under a hat thrust over his eyebrows.

"Did we wake you?" asked Samoylov, without greeting the mother, his face gloomy and thoughtful, contrary to his wont.

"I was not asleep," she said, looking at them with expectant eyes.

Samoylov's companion took off his hat, and breathing heavily and hoarsely said in a friendly basso, like an old acquaintance, giving her his broad, short-fingered hand:

"Good evening, granny! You don't recognize me?"

"Is it you?" exclaimed Nilovna, with a sudden access of delight. "Yegor Ivanovich?"

"The very same identical one!" replied he, bowing his large head with its long hair. There was a good-natured smile on his face, and a clear, caressing look in his small gray eyes. He was like a samovar – rotund, short, with thick neck and short arms. His face was shiny and glossy, with high cheek bones. He breathed noisily, and his chest kept up a continuous low wheeze.

"Step into the room. I'll be dressed in a minute," the mother said.

"We have come to you on business," said Samoylov thoughtfully, looking at her out of the corner of his eyes.

Yegor Ivanovich passed into the room, and from there said:

"Nikolay got out of jail this morning, granny. You know him?"

"How long was he there?" she asked.

"Five months and eleven days. He saw the Little Russian there, who sends you his regards, and Pavel, who also sends you his regards and begs you not to be alarmed. As a man travels on his way, he says, the jails constitute his resting places, established and maintained by the solicitous authorities! Now, granny, let us get to the point. Do you know how many people were arrested yesterday?"

"I do not. Why, were there any others arrested besides Pavel?" she exclaimed.

"He was the forty-ninth!" calmly interjected Yegor Ivanovich. "And we may expect about ten more to be taken! This gentleman here, for example."

"Yes; me, too!" said Samoylov with a frown.

Nilovna somehow felt relieved.

"He isn't there alone," she thought.

When she had dressed herself, she entered the room and, smiling bravely, said:

"I guess they won't detain them long, if they arrested so many."

"You are right," assented Yegor Ivanovich; "and if we can manage to spoil this mess for them, we can make them look altogether like fools. This is the way it is, granny. If we were now to cease smuggling our literature into the factory, the gendarmes would take advantage of such a regrettable circumstance, and would use it against Pavel and his comrades in jail."

"How is that? Why should they?" the mother cried in alarm.

"It's very plain, granny," said Yegor Ivanovich softly. "Sometimes even gendarmes reason correctly. Just think! Pavel was, and there were books and there were papers; Pavel is not, and no books and no papers! Ergo, it was Pavel who distributed these books! Aha! Then they'll begin to eat them all alive. Those gendarmes dearly love so to unman a man that what remains of him is only a shred of himself, and a touching memory."

"I see, I see," said the mother dejectedly. "O God! What's to be done, then?"

"They have trapped them all, the devil take them!" came Samoylov's voice from the kitchen. "Now we must continue our work the same as before, and not only for the cause itself, but also to save our comrades!"

"And there is no one to do the work," added Yegor, smiling. "We have first-rate literature. I saw to that myself. But how to get it into the factory, that's the question!"

"They search everybody at the gates now," said Samoylov.

The mother divined that something was expected of her. She understood that she could be useful to her son, and she hastened to ask:

"Well, now? What are we to do?"

Samoylov stood in the doorway to answer.

"Pelagueya Nilovna, you know Marya Korsunova, the peddler."

"I do. Well?"

"Speak to her; see if you can't get her to smuggle in our wares."

"We could pay her, you know," interjected Yegor.

The mother waved her hands in negation.

"Oh, no! The woman is a chatterbox. No! If they find out it comes from me, from this house – oh, no!"

Then, inspired by a sudden idea, she began gladly and in a low voice:

"Give it to me, give it to me. I'll manage it myself. I'll find a way. I will ask Marya to make me her assistant. I have to earn my living, I have to work. Don't I? Well, then, I'll carry dinners to the factory. Yes, I'll manage it!"

Pressing her hands to her bosom, she gave hurried assurances that she would carry out her mission well and escape detection. Finally she exclaimed in triumph: "They'll find out – Pavel Vlasov is away, but his arm reaches out even from jail. They'll find out!"

All three became animated. Briskly rubbing his hands, Yegor smiled and said:

"It's wonderful, stupendous! I say, granny, it's superb – simply magnificent!"

"I'll sit in jail as in an armchair, if this succeeds," said Samoylov, laughing and rubbing his hands.

"You are fine, granny!" Yegor hoarsely cried.

The mother smiled. It was evident to her that if the leaflets should continue to appear in the factory, the authorities would be forced to recognize that it was not her son who distributed them. And feeling assured of success, she began to quiver all over with joy.

"When you go to see Pavel," said Yegor, "tell him he has a good mother."

"I'll see him very soon, I assure you," said Samoylov, smiling.

The mother grasped his hand and said earnestly:

"Tell him that I'll do everything, everything necessary. I want him to know it."

"And suppose they don't put him in prison?" asked Yegor, pointing at Samoylov.

The mother sighed and said sadly:

"Well, then, it can't be helped!"

Both of them burst out laughing. And when she realized her ridiculous blunder, she also began to laugh in embarrassment, and lowering her eyes said somewhat slyly:

"Bothering about your own folk keeps you from seeing other people straight."

"That's natural!" exclaimed Yegor. "And as to Pavel, you need not worry about him. He'll come out of prison a still better man. The prison is our place of rest and study – things we have no time for when we are at large. I was in prison three times, and each time, although I got scant pleasure, I certainly derived benefit for my heart and mind."

"You breathe with difficulty," she said, looking affectionately at his open face.

"There are special reasons for that," he replied, raising his finger. "So the matter's settled, granny? Yes? To-morrow we'll deliver the matter to you – and the wheels that grind the centuried darkness to destruction will again start a-rolling. Long live free speech! And long live a mother's heart! And in the meantime, good-by."

"Good-by," said Samoylov, giving her a vigorous handshake. "To my mother, I don't dare even hint about such matters. Oh, no!"

"Everybody will understand in time," said Nilovna, wishing to please him. "Everybody will understand."

When they left, she locked the door, and kneeling in the middle of the room began to pray, to the accompaniment of the patter of the rain. It was a prayer without words, one great thought of men, of all those people whom Pavel introduced into her life. It was as if they passed between her and the ikons upon which she held her eyes riveted. And they all looked so simple, so strangely near to one another, yet so lone in life.

Early next morning the mother went to Marya Korsunova. The peddler, noisy and greasy as usual, greeted her with friendly sympathy.

"You are grieving?" Marya asked, patting the mother on the back. "Now, don't. They just took him, carried him off. Where is the calamity? There is no harm in it. It used to be that men were thrown into dungeons for stealing, now they are there for telling the truth. Pavel may have said something wrong, but he stood up for all, and they all know it. Don't worry! They don't all say so, but they all know a good man when they see him. I was going to call on you right along, but had no time. I am always cooking and selling, but will end my days a beggar, I guess, all the same. My needs get the best of me, confound them! They keep nibbling and nibbling like mice at a piece of cheese. No sooner do I manage to scrape together ten rubles or so, when along comes some heathen, and makes away with all my money. Yes. It's hard to be a woman! It's a wretched business! To live alone is hard, to live with anyone, still harder!"

"And I came to ask you to take me as your assistant," Vlasova broke in, interrupting her prattle.

"How is that?" asked Marya. And after hearing her friend's explanation, she nodded her head assentingly.

"That's possible! You remember how you used to hide me from my husband? Well, now I am going to hide you from want. Everyone ought to help you, for your son is perishing for the public cause. He is a fine chap, your son is! They all say so, every blessed soul of them. And they all pity him. I'll tell you something. No good is going to come to the authorities from these arrests, mark my word! Look what's going on in the factory! Hear them talk! They are in an ugly mood, my dear! The officials imagine that when they've bitten at a man's heel, he won't be able to go far. But it turns out that when ten men are hit, a hundred men get angry. A workman must be handled with care! He may go on patiently enduring and suffering everything that's heaped upon him for a long, long time, but then he can also explode all of a sudden!"

# CHAPTER X

The upshot of the conversation was that the next day at noon the mother was seen in the factory yard with two pots of eatables from Marya's culinary establishment, while Marya herself transferred her base of operations to the market place.

The workmen immediately noticed their new caterer. Some of them approached her and said approvingly:

"Gone into business, Nilovna?"

They comforted her, arguing that Pavel would certainly be released soon because his cause was a good one. Others filled her sad heart with alarm by their cautious condolence, while still others awoke a responsive echo in her by openly and bitterly abusing the manager and the gendarmes. Some there were who looked at her with a vindictive expression, among them Isay Gorbov, who, speaking through his teeth, said:

"If I were the governor, I would have your son hanged! Let him not mislead the people!"

This vicious threat went through her like the chill blast of death. She made no reply, glanced at his small, freckled face, and with a sigh cast down her eyes.

She observed considerable agitation in the factory; the workmen gathered in small groups and talked in an undertone, with great animation; the foremen walked about with careworn faces, poking their noses into everything; here and there were heard angry oaths and irritated laughter.

Two policemen escorted Samoylov past her. He walked with one hand in his pocket, the other smoothing his red hair.

A crowd of about a hundred workmen followed him, and plied the policemen with oaths and banter.

"Going to take a promenade, Grisha?" shouted one.

"They do honor to us fellows!" chimed in another.

"When we go to promenading, we have a bodyguard to escort us," said a third, and uttered a harsh oath.

"It does not seem to pay any longer to catch thieves!" exclaimed a tall, one-eyed workingman in a loud, bitter voice. "So they take to arresting honest people."

"They don't even do it at night!" broke in another. "They come and drag them away in broad daylight, without shame, the impudent scoundrels!"

The policemen walked on rapidly and sullenly, trying to avoid the sight of the crowd, and feigning not to hear the angry exclamations showered upon them from all sides. Three workmen carrying a big iron bar happened to come in front of them, and thrusting the bar against them, shouted:

"Look out there, fishermen!"

As he passed Nilovna, Samoylov nodded to her, and smiling, said:

"Behold, this is Gregory, the servant of God, being arrested."

She made a low bow to him in silence. These men, so young, sober, and clever, who went to jail with a smile, moved her, and she unconsciously felt for them the pitying affection of a mother. It pleased her to hear the sharp comments leveled against the authorities. She saw therein her son's influence.

Leaving the factory, she passed the remainder of the day at Marya's house, assisting her in her work, and listening to her chatter. Late in the evening she returned home and found it bare, chilly and disagreeable. She moved about from corner to corner, unable to find a resting place, and not knowing what to do with herself. Night was fast approaching, and she grew worried, because Yegor Ivanovich had not yet come and brought her the literature which he had promised.

Behind the window, gray, heavy flakes of spring snow fluttered and settled softly and noiselessly upon the pane. Sliding down and melting, they left a watery track in their course. The mother thought of her son.

A cautious rap was heard. She rushed to the door, lifted the latch, and admitted Sashenka. She had not seen her for a long while, and the first thing that caught her eye was the girl's unnatural stoutness.

"Good evening!" she said, happy to have a visitor at such a time, to relieve her solitude for a part of the night. "You haven't been around for a long while! Were you away?"

"No, I was in prison," replied the girl, smiling, "with Nikolay Ivanovich. Do you remember him?"

"I should think I do!" exclaimed the mother. "Yegor Ivanovich told me yesterday that he had been released, but I knew nothing about you. Nobody told me that you were there."

"What's the good of telling? I should like to change my dress before Yegor Ivanovich comes!" said the girl, looking around.

"You are all wet."

"I've brought the booklets."

"Give them here, give them to me!" cried the mother impatiently.

"Directly," replied the girl. She untied her skirt and shook it, and like leaves from a tree, down fluttered a lot of thin paper parcels on the floor around her. The mother picked them up, laughing, and said:

"I was wondering what made you so stout. Oh, what a heap of them you have brought! Did you come on foot?"

"Yes," said Sashenka. She was again her graceful, slender self. The mother noticed that her cheeks were shrunken, and that dark rings were under her unnaturally large eyes.

"You are just out of prison. You ought to rest, and there you are carrying a load like that for seven versts!" said the mother, sighing and shaking her head.

"It's got to be done!" said the girl. "Tell me, how is Pavel? Did he stand it all right? He wasn't very much worried, was he?" Sashenka asked the question without looking at the mother. She bent her head and her fingers trembled as she arranged her hair.

"All right," replied the mother. "You can rest assured he won't betray himself."

"How strong he is!" murmured the girl quietly.

"He has never been sick," replied the mother. "Why, you are all in a shiver! I'll get you some tea, and some raspberry jam."

"That's fine!" exclaimed the girl with a faint smile. "But don't you trouble! It's too late. Let me do it myself."

"What! Tired as you are?" the mother reproached her, hurrying into the kitchen, where she busied herself with the samovar. The girl followed into the kitchen, sat down on the bench, and folded her hands behind her head before she replied:

"Yes, I'm very tired! After all, the prison makes one weak. The awful thing about it is the enforced inactivity. There is nothing more tormenting. We stay a week, five weeks. We know how much there is to be done. The people are waiting for knowledge. We're in a position to satisfy their wants, and there we are locked up in a cage like animals! That's what is so trying, that's what dries up the heart!"

"Who will reward you for all this?" asked the mother; and with a sigh she answered the question herself. "No one but God! Of course you don't believe in Him either?"

"No!" said the girl briefly, shaking her head.

"And I don't believe you!" the mother ejaculated in a sudden burst of excitement. Quickly wiping her charcoal-blackened hands on her apron she continued, with deep conviction in her voice:

"You don't understand your own faith! How could you live the kind of life you are living, without faith in God?"

A loud stamping of feet and a murmur of voices were heard on the porch. The mother started; the girl quickly rose to her feet, and whispered hurriedly:

"Don't open the door! If it's the gendarmes, you don't know me. I walked into the wrong house, came here by accident, fainted away, you undressed me, and found the books around me. You understand?"

"Why, my dear, what for?" asked the mother tenderly.

"Wait a while!" said Sashenka listening. "I think it's Yegor."

It was Yegor, wet and out of breath.

"Aha! The samovar!" he cried. "That's the best thing in life, granny! You here already, Sashenka?"

His hoarse voice filled the little kitchen. He slowly removed his heavy ulster, talking all the time.

"Here, granny, is a girl who is a thorn in the flesh of the police! Insulted by the overseer of the prison, she declared that she would starve herself to death if he did not ask her pardon. And for eight days she went without eating, and came within a hair's breadth of dying. It's not bad! She must have a mighty strong little stomach."

"Is it possible you took no food for eight days in succession?" asked the mother in amazement.

"I had to get him to beg my pardon," answered the girl with a stoical shrug of her shoulders. Her composure and her stern persistence seemed almost like a reproach to the mother.

"And suppose you had died?" she asked again.

"Well, what can one do?" the girl said quietly. "He did beg my pardon after all. One ought never to forgive an insult, never!"

"Ye-es!" responded the mother slowly. "Here are we women who are insulted all our lives long."

"I have unloaded myself!" announced Yegor from the other room. "Is the samovar ready? Let me take it in!"

He lifted the samovar and talked as he carried it.

"My own father used to drink not less than twenty glasses of tea a day, wherefor his days upon earth were long, peaceful, and strong; for he lived to be seventy-three years old, never having suffered from any ailment whatsoever. In weight he reached the respectable figure of three hundred and twenty pounds, and by profession he was a sexton in the village of Voskresensk."

"Are you Ivan's son?" exclaimed the mother.

"I am that very mortal. How did you know his name?"

"Why, I am a Voskresenskian myself!"

"A fellow countrywoman! Who were your people?"

"Your neighbors. I am a Sereguin."

"Are you a daughter of Nil the Lame? I thought your face was familiar! Why, I had my ears pulled by him many and many a time!"

They stood face to face plying each other with questions and laughing. Sashenka looked at them and smiled, and began to prepare the tea. The clatter of the dishes recalled the mother to the realities of the present.

"Oh, excuse me! I quite forgot myself, talking about old times. It is so sweet to recall your youth."

"It's I who ought to beg your pardon for carrying on like this in your house!" said Sashenka. "But it is eleven o'clock already, and I have so far to go."

"Go where? To the city?" the mother asked in surprise.

"Yes."

"What are you talking about! It's dark and wet, and you are so tired. Stay here overnight. Yegor Ivanovich will sleep in the kitchen, and you and I here."

"No, I must go," said the girl simply.

"Yes, countrywoman, she must go. The young lady must disappear. It would be bad if she were to be seen on the street to-morrow."

"But how can she go? By herself?"

"By herself," said Yegor, laughing.

The girl poured tea for herself, took a piece of rye bread, salted it, and started to eat, looking at the mother contemplatively.

"How can you go that way? Both you and Natasha. I wouldn't. I'm afraid!"

"She's afraid, too," said Yegor. "Aren't you afraid, Sasha?"

"Of course!"

The mother looked at her, then at Yegor, and said in a low voice, "What strange – "

"Give me a glass of tea, granny," Yegor interrupted her.

When Sashenka had drunk her glass of tea, she pressed Yegor's hand in silence, and walked out into the kitchen. The mother followed her. In the kitchen Sashenka said:

"When you see Pavel, give him my regards, please." And taking hold of the latch, she suddenly turned around, and asked in a low voice: "May I kiss you?"

The mother embraced her in silence, and kissed her warmly.

"Thank you!" said the girl, and nodding her head, walked out.

Returning to the room, the mother peered anxiously through the window. Wet flakes of snow fluttered through the dense, moist darkness.

"And do you remember Prozorov, the storekeeper?" asked Yegor. "He used to sit with his feet sprawling, and blow noisily into his glass of tea. He had a red, satisfied, sweet-covered face."

"I remember, I remember," said the mother, coming back to the table. She sat down, and looking at Yegor with a mournful expression in her eyes, she spoke pityingly: "Poor Sashenka! How will she ever get to the city?"

"She will be very much worn out," Yegor agreed. "The prison has shaken her health badly. She was stronger before. Besides, she has had a delicate bringing up. It seems to me she has already ruined her lungs. There is something in her face that reminds one of consumption."

"Who is she?"

"The daughter of a landlord. Her father is a rich man and a big scoundrel, according to what she says. I suppose you know, granny, that they want to marry?"

"Who?"

"She and Pavel. Yes, indeed! But so far they have not yet been able. When he is free, she is in prison, and *vice versa*." Yegor laughed.

"I didn't know it!" the mother replied after a pause. "Pasha never speaks about himself."

Now she felt a still greater pity for the girl, and looking at her guest with involuntary hostility, she said:

"You ought to have seen her home."

"Impossible!" Yegor answered calmly. "I have a heap of work to do here, and the whole day to-morrow, from early morning, I shall have to walk and walk and walk. No easy job, considering my asthma."

"She's a fine girl!" said the mother, vaguely thinking of what Yegor had told her. She felt hurt that the news should have come to her, not from her son, but from a stranger, and she pressed her lips together tightly, and lowered her eyebrows.

"Yes, a fine girl!" Yegor nodded assent. "There's a bit of the noblewoman in her yet, but it's growing less and less all the time. You are sorry for her, I see. What's the use? You won't find heart enough, if you start to grieve for all of us rebels, granny dear. Life is not made very easy for us, I admit. There, for instance, is the case of a friend of mine who returned a short while ago from exile. When he went through Novgorod, his wife and child awaited him in Smolensk, and when he arrived

in Smolensk, they were already in prison in Moscow. Now it's the wife's turn to go to Siberia. To be a revolutionary and to be married is a very inconvenient arrangement – inconvenient for the husband, inconvenient for the wife and in the end for the cause also! I, too, had a wife, an excellent woman, but five years of this kind of life landed her in the grave."

He emptied the glass of tea at one gulp, and continued his narrative. He enumerated the years and months he had passed in prison and in exile, told of various accidents and misfortunes, of the slaughters in prisons, and of hunger in Siberia. The mother looked at him, listened with wonderment to the simple way in which he spoke of this life, so full of suffering, of persecution, of wrong, and abuse of men.

"Well, let's get down to business!"

His voice changed, and his face grew more serious. He asked questions about the way in which the mother intended to smuggle the literature into the factory, and she marveled at his clear knowledge of all the details.

Then they returned to reminiscences of their native village. He joked, and her mind roved thoughtfully through her past. It seemed to her strangely like a quagmire uniformly strewn with hillocks, which were covered with poplars trembling in constant fear; with low firs, and with white birches straying between the hillocks. The birches grew slowly, and after standing for five years on the unstable, putrescent soil, they dried up, fell down, and rotted away. She looked at this picture, and a vague feeling of insufferable sadness overcame her. The figure of a girl with a sharp, determined face stood before her. Now the figure walks somewhere in the darkness amid the snowflakes, solitary, weary. And her son sits in a little cell, with iron gratings over the window. Perhaps he is not yet asleep, and is thinking. But he is thinking not of his mother. He has one nearer to him than herself. Heavy, chaotic thoughts, like a tangled mass of clouds, crept over her, and encompassed her and oppressed her bosom.

"You are tired, granny! Let's go to bed!" said Yegor, smiling.

She bade him good night, and sidled carefully into the kitchen, carrying away a bitter, caustic feeling in her heart.

In the morning, after breakfast, Yegor asked her:

"Suppose they catch you and ask you where you got all these heretical books from. What will you say?"

"I'll say, 'It's none of your business!'" she answered, smiling.

"You'll never convince them of that!" Yegor replied confidently. "On the contrary, they are profoundly convinced that this is precisely their business. They will question you very, very diligently, and very, very long!"

"I won't tell, though!"

"They'll put you in prison!"

"Well, what of it? Thank God that I am good at least for that," she said with a sigh. "Thank God! Who needs me? Nobody!"

"H'm!" said Yegor, fixing his look upon her. "A good person ought to take care of himself."

"I couldn't learn that from you, even if I were good," the mother replied, laughing.

Yegor was silent, and paced up and down the room; then he walked up to her and said: "This is hard, countrywoman! I feel it, it's very hard for you!"

"It's hard for everybody," she answered, with a wave of her hand. "Maybe only for those who understand, it's easier. But I understand a little, too. I understand what it is the good people want."

"If you do understand, granny, then it means that everybody needs you, everybody!" said Yegor earnestly and solemnly.

She looked at him and laughed without saying anything.

# CHAPTER XI

At noon, calmly and in a businesslike way she put the books around her bosom, and so skillfully and snugly that Yegor announced, smacking his lips with satisfaction:

"*Sehr gut!* as the German says when he has drunk a keg of beer. Literature has not changed you, granny. You still remain the good, tall, portly, elderly woman. May all the numberless gods grant you their blessings on your enterprise!"

Within half an hour she stood at the factory gate, bent with the weight of her burden, calm and assured. Two guards, irritated by the oaths and raillery of the workingmen, examined all who entered the gate, handling them roughly and swearing at them. A policeman and a thin-legged man with a red face and alert eyes stood at one side. The mother, shifting the rod resting on her shoulders, with a pail suspended from either end of it, watched the man from the corner of her eye. She divined that he was a spy.

A tall, curly-headed fellow with his hat thrown back over his neck, cried to the guardsmen who searched him:

"Search the head and not the pockets, you devils!"

"There is nothing but lice on your head," retorted one of the guardsmen.

"Catching lice is an occupation more suited to you than hunting human game!" rejoined the workman. The spy scanned him with a rapid glance.

"Will you let me in?" asked the mother. "See, I'm bent double with my heavy load. My back is almost breaking."

"Go in! Go in!" cried the guard sullenly. "She comes with arguments, too."

The mother walked to her place, set her pails on the ground, and wiping the perspiration from her face looked around her.

The Gusev brothers, the locksmiths, instantly came up to her, and the older of them, Vasily, asked aloud, knitting his eyebrows:

"Got any pirogs?"

"I'll bring them to-morrow," she answered.

This was the password agreed upon. The faces of the brothers brightened. Ivan, unable to restrain himself, exclaimed:

"Oh, you jewel of a mother!"

Vasily squatted down on his heels, looked into the pot, and a bundle of books disappeared into his bosom.

"Ivan!" he said aloud. "Let's not go home, let's get our dinner here from her!" And he quickly shoved the books into the legs of his boots. "We must give our new peddler a lift, don't you think so?"

"Yes, indeed!" Ivan assented, and laughed aloud.

The mother looked carefully about her, and called out:

"Sour cabbage soup! Hot vermicelli soup! Roast meat!"

Then deftly and secretly taking out one package of books after the other, she shoved them into the hands of the brothers. Each time a bundle disappeared from her hands, the sickly, sneering face of the officer of gendarmes flashed up before her like a yellow stain, like the flame of a match in a dark room, and she said to him in her mind, with a feeling of malicious pleasure:

"Take this, sir!" And when she handed over the last package she added with an air of satisfaction: "And here is some more, take it!"

Workmen came up to her with cups in their hands, and when they were near Ivan and Vasily, they began to laugh aloud. The mother calmly suspended the transfer of the books, and poured sour soup and vermicelli soup, while the Gusevs joked her.

"How cleverly Nilovna does her work!"

"Necessity drives one even to catching mice," remarked a stoker somberly. "They have snatched away your breadgiver, the scoundrels! Well, give us three cents' worth of vermicelli. Never mind, mother! You'll pull through!"

"Thanks for the good word!" she returned, smiling.

He walked off to one side and mumbled, "It doesn't cost me much to say a good word!"

"But there's no one to say it to!" observed a blacksmith, with a smile, and shrugging his shoulders in surprise added: "There's a life for you, fellows! There's no one to say a good word to; no one is worth it. Yes, sir!"

Vasily Gusev rose, wrapped his coat tightly around him, and exclaimed:

"What I ate was hot, and yet I feel cold."

Then he walked away. Ivan also rose, and ran off whistling merrily.

Cheerful and smiling, Nilovna kept on calling her wares:

"Hot! Hot! Sour soup! Vermicelli soup! Porridge!"

She thought of how she would tell her son about her first experience; and the yellow face of the officer was still standing before her, perplexed and spiteful. His black mustache twitched uneasily, and his upper lip turned up nervously, showing the gleaming white enamel of his clenched teeth. A keen joy beat and sang in her heart like a bird, her eyebrows quivered, and continuing deftly to serve her customers she muttered to herself:

"There's more! There's more!"

Through the whole day she felt a sensation of delightful newness which embraced her heart as with a fondling caress. And in the evening, when she had concluded her work at Marya's house, and was drinking tea, the splash of horses' hoofs in the mud was heard, and the call of a familiar voice. She jumped up, hurried into the kitchen, and made straight for the door. Somebody walked quickly through the porch; her eyes grew dim, and leaning against the doorpost, she pushed the door open with her foot.

"Good evening, mother!" a familiar, melodious voice rang out, and a pair of dry, long hands were laid on her shoulders.

The joy of seeing Andrey was mingled in her bosom with the sadness of disappointment; and the two contrary feelings blended into one burning sensation which embraced her like a hot wave. She buried her face in Andrey's bosom. He pressed her tightly to himself, his hands trembled. The mother wept quietly without speaking, while he stroked her hair, and spoke in his musical voice:

"Don't cry, mother. Don't wring my heart. Upon my honest word, they will let him out soon! They haven't a thing against him; all the boys will keep quiet as cooked fish."

Putting his long arm around the mother's shoulders he led her into the room, and nestling up against him with the quick gesture of a squirrel, she wiped the tears from her face, while her heart greedily drank in his tender words.

"Pavel sends you his love. He is as well and cheerful as can be. It's very crowded in the prison. They have thrown in more than a hundred of our people, both from here and from the city. Three and four persons have been put into one cell. The prison officials are rather a good set. They are exhausted with the quantity of work the gendarmes have been giving them. The prison authorities are not extremely rigorous, they don't order you about roughly. They simply say: 'Be quiet as you can, gentlemen. Don't put us in an awkward position!' So everything goes well. We talk with one another, we give books to one another, and we share our food. It's a good prison! Old and dirty, but so soft and so light. The criminals are also nice people; they help us a good deal. Bukin, four others, and myself were released. It got too crowded. They'll let Pavel go soon, too. I'm telling you the truth, believe me. Vyesovshchikov will be detained the longest. They are very angry at him. He scolds and swears at everybody all the time. The gendarmes can't bear to look at him. I guess he'll get himself into court, or receive a sound thrashing some day. Pavel tries to dissuade him. 'Stop, Nikolay!' he says to him. 'Your

swearing won't reform them.' But he bawls: 'Wipe them off the face of the earth like a pest!' Pavel conducts himself finely out there; he treats all alike, and is as firm as a rock! They'll soon let him go."

"Soon?" said the mother, relieved now and smiling. "I know he'll be let out soon!"

"Well, if you know, it's all right! Give me tea, mother. Tell me how you've been, how you've passed your time."

He looked at her, smiling all over, and seemed so near to her, such a splendid fellow. A loving, somewhat melancholy gleam flashed from the depths of his round, blue eyes.

"I love you dearly, Andriusha!" the mother said, heaving a deep sigh, as she looked at his thin face grotesquely covered with tufts of hair.

"People are satisfied with little from me! I know you love me; you are capable of loving everybody; you have a great heart," said the Little Russian, rocking in his chair, his eyes straying about the room.

"No, I love you very differently!" insisted the mother. "If you had a mother, people would envy her because she had such a son."

The Little Russian swayed his head, and rubbed it vigorously with both hands.

"I have a mother, somewhere!" he said in a low voice.

"Do you know what I did to-day?" she exclaimed, and reddening a little, her voice choking with satisfaction, she quickly recounted how she had smuggled literature into the factory.

For a moment he looked at her in amazement with his eyes wide open; then he burst out into a loud guffaw, stamped his feet, thumped his head with his fingers, and cried joyously:

"Oho! That's no joke any more! That's business! Won't Pavel be glad, though! Oh, you're a trump. That's good, mother! You have no idea *how* good it is! Both for Pavel and all who were arrested with him!"

He snapped his fingers in ecstasy, whistled, and fairly doubled over, all radiant with joy. His delight evoked a vigorous response from the mother.

"My dear, my Andriusha!" she began, as if her heart had burst open, and gushed over merrily with a limpid stream of living words full of serene joy. "I've thought all my life, 'Lord Christ in heaven! what did I live for?' Beatings, work! I saw nothing except my husband. I knew nothing but fear! And how Pasha grew I did not see, and I hardly know whether I loved him when my husband was alive. All my concerns, all my thoughts were centered upon one thing – to feed my beast, to propitiate the master of my life with enough food, pleasing to his palate, and served on time, so as not to incur his displeasure, so as to escape the terrors of a beating, to get him to spare me but once! But I do not remember that he ever did spare me. He beat me so – not as a wife is beaten, but as one whom you hate and detest. Twenty years I lived like that, and what was up to the time of my marriage I do not recall. I remember certain things, but I see nothing! I am as a blind person. Yegor Ivanovich was here – we are from the same village – and he spoke about this and about that. I remember the houses, the people, but how they lived, what they spoke about, what happened to this one and what to that one – I forget, I do not see! I remember fires – two fires. It seems that everything has been beaten out of me, that my soul has been locked up and sealed tight. It's grown blind, it does not hear!"

Her quick-drawn breath was almost a sob. She bent forward, and continued in a lowered voice: "When my husband died I turned to my son; but he went into this business, and I was seized with a pity for him, such a yearning pity – for if he should perish, how was I to live alone? What dread, what fright I have undergone! My heart was rent when I thought of his fate.

"Our woman's love is not a pure love! We love that which we need. And here are you! You are grieving about your mother. What do you want her for? And all the others go and suffer for the people, they go to prison, to Siberia, they die for them, many are hung. Young girls walk alone at night, in the snow, in the mud, in the rain. They walk seven versts from the city to our place. Who drives them? Who pursues them? They love! You see, theirs is pure love! They believe! Yes, indeed, they believe, Andriusha! But here am I – I can't love like that! I love my own, the near ones!"

"Yes, you can!" said the Little Russian, and turning away his face from her, he rubbed his head, face, and eyes vigorously as was his wont. "Everybody loves those who are near," he continued. "To a large heart, what is far is also near. You, mother, are capable of a great deal. You have a large capacity of motherliness!"

"God grant it!" she said quietly. "I feel that it is good to live like that! Here are you, for instance, whom I love. Maybe I love you better than I do Pasha. He is always so silent. Here he wants to get married to Sashenka, for example, and he never told me, his mother, a thing about it."

"That's not true," the Little Russian retorted abruptly. "I know it isn't true. It's true he loves her, and she loves him. But marry? No, they are not going to marry! She'd want to, but Pavel – he can't! He doesn't want to!"

"See how you are!" said the mother quietly, and she fixed her eyes sadly and musingly on the Little Russian's face. "You see how you are! You offer up your own selves!"

"Pavel is a rare man!" the Little Russian uttered in a low voice. "He is a man of iron!"

"Now he sits in prison," continued the mother reflectively. "It's awful, it's terrible! It's not as it used to be before! Life altogether is not as it used to be, and the terror is different from the old terror. You feel a pity for everybody, and you are alarmed for everybody! And the heart is different. The soul has opened its eyes, it looks on, and is sad and glad at the same time. There's much I do not understand, and I feel so bitter and hurt that you do not believe in the Lord God. Well, I guess I can't help that! But I see and know that you are good people. And you have consecrated yourselves to a stern life for the sake of the people, to a life of hardship for the sake of truth. The truth you stand for, I comprehend: as long as there will be the rich, the people will get nothing, neither truth nor happiness, nothing! Indeed, that's so, Andriusha! Here am I living among you, while all this is going on. Sometimes at night my thoughts wander off to my past. I think of my youthful strength trampled under foot, of my young heart torn and beaten, and I feel sorry for myself and embittered. But for all that I live better now, I see myself more and more, I feel myself more."

The Little Russian arose, and trying not to scrape with his feet, began to walk carefully up and down the room, tall, lean, absorbed in thought.

"Well said!" he exclaimed in a low voice. "Very well! There was a young Jew in Kerch who wrote verses, and once he wrote:

"And the innocently slain,
Truth will raise to life again.

"He himself was killed by the police in Kerch, but that's not the point. He knew the truth and did a great deal to spread it among the people. So here you are one of the innocently slain. He spoke the truth!"

"There, I am talking now," the mother continued. "I talk and do not hear myself, don't believe my own ears! All my life I was silent, I always thought of one thing – how to live through the day apart, how to pass it without being noticed, so that nobody should touch me! And now I think about everything. Maybe I don't understand your affairs so very well; but all are near me, I feel sorry for all, and I wish well to all. And to you, Andriusha, more than all the rest."

He took her hand in his, pressed it tightly, and quickly turned aside. Fatigued with emotion and agitation, the mother leisurely and silently washed the cups; and her breast gently glowed with a bold feeling that warmed her heart.

Walking up and down the room the Little Russian said:

"Mother, why don't you sometimes try to befriend Vyesovshchikov and be kind to him? He is a fellow that needs it. His father sits in prison – a nasty little old man. Nikolay sometimes catches sight of him through the window and he begins to swear at him. That's bad, you know. He is a good

fellow, Nikolay is. He is fond of dogs, mice, and all sorts of animals, but he does not like people. That's the pass to which a man can be brought."

"His mother disappeared without a trace, his father is a thief and a drunkard," said Nilovna pensively.

When Andrey left to go to bed, the mother, without being noticed, made the sign of the cross over him, and after about half an hour, she asked quietly, "Are you asleep, Andriusha?"

"No. Why?"

"Nothing! Good night!"

"Thank you, mother, thank you!" he answered gently.

# CHAPTER XII

The next day when Nilovna came up to the gates of the factory with her load, the guides stopped her roughly, and ordering her to put the pails down on the ground, made a careful examination.

"My eatables will get cold," she observed calmly, as they felt around her dress.

"Shut up!" said a guard sullenly.

Another one, tapping her lightly on the shoulder, said with assurance:

"Those books are thrown across the fence, I say!"

Old man Sizov came up to her and looking around said in an undertone:

"Did you hear, mother?"

"What?"

"About the pamphlets. They've appeared again. They've just scattered them all over like salt over bread. Much good those arrests and searches have done! My nephew Mazin has been hauled away to prison, your son's been taken. Now it's plain it isn't he!" And stroking his beard Sizov concluded, "It's not people, but thoughts, and thoughts are not fleas; you can't catch them!"

He gathered his beard in his hand, looked at her, and said as he walked away:

"Why don't you come to see me some time? I guess you are lonely all by yourself."

She thanked him, and calling her wares, she sharply observed the unusual animation in the factory. The workmen were all elated, they formed little circles, then parted, and ran from one group to another. Animated voices and happy, satisfied faces all around! The soot-filled atmosphere was astir and palpitating with something bold and daring. Now here, now there, approving ejaculations were heard, mockery, and sometimes threats.

"Aha! It seems truth doesn't agree with them," she heard one say.

The younger men were in especially good spirits, while the elder workmen had cautious smiles on their faces. The authorities walked about with a troubled expression, and the police ran from place to place. When the workingmen saw them, they dispersed, and walked away slowly, or if they remained standing, they stopped their conversation, looking silently at the agitated, angry faces.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.