

**ГЕНРИК
СЕНКЕВИЧ**

CHILDREN OF
THE SOIL

Henryk Sienkiewicz
Children of the Soil

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Содержание

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT	6
CHAPTER I	7
CHAPTER II	11
CHAPTER III	26
CHAPTER IV	34
CHAPTER V	40
CHAPTER VI	43
CHAPTER VII	50
CHAPTER VIII	54
CHAPTER IX	59
CHAPTER X	64
CHAPTER XI	70
CHAPTER XII	74
CHAPTER XIII	79
CHAPTER XIV	86
CHAPTER XV	91
CHAPTER XVI	94
CHAPTER XVII	96
CHAPTER XVIII	99
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	105

Henryk Sienkiewicz

Children of the Soil

**TO HIS EXCELLENCY, HON. FREDERIC T.
GREENHALGE, Governor of Massachusetts**

Sir, – You are at the head of a Commonwealth renowned for mental culture; you esteem the Slav Race and delight in good literature; – to you I beg to dedicate this volume, in the hope that it will give pleasure to you and to others in that State which you govern so acceptably.

JEREMIAH CURTIN

Warren, Vermont,
April 19, 1895.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

The title of this book in the original is *Rodzina Polanieckich* (The Family of the Polanyetskis); “Children of the Soil” has been substituted, because of the difficulty of the Polish title for American and English readers, because the Polanyetskis are called children of the soil in the text of the volume, and because all the other characters are children of the soil in the same sense.

For most readers this book will have a double interest, – the interest attaching to a picture of Polish life, and the general human interest inseparable from characters like those presented in the narrative of Pan Stanislav’s fortunes.

The Poles form a part of the great Slav race, which has played so important a rôle in the world’s history already, and which is destined to play a far more important one yet in the future.

The argument involved in the career and meditations of Pan Stanislav is of interest to every person in civilized society; it is an argument presented so clearly, and reinforced with such pointed examples, that neither comment nor explanation is needed.

Were it not for the change of title, I might escape even this brief statement; but now I may add that the following translation was made in many places, in different countries, at various intervals, and at moments snatched from other work. I began “Children of the Soil” in Cahirciveen, Ireland, and continued it in London, Edinburgh, Fort William near the foot of Ben Nevis, Rome, Naples, and Florence, Tsarskoe Selo, Russia, and South Uist, an island of the Outer Hebrides. From the Outer Hebrides I was called home before I wished to come, and left that little granite kingdom in the Atlantic with sincere regret.

The translation was finished in Warren, Vermont, and revised carefully. To new readers of Sienkiewicz I may state that Pan, Pani, and Panna, when prefixed to names, mean Mr., Mrs., and Miss respectively.

JEREMIAH CURTIN.

CHAPTER I

It was the first hour after midnight when Pan Stanislaw Polanyetski was approaching the residence in Kremen. During years of childhood he had been twice in that village, when his mother, a distant relative of the present owner of Kremen, was taking him home for vacation. Pan Stanislaw tried to remember the place, but to do so was difficult. At night, by the light of the moon, everything took on an uncertain form. Over the bushes, fields, and meadows, a white mist was lying low, changing the whole region about into a shoreless lake, as it were, – an illusion increased by choruses of frogs in the mist.

It was a July night, very calm and perfectly bright. At moments, when the frogs became silent, landrails were heard playing in the dew; and at times, from afar, from muddy ponds, hidden behind reeds, the call of the bittern sounded as if coming from under the earth.

Pan Stanislaw could not resist the charm of that night. It seemed to him familiar in some way; and that familiarity he felt all the more, since he had returned only the previous year from abroad, where he had spent his first youth and had become engaged afterward in mercantile matters. Now, while entering that sleeping village, he recalled his childhood, memorable through his mother, now five years dead, and because the bitterness and cares of that childhood, compared with the present, seemed perfect bliss to him.

At last the brichka rolled up toward the village, which began with a cross standing on a sand mound. The cross, inclining greatly, seemed ready to fall. Pan Stanislaw remembered it because in his time under that mound had been buried a man found hanging from a limb in the neighboring forest, and afterward people were afraid to pass by that spot in the night-time.

Beyond the cross were the first cottages, but the people were sleeping; there was no light in any window. As far as the eye could reach, only roofs of cottages were gleaming on the night background of the sky, lighted up by the moon, and the roofs appeared silvery and blue. Some cottages were washed with lime and seemed bright green; others, hidden in plum orchards, in thickets of sunflowers or pole beans, barely came out of the shadow. In the yards, dogs barked, but in their sleep, as it were, accompanying the croaking of frogs, the calling of landrails and bitterns, and all those sounds with which a summer night speaks, and which strengthen the impression of silence still more.

The brichka, moving slowly along the soft sandy road, entered at last a dark alley, spotted only here and there by the moonlight, which pushed in between the leaves. Beyond the alley, night watches whistled; and in the open was seen a white dwelling, in which some windows were lighted. When the brichka rattled up to the entrance, a serving-man hurried out of the house and began to assist Pan Stanislaw to alight; but in addition the night watch appeared and two white dogs, evidently very young and friendly, for, instead of barking, they began to fawn and to spring on the guest, showing such delight at his coming that the watch had to moderate their effusiveness with a stick.

The man took Pan Stanislaw's things from the brichka, and after a moment the guest found himself in a dining-room where tea was waiting. Nothing had changed from the time of his childhood. At one wall was a sideboard in walnut; at one end of this a clock with heavy weights and a cuckoo; at the other were two badly painted portraits of women in robes of the eighteenth century; in the centre of the room stood a table with a white cloth, and surrounded by chairs with high arms. That room, lighted brightly, full of steam rising from a samovar, seemed rather hospitable and gladsome.

Pan Stanislaw began to walk along the side of the table; but the squeaking of his boots struck him in that silence, therefore he went to the window and looked through the panes at the yard filled with moonlight. Over this yard the two white dogs, which had greeted him so effusively, were chasing each other.

After a time the door of the next room opened, and a young lady entered in whom Pan Stanislaw divined the daughter of the master of Kremen by his second wife; at sight of her he stepped from

the window curtains, and, approaching the table in his squeaking boots, bowed, and announced his name. The young lady extended her hand, and said, —

“We learned of your arrival from the despatch. Father is a trifle ill, and was obliged to lie down; but he will be glad to see you in the morning.”

“I am not to blame for coming so late,” answered Pan Stanislaw; “the train reaches Chernyov only at eleven.”

“And from Chernyov it is ten miles to Kremen. Father tells me that this is not your first visit.”

“I came here with my mother when you were not in the world yet.”

“I know. You are a relative of my father.”

“I am a relative of Pan Plavitski’s first wife.”

“Father esteems family connections very highly, even the most distant,” said the young lady; and she began to pour out tea, pushing aside from time to time the steam, which, rising from the samovar, veiled her eyes. When conversation halted, only the tick of the clock was heard. Pan Stanislaw, who was interested by young ladies, looked at Panna Plavitski carefully. She was a person of medium height, rather slender; she had dark hair, a face calm, but subdued, as it were, a complexion sunburnt somewhat, blue eyes, and a most shapely mouth. Altogether it was the face of a self-possessed and delicate woman. Pan Stanislaw, to whom she seemed not ill-looking, but also not beautiful, thought that she was rather attractive; that she might be good; and that under that exterior, not too brilliant, she might have many of those various qualities which young ladies in the country have usually. Though he was young, life had taught him one truth, — that in general women gain on near acquaintance, while in general men lose. He had heard also touching Panna Plavitski, that the whole management in Kremen — a place, by the way, almost ruined — lay on her mind, and that she was one of the most overworked persons on earth. With reference to those cares, which must weigh on her, she seemed calm and unmoved; still he thought that surely she must wish to sleep. This was evident, indeed, by her eyes, which blinked in spite of her, under the light of the hanging lamp.

The examination would have come out on the whole in her favor, were it not that conversation dragged somewhat. This was explained by the fact that they saw each other for the first time in life; besides, she received him alone, which might be awkward for a young lady. Finally, she knew that Pan Stanislaw had not come to make a visit, but to ask for money. Such was the case in reality. His mother had given, a very long time before, twelve thousand and some rubles for a mortgage on Kremen, which Pan Stanislaw wished to have redeemed, — first, because there were enormous arrears of interest, and second, since he was a partner in a mercantile house in Warsaw, he had entered into various transactions and needed capital. He had promised himself beforehand to make no compromise, and to exact his own absolutely. In affairs of that sort, it was a point with him always to appear unyielding. He was not such by nature, perhaps; but he had made inflexibility a principle, and therewith a question of self-love. In consequence of this, he overshot the mark frequently, as people do who argue something into themselves. Hence, while looking at that agreeable, but evidently drowsy young lady, he repeated to himself, in spite of the sympathy which was roused in him, —

“That is all well, but you must pay.”

After a while he said, “I have heard that you busy yourself with everything; do you like land management?”

“I love Kremen greatly,” answered she.

“I too loved Kremen when I was a boy; but I should not like to manage the place, — the conditions are so difficult.”

“Difficult, difficult. We do what we can.”

“That is it, — you do what you can.”

“I assist father, who is often in poor health.”

“I am not skilled in those matters, but, from what I see and hear, I infer that the greater number of agriculturists cannot count on a future.”

“We count on Providence.”

“Of course, but people cannot send creditors to Providence.”

Panna Plavitski's face was covered with a blush; a moment of awkward silence followed; and Pan Stanislav said to himself, —

“Since thou hast begun, proceed farther;” and he said, —

“You will permit me to explain the object of my coming.”

The young lady looked at him with a glance in which he might read, “Thou hast come just now; the hour is late. I am barely alive from fatigue: even the slightest delicacy might have restrained thee from beginning such a conversation.” She answered aloud, —

“I know why you have come; but it may be better if you will speak about that with my father.”

“I beg your pardon.”

“But I beg pardon of you. People have a right to mention what belongs to them, and I am accustomed to that; but to-day is Saturday, and on Saturday there is so much work. Moreover, in affairs of this sort, you will understand – sometimes, when Jews come, I bargain with them; but this time I should prefer if you would speak with my father. It would be easier for both.”

“Then till to-morrow,” said Pan Stanislav, who lacked the boldness to say that in questions of money he preferred to be treated like a Jew.

“Perhaps you would permit me to pour you more tea?”

“No, I thank you. Good-night.” And, rising, he extended his hand; but the young lady gave hers far less cordially than at the greeting, so that he touched barely the ends of her fingers. In going, she said, —

“The servant will show you the chamber.”

And Pan Stanislav was left alone. He felt a certain discontent, and was dissatisfied with himself, though he did not wish to acknowledge that fact in his heart. He began even to persuade himself that he had done well, since he had come hither, not to talk politely, but to get money. What was Panna Plavitski to him? She neither warmed nor chilled him. If she considered him a churl, so much the better; for it happens generally that the more disagreeable a creditor, the more people hasten to pay him.

But his discontent was increased by that reasoning; for a certain voice whispered to him that this time it was not merely a question of good-breeding, but also in some degree of compassion for a wearied woman. He felt, besides, that by acting so urgently he was satisfying his pose, not his heart, all the more because she pleased him. As in that sleeping village and in that moonlight night he had found something special, so in that young lady he found something which he had looked for in vain in foreign women, and which moved him more than he expected. But people are often ashamed of feelings which are very good. Pan Stanislav was ashamed of emotions, especially; hence he determined to be inexorable, and on the morrow to squeeze old Plavitski without mercy.

Meanwhile the servant conducted him to the bed-chamber. Pan Stanislav dismissed him at once, and was alone. That was the same chamber which they gave him, when, during the life of Plavitski's first wife, he came to Kremen with his mother; and remembrances beset him again. The windows looked out on a garden, beyond which lay a pond; the moon was looking into the water, and the pond could be seen more easily than in former times, for it was hidden then by a great aged ash-tree, which must have been broken down by a storm, since on that spot there was sticking up merely a stump with a freshly broken piece at the top. The light of the moon seemed to centre on that fragment, which was gleaming very brightly. All this produced an impression of great calm. Pan Stanislav, who lived in the city amid mercantile labors, therefore in continual tension of his physical and mental powers, and at the same time in continual unquiet, felt that condition of the country around him as he would a warm bath after great toil. He was penetrated by relief. He tried to reflect on business transactions, how were they turning, would they give loss or profit, finally on Bigiel, his partner, and how Bigiel would manage various interests in his absence, – but he could not continue.

Then he began to think of Panna Plavitski. Her person, though it had made a good impression, was indifferent to him, even for this reason, that he saw her for the first time; but she interested him as a type. He was thirty years old and something more, therefore of the age in which instinct, with a force almost invincible, urges a man to establish a domestic hearth, take a wife, and have a family. The greatest pessimism is powerless against this instinct; neither art nor any calling in life protects a man against it. In consequence of this, misanthropes marry in spite of their philosophy, artists in spite of their art, as do all those men who declare that they give to their objects not a half, but a whole soul. Exceptions confirm the principle that, in general, men cannot live a conventional lie and swim against the currents of nature. For the great part, only those do not marry for whom the same power that creates marriage stands in the way of it; that is, those whom love has deceived. Hence, celibacy in advanced life, if not always, is most frequently a hidden tragedy.

Stanislav Polanyetski was neither a misanthrope nor an artist; neither was he a man proclaiming theories against marriage. On the contrary, he wanted to marry, and he was convinced that he ought to marry. He felt that for him the time had arrived; hence he looked around for the woman. From that came the immense interest which women roused in him, especially unmarried ones. Though he had spent some years in France and Belgium, he had not sought love among married women, even among those who were over giddy. He was an active and occupied person, who contended that only idle men can romance with married women, and in general that besieging other men's wives is possible only where men have very much money, little honor, and nothing to do, consequently in a society where there is a whole class long since enriched, sunk in elegant idleness, and of dishonest life. He was himself, in truth, greatly occupied, hence he wished to love in order to marry; therefore only unmarried women roused in him curiosity of soul and body. When he met a young lady, the first question he asked himself was, "Is she not the woman?" or at least, "Is she not the kind of woman?" At present his thoughts were circling around Panna Plavitski in this manner. To begin with, he had heard much of her from her relative living in Warsaw; and he had heard things that were good and even touching. Her calm, mild face was before his eyes now. He recalled her hands, very shapely, with long fingers, though somewhat sunburnt, her dark blue eyes, then the slight shadow over her mouth. Her voice too pleased him. Notwithstanding all this, he repeated his promise that he would make no compromise and must have his own; still he was angry at the fate which had brought him to Kremen as a creditor. Speaking to himself in mercantile language, he repeated in spirit, "The quality is good, but I will not 'reflect,' as I did not come for it."

Still he "reflected," and that to such a degree that after he had undressed and lain down, he could not sleep for a long time. The cocks began to crow, the window panes were growing pale and green; but under his closed eyelids he saw yet the calm forehead of Panna Plavitski, the shadow over her mouth, and her hands pouring out the tea. Then, when sleep became overpowering, it seemed to him as though he were holding those hands in his own and drawing her toward him, and she was pulling back and turning her head aside, as if to escape a kiss. In the morning he woke late, and remembering Panna Plavitski, thought, "Ah, she will look like that!"

CHAPTER II

He was roused by the servant, who brought coffee and took his clothes to be brushed. When the servant brought them back, Pan Stanislav asked if it were not the custom of the house to meet in the dining-room for coffee.

"No," answered the servant; "because the young lady rises early, and the old gentleman sleeps late."

"And has the young lady risen?"

"The young lady is at church."

"True, to-day is Sunday. But does not the young lady go to church with the old gentleman?"

"No; the old gentleman goes to high Mass, and then goes to visit the canon, so the young lady prefers early Mass."

"What do they do here on Sunday?"

"They sit at home; Pan Gantovski comes to dinner."

Pan Stanislav knew this Gantovski as a small boy. In those times they nicknamed him "Little Bear," for he was a thick little fellow, awkward and surly. The servant explained that Pan Gantovski's father had died about five years before, and that the young man was managing his estate in the neighboring Yalbrykov.

"And does he come here every Sunday?"

"Sometimes he comes on a week day in the evening."

"A rival!" thought Pan Stanislav. After a while he inquired, —

"Has the old gentleman risen?"

"It must be that he has rung the bell, for Yozef has gone to him."

"Who is Yozef?"

"The valet."

"And who art thou?"

"I am his assistant."

"Go and inquire when it will be possible to see the old gentleman."

The servant went out and returned soon.

"The old gentleman sends to say that when he dresses he will beg you to come."

"Very well."

The servant went out; Pan Stanislav remained alone and waited, or rather was bored, a good while. Patience began to fail him at last; and he was about to stroll to the garden, when Yozef came with the announcement that the old gentleman begged him to come.

Yozef conducted him then to a chamber at the other end of the house. Pan Stanislav entered, and at the first moment did not recognize Pan Plavitski. He remembered him as a person in the bloom of life and very good-looking; now an old man stood before him, with a face as wrinkled as a baked apple, — a face to which small blackened mustaches strove in vain to lend the appearance of youth. Hair as black as the mustaches, and parted low at the side of the head, indicated also pretensions as yet unextinguished.

But Plavitski opened his arms: "Stas! how art thou, dear boy? Come hither!" And, pointing to his white shirt, he embraced the head of Pan Stanislav, and pressed it to his bosom, which moved with quick breathing.

The embrace continued a long time, and for Pan Stanislav, much too long. Plavitski said at last, —

“Let me look at thee, Anna, drop for drop! My poor beloved Anna!” and Plavitski sobbed; then he wiped with his heart finger¹ his right eyelid, on which, however, there was not a tear, and repeated, —

“As like Anna as one drop is like another! Thy mother was always for me the best and the most loving relative.”

Pan Stanislav stood before him confused, also somewhat stunned by a reception such as he had not expected, and by the odor of wax, powder, and various perfumes, which came from the face, mustaches, and shirt of the old man.

“How is my dear uncle?” asked he at last, judging that this title, which moreover he had given in years of childhood to Plavitski, would answer best to the solemn manner of his reception.

“How am I?” repeated Plavitski. “Not long for me now, not long! But just for this reason I greet thee in my house with the greater affection, — I greet thee as a father. And if the blessing of a man standing over the grave, and who at the same time is the eldest member of the family, has in thy eyes any value, I give it thee.”

And seizing Pan Stanislav’s head a second time, he kissed it and blessed him. The young man changed still more, and constraint was expressed on his face. His mother was a relative and friend of Plavitski’s first wife: to Plavitski himself no affectionate feelings had ever attracted her, so far as he could remember; hence the solemnity of the reception, to which he was forced to yield, was immensely disagreeable to him. Pan Stanislav had not the least family feeling for Plavitski. “This monkey,” thought he, “is blessing me instead of talking money;” and he was seized by a certain indignation, which might help him to explain matters clearly.

“Now sit down, dear boy,” said Plavitski, “and be as if in thy own house.”

Pan Stanislav took a seat, and began, “Dear uncle, for me it is very pleasant to visit uncle. I should have done so surely, even without business; but uncle knows that I have come also on that affair which my mother — ”

Here the old man laid his hand on Pan Stanislav’s knee suddenly. “But hast thou drunk coffee?” asked he.

“I have,” answered Pan Stanislav, driven from his track.

“Marynia goes to church early. I beg pardon, too, that I have not given thee my room; but I am old, I am accustomed to sleep here. This is my nest.” Then, with a circular sweep of the hand, he directed attention to the chamber.

Unconsciously Pan Stanislav let his eyes follow the motion of the hand. On a time this chamber had been to him a ceaseless temptation, for in it had hung the arms of Plavitski. The only change in it was the wall, which in the old time was rose-colored, and represented, on an endless number of squares, young shepherdesses, dressed *à la Watteau*, and catching fish with hooks. At the window stood a toilet-table with a white cover, and a mirror in a silver frame. On the table was a multitude of little pots, vials, boxes, brushes, combs, nail files, etc. At one side, in the corner, was a table with pipes and pipe-stems with amber mouth-pieces; on the wall, above the sofa, was the head of a wild boar, and under it two double-barrelled guns, a hunting-bag, horns, and, in general, the weapons of hunting; in the depth was a table with papers, open shelves with a certain number of books. Everywhere the place was full of old furniture more or less needed and ornamental, but indicating that the occupant of the chamber was the centre around which everything turned in that house, and that he cared greatly for himself. In one word, it was the chamber of an old single man, — an egotist full of petty anxiety for his personal comfort, and full of pretensions. Pan Stanislav did not need long reflection to divine that Plavitski would not give up his chamber for anything, nor to any man.

But the hospitable host inquired further, “Was it comfortable enough for thee? How didst thou spend the night?”

¹ Third, or ring finger.

“Perfectly; I rose late.”

“But thou wilt stay a week or so with me?”

Pan Stanislaw, who was very impulsive, sprang up from his chair.

“Doesn’t uncle know that I have business in Warsaw, and a partner, who at present is doing all our work alone? I must go at the earliest; and to-day I should like to finish the business on which I have come.”

To this Plavitski answered with a certain cordial dignity, “No, my boy. To-day is Sunday; and besides, family feeling should go before business. To-day I greet thee, and receive thee as a blood relative; to-morrow, if thou wish, appear as a creditor. That is it. To-day my Stas has come to me, the son of my Anna. Thus will it be till to-morrow; thus should it be, Stas. This is said to thee by thy eldest relative, who loves thee, and for whom thou shouldst do this.”

Pan Stanislaw frowned a little, but after a while he answered, “Let it be so till to-morrow.”

“Anna spoke through thee then. Dost smoke a pipe?”

“No, only cigarettes.”

“Believe me, thou doest ill. But I have cigarettes for guests.”

Further conversation was interrupted by the rattle of an equipage at the entrance.

“That is Marynia, who has come from early Mass,” said Plavitski.

Pan Stanislaw looked out through the window, and saw a young lady in a straw hat stepping out of the equipage.

“Hast made the acquaintance of Marynia?” asked Plavitski.

“I had the pleasure yesterday.”

“She is a dear child. I need not tell thee that I live only for her – ”

At that moment the door opened, and a youthful voice asked, “May I come in?”

“Come in, come in; Stas is here!” answered Plavitski.

Marynia entered the chamber quickly, with her hat hanging by ribbons over her shoulder; and when she had embraced her father, she gave her hand to Pan Stanislaw. In her rose-colored muslin, she looked exceedingly graceful and pretty. There was about her something of the character of Sunday, and with it the freshness of that morning, which was bright and calm. Her hair had been ruffled a little by her hat; her cheeks were blooming; and youth was breathing from her person. To Pan Stanislaw, she seemed more joyous and more shapely than the previous evening.

“High Mass will be a little later to-day,” said she to her father; “for immediately after Mass the canon went to the mill to prepare Pani Siatkowski; she is very ill. Papa will have half an hour yet.”

“That is well,” said Plavitski; “during that time thou wilt become more nearly acquainted with Stas. I tell thee, drop for drop like Anna! But thou hast never seen her. Remember, too, Marynia, that he will be our creditor to-morrow, if he wishes; but to-day he is only our relative and guest.”

“Very well,” answered the young lady; “we shall have a pleasant Sunday.”

“You went to sleep so late yesterday,” said Pan Stanislaw, “and to-day you were at early Mass.”

She answered merrily, “The cook and I go to early Mass that we may have time afterward to think of dinner.”

“I forgot to mention,” said Pan Stanislaw, “that I bring you salutations from Pani Emilia Hvastovski.”

“I have not seen Emilia for a year and a half, but we write to each other often. She is about to visit Reichenhall, for the sake of her little daughter.”

“She was ready to start when I saw her.”

“But how is the little girl?”

“She is in her twelfth year; she has grown beyond measure, and is pale. It does not seem that she is very healthy.”

“Do you visit Emilia often?”

“Rather often. She is almost my only acquaintance in Warsaw. Besides, I like Pani Emilia very much.”

“Tell me, my boy,” inquired Plavitski, taking a pair of fresh gloves from the table, and putting them into a breast-pocket, “what is thy particular occupation in Warsaw?”

“I am what is called an ‘affairist;’ I have a commission house in company with a certain Bigiel. I speculate in wheat and sugar, sometimes in timber; in anything that gives profit.”

“I have heard that thou art an engineer?”

“I have my specialty. But on my return I could not find occupation at any factory, and I began at mercantile transactions, all the more readily that I had some idea of them. But my specialty is dyeing.”

“How dost thou say?” inquired Plavitski.

“Dyeing.”

“The times are such now that one must take up anything,” said Plavitski, with dignity. “I am not the man to take that ill of thee. If thou wilt only retain the honorable old traditions of the family, no occupation brings shame to a man.”

Pan Stanislaw, to whom the appearance of the young lady had brought back his good nature, and who was amused by the sudden “grandezza” of the old man, showed his sound teeth in a smile, and answered, —

“Praise God for that!”

Panna Plavitski smiled in like manner, and said, “Emilia, who likes you very much, wrote to me once that you conduct your business perfectly.”

“The only difficulty in this country is with Jews; still competition is easy. And with Jews it is possible to get on by abstaining from anti-Semitic manifestoes. As to Pani Emilia, however, she knows as much about business as does her little Litka.”

“Yes; she has never been practical. Had it not been for her husband’s brother, Pan Teofil Hvastovski, she would have lost all she has. But Pan Teofil loves Litka greatly.”

“Who doesn’t love Litka? I, to begin with, am dying about her. She is such a marvellous child, and such a favorite; I tell you that I have a real weakness for her.”

Panna Marynia looked attentively at his honest, vivacious face, and thought, “He must be a little whimsical, but he has a good heart.”

Plavitski remarked, meanwhile, that it was time for Mass, and he began to take farewell of Marynia in such fashion as if he were going on a journey of some months; then he made the sign of the cross on her head, and took his hat. The young lady pressed Pan Stanislaw’s hand with more life than at the morning greeting; he, when sitting in the little equipage, repeated in his mind, “Oh, she is very nice, very sympathetic.”

Beyond the alley, by which Pan Stanislaw had come the night before, the equipage rolled over a road which was beset here and there with old and decayed birches standing at unequal distances from one another. On one side stretched a potato-field, on the other an enormous plain of wheat, with heavy bent heads, which seemed to sleep in the still air and in the full light of the sun. Before the carriage, magpies and hoopoes flew among the birches. Moving along paths through the yellow sea of wheat, and hidden in it to their shoulders, went village maidens with red kerchiefs on their heads, which resembled blooming poppies.

“Good wheat,” said Pan Stanislaw.

“Not bad. What is in man’s power is done, and what God gives He gives. Thou art young, my dear, so I give thee a precept, which in future will be of service to thee more than once, ‘Do always that which pertains to thee, and leave the rest to the Lord God.’ He knows best what we need. The harvest will be good this year; I know that beforehand, for when God is going to touch me with anything, He sends a sign.”

“What is it?” asked Pan Stanislaw, with astonishment.

“Behind my pipe-table – I do not know whether thou hast noted where it stands – a mouse shows himself to me a number of days in succession when any evil is coming.”

“There must be a hole in the floor.”

“There is no hole,” said Plavitski, closing his eyes, and shaking his head mysteriously.

“One might bring in a cat.”

“I will not bring in a cat, for if it is the will of God that that mouse should be a sign to me, or forewarning, I shall not go against that will. Nothing has appeared to me this year. I mentioned this to Marynia; maybe God desires in some way to show that He is watching over our family. Listen, my dear; people will say, I know, that we are ruined, or at least in a very bad state. Here it is; judge for thyself: Kremen and Skoki, Magyerovka and Suhotsin, contain about two hundred and fifty vlokas of land; on that there is a debt of thirty thousand rubles to the society, not more, and about a hundred thousand mortgage, including thy sum. Therefore we have about a hundred and thirty thousand. Let us estimate only three thousand rubles a vloka; that will make seven hundred and fifty thousand, – altogether eight hundred and eighty thousand – ”

“How is that?” asked Pan Stanislav, with astonishment; “uncle is including the debt with the property.”

“If the property were worth nothing, no one would give me a copper for it, so I add the debt to the value of the property.”

Pan Stanislav thought, “He is a lunatic, with whom it is useless to talk;” and he listened further in silence.

“I intend to parcel out Magyerovka. The mill I will sell; but in Skoki and Suhotsin I have marl, and knowest thou at how much I have estimated it? At two million rubles.”

“Has uncle a purchaser?”

“Two years ago a certain Shaum came and looked at the fields. He went away, it is true, without speaking of the business; but I am sure that he will come again, otherwise the mouse would have appeared behind the pipe-table.”

“Ha! let him come again.”

“Knowest thou another thing that comes to my head? Since thou art an ‘affairist,’ take up this business. Find thyself partners, that is all.”

“The business is too large for me.”

“Then find me a purchaser; I will give ten per cent of the proceeds.”

“What does Panna Marynia think of this marl?”

“Marynia, how Marynia? She is a golden child, but still a child! She believes that Providence watches over our family.”

“I heard that from her yesterday.”

Meanwhile they had drawn near Vantory and the church, on a hill among linden-trees. Under the hill stood at number of peasant-wagons with ladder-like boxes, some brichkas and carriages. Pan Plavitski made the sign of the cross, and said, “This is our little church, which thou must remember. All the Plavitskis lie here, and I, too, shall be lying here soon. I never pray better than in this place.”

“There will be many people, I see,” said Pan Stanislav.

“Gantovski’s brichka, Zazimski’s coach, Yamish’s carriage, and a number of others are there. Thou must remember the Yamishes. She is an uncommon woman; he pretends to be a great agriculturist and a councillor, but he is an old dotard, who never did understand her.”

At that moment the bell began to sound in the church tower.

“They have seen us, and are ringing the bell,” said Plavitski; “Mass will begin this moment. I will take thee, after Mass, to the grave of my first wife; pray for her, since she was thy aunt. She was an honest woman; the Lord light her.”

Here Plavitski raised his finger again to rub his right eye. Pan Stanislav therefore asked, wishing to change the conversation, —

“But was not Pani Yamish once very beautiful? or is this the same one?”

Plavitski's face gleamed suddenly. He thrust out for one moment the end of his tongue from his blackened little mustaches, and patting Pan Stanislaw on the thigh, said, —

“She is worth a sin yet, — she is, she is.”

Meanwhile they drove in, and after walking around the church, entered the sacristy at the side; not wishing to push through the crowd, they sat on side seats near the altar. Plavitski occupied the collator's place, in which were also the Yamishes. Yamish was a man very old in appearance, with an intelligent face, but weighed down; she was a woman well toward sixty, dressed almost like Panna Marynia, — that is, in a muslin robe and a straw hat. The bows, full of politeness, which Pan Plavitski made to her, and the kind smiles with which she returned them, showed that between those two reigned intimate relations founded on mutual adoration. After a while the lady, raising her glasses to her eyes, began to observe Pan Stanislaw, not understanding apparently who could have come with Pan Plavitski. In the seat behind them one of the neighbors, taking advantage of the fact that Mass had not begun yet, was finishing some narrative about hunting, and repeated a number of times to another neighbor, “My dogs, well — ” then both stopped their conversation, and began to speak to Plavitski and Pani Yamish so audibly that every word reached the ears of Pan Stanislaw. The priest came out to the altar then.

At sight of the Mass and that little church, Pan Stanislaw's memory went back to the years of his childhood, when he was there with his mother. Wonder rose in him involuntarily when he thought how little anything changes in the country, except people. Some are placed away in consecrated earth; others are born. But the new life puts itself into the old forms; and to him who comes from afar, after a long absence, all that he saw long ago seems of yesterday. The church was the same; the nave was filled, as of old, with flaxen-colored heads of peasants, gray coats, red and yellow kerchiefs with flowers on the heads of the maidens; it had precisely the same kind of odor of incense, of sweet flag, and the exhalations of people. Outside one of the windows grew the same birch-tree, whose slender branches, thrown against the panes by the wind as it rose, cast shade which gave a green tinge to light in the church. But the people were not the same: some of the former ones were crumbling quietly into dust, or had made their way from beneath the earth in the form of grass; those who were left yet were somehow bent, as if going under ground gradually. Pan Stanislaw, who plumed himself on avoiding all generalizing theories, but who in reality had a Slav head, which, as it were, had not emerged yet from universal existence, occupied himself with them involuntarily; and all the time he was thinking that there is still a terrible precipice between that passion for life innate in people and the absoluteness of death. He thought, also, that perhaps for this reason all systems of philosophy vanish, like shadows; but Mass is celebrated, as of old, because it alone promises further and unbroken continuity.

Reared abroad, he did not believe in it greatly; at least, he was not certain of it. He felt in himself, as do all people of to-day, the very newest people, an irrestrainable repugnance to materialism; but from it he had not found an escape yet, and, what is more, it seemed to him that he was not seeking it. He was an unconscious pessimist, like those who are looking for something which they cannot find. He stunned himself with occupations to which he was habituated; and only in moments of great excess in that pessimism did he ask himself, What is this all for? Of what use is it to gain property, labor, marry, beget children, if everything ends in an abyss? But that was at times, and did not become a fixed principle. Youth saved him from this, not the first youth, but also not a youth nearing its end, a certain mental and physical strength, the instinct of self-preservation, the habit of work, vivacity of character, and finally that elemental force, which pushes a man into the arms of a woman. And now from the recollections of childhood, from thoughts of death, from doubts as to the fitness of marriage, he came to this special thought, that he had no one to whom he could give what was best in him; and then he came to Panna Marynia Plavitski, whose muslin robe, covering a young and shapely body, did not leave his eyes. He remembered that when he was leaving Warsaw, Pani Emilia, a great friend of his and of Panna Marynia's, had said laughingly, —

“If you, after being in Kremen, do not fall in love with Marynia, I shall close my doors against you.” He answered her with great courage that he was going only to squeeze out money, not to fall in love, but that was not true. If Panna Plavitski had not been in Kremen, he would surely have throttled Plavitski by letter, or by legal methods. On the way he had been thinking of Panna Marynia and of how she would look, and he was angry because he was going for money, too. Having talked into himself great decision in such matters, he determined above all to obtain what belonged to him, and was ready rather to go beyond the mark than not to reach it. He promised this to himself, especially the first evening, when Marynia, though she had pleased him well enough, had not produced such a great impression as he had expected, or rather had produced a different one; but that morning she had taken his eye greatly. “She is like the morning herself,” thought he; “she is nice and knows that she is nice, – women always know that.”

This last discovery made him somewhat impatient, for he wished to return as soon as possible to Kremen, to observe the young woman further. In fact, Mass was over soon. Plavitski went out immediately after the blessing, for he had two duties before him, – the first, to pray on the graves of his two wives who were lying under the church; the second, to conduct Pani Yamish to her carriage. Since he wished to neglect neither of these, he had to count with time. Pan Stanislav went with him; and soon they found themselves before the stone slabs, erected side by side in the church wall. Plavitski kneeled and prayed awhile with attention; then he rose, and wiping away a tear, which was hanging really on his lids, took Pan Stanislav by the arm, and said, “Yes, I lost both; still I must live.”

Meanwhile Pani Yamish appeared before the church door in the company of her husband, of those two neighbors who had spoken to her before Mass, and of young Gantovski. At sight of her Pan Plavitski bent to Pan Stanislav’s ear and said, —

“When she enters the carriage, take notice what a foot she has yet.”

After a while both joined the company; bows and greetings began. Pan Plavitski presented Pan Polanyetski; then, turning to Pani Yamish, he added, with the smile of a man convinced that he says something which no common person could have hit upon, —

“My relative, who has come to embrace his uncle, and squeeze him.”

“We will permit only the first; otherwise he will have an affair with us,” said the lady.

“But Kremen² is hard,” continued Plavitski; “he will break his teeth on it, though he is young.”

Pani Yamish half closed her eyes. “That ease,” said she, “with which you scatter sparks, *c’est inoui!* How is your health to-day?”

“At this moment I feel healthy and young.”

“And Marynia?”

“She was at early Mass. We wait for you both at five. My little housekeeper is breaking her head over supper. A beautiful day.”

“We shall come if neuralgia lets me, and my lord husband is willing.”

“How is it, neighbor?” asked Plavitski.

“I am always glad to go,” answered the neighbor, with the voice of a crushed man.

“Then, *au revoir*.”

“*Au revoir*,” answered the lady; and turning to Pan Stanislav, she reached her hand to him. “It was a pleasure for me to make your acquaintance.”

Plavitski gave his arm to the lady, and conducted her to the carriage. The two neighbors went away also. Pan Stanislav remained a while with Gantovski, who looked at him without much goodwill. Pan Stanislav remembered him as an awkward boy; from the “Little Bear,” he had grown to be a stalwart man, somewhat heavy perhaps in his movements, but rather presentable, with a very shapely, light-colored mustache. Pan Stanislav did not begin conversation, waiting till the other should speak first; but he thrust his hands into his pockets, and maintained a stubborn silence.

² Kremen means flint in Polish.

“His former manners have remained with him,” thought Pan Stanislav, who felt now an aversion to that surly fellow.

Meanwhile Plavitski returned from Yamish’s carriage.

“Hast taken notice?” asked he of Pan Stanislav, first of all. “Well, Gantos,” said he then, “thou wilt go in thy brichka, for in the carriage there are only two places.”

“I will go in the brichka, for I am taking a dog to Panna Marynia,” answered the young man, who bowed and walked off.

After a while Pan Plavitski and Pan Stanislav found themselves on the road to Kremen.

“This Gantovski is uncle’s relative, I suppose?” asked Pan Stanislav.

“The tenth water after a jelly. They are very much fallen. This Adolph has one little farm and emptiness in his pocket.”

“But in his heart there is surely no emptiness?”

Pan Plavitski pouted. “So much the worse for him, if he imagines anything. He may be good, but he is simple. No breeding, no education, no property. Marynia likes him, or rather she endures him.”

“Ah, does she endure him?”

“See thou how it is: I sacrifice myself for her and stay in the country; she sacrifices herself for me and stays in the country. There is no one here; Pani Yamish is considerably older than Marynia; in general, there are no young people; life here is tedious: but what’s to be done? Remember, my boy, that life is a series of sacrifices. There is need for thee to carry that principle in thy heart and thy head. Those especially who belong to honorable and more prominent families should not forget this. But Gantovski is with us always on Sunday for dinner; and to-day, as thou hast heard, he is bringing a dog.”

They dropped into silence, and drove along the sand slowly. The magpies flew before them from birch to birch, this time in the direction of Kremen. Behind Plavitski’s little carriage rode in his brichka Pan Gantovski, who, thinking of Pan Stanislav, said to himself, —

“If he comes as a creditor to squeeze them, I’ll break his neck; if he comes as a rival, I’ll break it too.”

From childhood, he had cherished hostile feelings toward Polanyetski. In those days they met once in a while. Polanyetski used to laugh at him; and, being a couple of years older, he even beat him.

Plavitski and his guest arrived at last, and, half an hour later, all found themselves at table in the dining-room, with Panna Marynia. The young dog, brought by Gantovski, taking advantage of his privilege of guest, moved about under the table, and sometimes got on the knees of those present with great confidence and with delight, expressed by wagging his tail.

“That is a Gordon setter,” said Gantovski. “He is simple yet; but those dogs are clever, and become wonderfully attached.”

“He is beautiful, and I am very grateful to you,” answered Marynia, looking at the shining black hair and the yellow spots over the eyes of the dog.

“Too friendly,” added Plavitski, covering his knees with a napkin.

“In the field, too, they are better than common setters.”

“Do you hunt?” asked Pan Stanislav of the young lady.

“No; I have never had any desire to do so. And you?”

“Sometimes. But I live in the city.”

“Art thou much in society?” inquired Plavitski.

“Almost never. My visits are to Pani Emilia, my partner Bigiel, and Vaskovski, my former professor, an oddity now, — those are all. Of course I go sometimes to people with whom I have business.”

“That is not well, my boy. A young man should have and preserve good social relations, especially when he has a right to them. If a man has to force his way, the question is different; but as Polanyetski, thou hast the right to go anywhere. I have the same story, too, with Marynia. The winter

before last, when she had finished her eighteenth year, I took her to Warsaw. Thou'lt understand that the trip was not without cost, and that for me it required certain sacrifices. Well, and what came of it? She sat for whole days with Pani Emilia, and they read books. She is born a recluse, and will remain one. Thou and she might join hands."

"Let us join hands!" cried Pan Stanislaw, joyously.

"I cannot, with a clear conscience," answered Marynia; "for it was not altogether as papa describes. I read books with Emilia, it is true; but I was much in society with papa, and I danced enough for a lifetime."

"You have no fault to find?"

"No; but I am not yearning."

"Then you did not bring away memories, it seems?"

"Evidently there remained with me only recollections, which are something different."

"I do not understand the difference."

"Memory is a magazine, in which the past lies stored away, and recollection appears when we go to the magazine to take something."

Here Panna Marynia was alarmed somewhat at that special daring with which she had allowed herself this philosophical deduction as to the difference between memory and recollection; therefore she blushed rather deeply.

"Not stupid, and pretty," thought Pan Stanislaw; aloud he said, "That would not have come to my head, and it is so appropriate."

He surveyed her with eyes full of sympathy. She was in fact very pretty; for she was laughing, somewhat confused by the praise, and also delighted sincerely with it. She blushed still more when the daring young man said, —

"To-morrow, before parting, I shall beg for a place, — even in the magazine."

But he said this with such joyousness that it was impossible to be angry with him; and Marynia answered, not without a certain coquetry, —

"Very well; and I ask reciprocity."

"In such case, I should have to go so often to the magazine that I might prefer straightway to live in it."

This seemed to Marynia somewhat too bold on such short acquaintance; but Plavitski broke in now and said, —

"This Stanislaw pleases me. I prefer him to Gantos, who sits like a misanthrope."

"Because I can talk only of what may be taken in hand," answered the young man, with a certain sadness.

"Then take your fork, and eat."

Pan Stanislaw laughed. Marynia did not laugh: she was sorry for Gantovski; therefore she turned the conversation to things which were tangible.

"She is either a coquette, or has a good heart," thought Pan Stanislaw again.

But Pan Plavitski, who recalled evidently his last winter visit in Warsaw, continued, "Tell me, Stas, dost thou know Bukatski?"

"Of course. By the way, he is a nearer relative to me than to uncle."

"We are related to the whole world, — to the whole world literally. Bukatski was Marynia's most devoted dancer. He danced with her at all the parties."

Pan Stanislaw began to laugh again; "And for all his reward he went to the magazine, to the dust-bin. But at least it is not necessary to dust him, for he is as careful of his person as uncle, for instance. He is the greatest dandy in Warsaw. What does he do? He is manager of fresh air, which means that when there is fair weather he walks out or rides. Besides, he is an original, who has peculiar little closets in his brain. He observes various things of such kind as no other would notice. Once, after his return from Venice, I met him and asked what he had seen there. 'I saw,' said he, 'while on the

Riva dei Schiavoni, half an egg-shell and half a lemon-rind floating: they met, they struck, they were driven apart, they came together; at last, paf! the half lemon fell into the half egg-shell, and away they went sailing together. In this see the meaning of harmony.' Such is Bukatski's occupation, though he knows much, and in art, for instance, he is an authority."

"But they say that he is very capable."

"Perhaps he is, but capable of nothing. He eats bread, and that is the end of his service. If at least he were joyous, but at bottom he is melancholy. I forgot to say that besides he is in love with Pani Emilia."

"Does Emilia receive many people?" inquired Marynia.

"No. Vaskovski, Bukatski, and Mashko, an advocate, the man who buys and sells estates, are her only visitors.

"Of course she cannot receive many people; she has to give much time to Litka."

"Dear little girl," said Pan Stanislav, "may God grant at least that Reichenhall may help her."

And his joyous countenance was covered in one moment with genuine sadness. Marynia looked at him with eyes full of sympathy, and in her turn thought a second time, "Still he must be kind really."

But Plavitski began to talk as if to himself. "Mashko, Mashko – he too was circling about Marynia. But she did not like him. As to estates, the price now is such that God pity us."

"Mashko is the man who declares that under such conditions it is well to buy them."

Dinner came to an end, and they passed into the drawing-room for coffee; while at coffee Pan Plavitski, as his wont was in moments of good-humor, began to make a butt of Gantovski. The young man endured patiently, out of regard for Marynia, but with a mien that seemed to say, "Ei! but for her, I would shake all the bones out of thee." After coffee Marynia sat down at the piano, while her father was occupied with patience. She played not particularly well, but her clear and calm face was outlined pleasantly over the music-board. About five Pan Plavitski looked at the clock and said, —

"The Yamishes are not coming."

"They will come yet," answered Marynia.

But from that moment on he looked continually at the clock, and announced every moment that the Yamishes would not come. At last, about six, he said with a sepulchral voice, —

"Some misfortune must have happened."

Pan Stanislav at that moment was near Marynia, who in an undertone said, —

"Here is a trouble! Nothing has happened, of course; but papa will be in bad humor till supper."

At first Pan Stanislav wished to answer that to make up he would be in good-humor to-morrow after sleeping; but, seeing genuine anxiety on the young lady's face, he answered, —

"As I remember, it is not very far; send some one to inquire what has happened."

"Why not send some one over there, papa?"

But he answered with vexation, "Too much kindness; I will go myself;" and ringing for a servant, he ordered the horses, then stopping for a moment he said, —

"*Enfin*, anything may happen in the country; some person might come and find my daughter alone. This is not a city. Besides, you are relatives. Thou, Gantovski, may be necessary for me, so have the kindness to come with me."

An expression of the greatest unwillingness and dissatisfaction was evident on the young man's face. He stretched his hand to his yellow hair and said, —

"Drawn up at the pond is a boat, which the gardener could not launch. I promised Panna Marynia to launch it; but last Sunday she would not let me, for rain was pouring, as if from a bucket."

"Then run and try. It is thirty yards to the pond; thou wilt be back in two minutes."

Gantovski went to the garden in spite of himself. Plavitski, without noticing his daughter or Pan Stanislav, repeated as he walked through the room, —

"Neuralgia in the head; I would bet that it is neuralgia in the head; Gantovski in case of need could gallop for the doctor. That old mope, that councillor without a council, would not send for

him surely.” And needing evidently to pour out his ill humor on some one, he added, turning to Pan Stanislaw, “Thou’lt not believe what a booby that man is.”

“Who?”

“Yamish.”

“But, papa!” interrupted Marynia.

Plavitski did not let her finish, however, and said with increasing ill humor, “It does not please thee, I know, that she shows me a little friendship and attention. Read Pan Yamish’s articles on agriculture, do him homage, raise statues to him; but let me have my sympathies.”

Here Pan Stanislaw might admire the real sweetness of Marynia, who, instead of being impatient, ran to her father, and putting her forehead under his blackened mustaches, said, —

“They will bring the horses right away, right away, right away! Maybe I ought to go; but let ugly father not be angry, for he will hurt himself.”

Plavitski, who was really much attached to his daughter, kissed her on the forehead and said, “I know thou hast a good heart. But what is Gantovski doing?”

And he called through the open gate of the garden to the young man, who returned soon, wearied out, and said, —

“There is water in the boat, and it is drawn up too far; I have tried, and I cannot — ”

“Then take thy cap and let’s be off, for I hear the horses have come.”

A moment later the young people were alone.

“Papa is accustomed to society a little more elegant than that in the country,” said Marynia; “therefore he likes Pani Yamish, but Pan Yamish is a very honorable and sensible man.”

“I saw him in the church; to me he seemed as if crushed.”

“Yes; for he is sickly, and besides has much care.”

“Like you.”

“No, Pan Yamish manages his work perfectly; besides, he writes much on agriculture. He is really the light of these parts. Such a worthy man! She too is a good woman, only to me she seems rather pretentious.”

“An ex-beauty.”

“Yes. And this unbroken country life, through which she has become rather rusty, increases her oddness. I think that in cities oddities of character and their ridiculous sides efface one another; but in the country, people turn into originals more easily, they grow disused to society gradually, a certain old-fashioned way is preserved in intercourse, and it goes to excess. We must all seem rusty to people from great cities, and somewhat ridiculous.”

“Not all,” answered Pan Stanislaw; “you, for example.”

“It will come to me in time,” answered Marynia, with a smile.

“Time may bring changes too.”

“With us there is so little change, and that most frequently for the worse.”

“But in the lives of young ladies in general changes are expected.”

“I should wish first that papa and I might come to an agreement about Kremen.”

“Then your father and Kremen are the main, the only objects in life for you?”

“True. But I can help little, since I know little of anything.”

“Your father, Kremen, and nothing more,” repeated Pan Stanislaw.

A moment of silence came, after which Marynia asked Pan Stanislaw if he would go to the garden. They went, and soon found themselves at the edge of the pond. Pan Stanislaw, who, while abroad, had been a member of various sporting clubs, pushed to the water’s edge the boat, which Gantovski could not manage; but it turned out that the boat was leaky, and that they could not row in it.

“This is a case of my management,” said Marynia, laughing; “there is a leak everywhere. And I know not how to find an excuse, since the pond and the garden belong to me only. But before it is launched I will have the boat mended.”

“As I live, it is the same boat in which I was forbidden to sail when a boy.”

“Quite possibly. Have you not noticed that things change less by far, and last longer than people? At times it is sad to think of this.”

“Let us hope to last longer than this moss-covered boat, which is as water-soaked as a sponge. If this is the boat of my childhood, I have no luck with it. In old times I was not permitted to sail in it, and now I have hurt my hand with some rusty nail.”

Saying this, he drew out his handkerchief and began to wind it around a finger of his right hand, with his left hand, but so awkwardly that Marynia said, —

“You cannot manage it; you need help;” and she began to bind up his hand, which he twisted a little so as to increase the difficulty of her task, since it was pleasant for him to feel her delicate fingers touching his. She saw that he was hindering her, and glanced at him; but the moment their eyes met, she understood the reason, and, blushing, bent down as if tying more carefully. Pan Stanislaw felt her near him, he felt the warmth coming from her, and his heart beat more quickly.

“I have wonderfully pleasant memories,” said he, “of my former vacations here; but this time I shall take away still pleasanter ones. You are very kind, and besides exactly like some flower in this Kremen. On my word, I do not exaggerate.”

Marynia understood that the young man said that sincerely, a little too daringly perhaps, but more through innate vivacity than because they were alone; she was not offended, therefore, but she began to make playful threats with her pleasant low voice, —

“I beg you not to say pretty things to me; if you do, I shall bind your hand badly, and then run away.”

“You may bind the hand badly, but stay. The evening is so beautiful.”

Marynia finished her work with the handkerchief, and they walked farther. The evening was really beautiful. The sun was setting; the pond, not wrinkled with a breath of wind, shone like fire and gold. In the distance, beyond the water, the alders were dozing quietly; the nearer trees were outlined with wonderful distinctness in the ruddy air. In the yard beyond the house, storks were chattering.

“Kremen is charming, very charming!” said Pan Stanislaw.

“Very,” answered Marynia.

“I understand your attachment to this place. Besides, when one puts labor into anything, one is attached to it still more. I understand too that in the country it is possible to have pleasant moments like this; but, besides, it is agreeable here. In the city weariness seizes men sometimes, especially those who, like me, are plunged to their ears in accounts, and who, besides, are alone. Pan Bigiel, my partner, has a wife, he has children, — that is pleasant. But how is it with me? I say to myself often: I am at work, but what do I get for it? Grant that I shall have a little money, but what then? — nothing. To-morrow ever the same as to-day: Work and work. You know, Panna Plavitski, when a man devotes himself to something, when he moves with the impetus of making money, for example, money seems to him an object. But moments come in which I think that Vaskovski, my original, is right, and that no one whose name ends in *ski* or *vich* can ever put his whole soul into such an object and rest in it exclusively. He declares that there is in us yet the fresh memory of a previous existence, and that in general the Slavs have a separate mission. He is a great original, a philosopher, and a mystic. I argue with him, and make money as I can; but now, for example, when I am walking with you in this garden, it seems to me in truth that he is right.”

For a time they walked on without speaking. The light became ruddier every instant, and their faces were sunk, as it were, in that gleam. Friendly, reciprocal feelings rose in them each moment. They felt pleasant and calm in each other’s society. Of this Pan Stanislaw was sensible seemingly, for, after a while, he remarked, —

“That is true, too, which Pani Emilia told me. She said that one has more confidence, and feels nearer to you in an hour than to another in a month. I have verified this. It seems to me that I have known you for a long time. I think that only persons unusually kind can produce this impression.”

“Emilia loves me much,” answered Marynia, with simplicity; “that is why she praises me. Even if what she says were true, I will add that I have not the power to be such with all persons.”

“You made on me, yesterday, another impression, indeed; but you were tired then and drowsy.”

“I was, in some degree.”

“And why did you not go to bed? The servants might have made tea for me, or I might have done without it.”

“No; we are not so inhospitable as that. Papa said that one of us should receive you. I was afraid that he would wait himself for you, and that would have injured him; so I preferred to take his place.”

“In that regard thou mightst have been at ease,” thought Pan Stanislaw; “but thou art an honest maiden to defend the old egotist.” Then he said, “I beg your pardon for having begun to speak of business at once. That is a mercantile habit. But I reproached myself afterward. ‘Thou art this and that kind of man,’ thought I; and with shame do I beg your pardon.”

“There is no cause for pardon, since there is no fault. They told you that I occupy myself with everything; hence you turned to me.”

Twilight spread more deeply by degrees. After a certain time they returned to the house, and, as the evening was beautiful, they sat down on the garden veranda. Pan Stanislaw entered the drawing-room for a moment, returned with a footstool, and, bending down, pushed it under Marynia’s feet.

“I thank you, I thank you much,” said she, inclining, and taking her skirt with her hand; “how kind of you! I thank you much.”

“I am inattentive by nature,” said he; “but do you know who taught me a little carefulness? Litka. There is need of care with her; and Pani Emilia has to remember this.”

“She remembers it,” answered Marynia, “and we will all help her. If she had not gone to Reichenhall, I should have invited her here.”

“And I should have followed Litka without invitation.”

“Then I beg you in papa’s name, once and for all.”

“Do not say that lightly, for I am ready to abuse your kindness. For me it is very pleasant here; and as often as I feel out of sorts in Warsaw, I’ll take refuge in Kremen.”

Pan Stanislaw knew this time that his words were intended to bring them nearer, to establish sympathy between them; and he spoke with design, and sincerely. While speaking, he looked on that mild young face, which, in the light of the setting sun, seemed calmer than usual. Marynia raised to him her blue eyes, in which was the question, “Art speaking by chance, or of purpose?” and she answered in a somewhat lower voice, —

“Do so.”

And both were silent, feeling that really a connection between them was beginning.

“I am astonished that papa is not returning,” said she, at last.

The sun had gone down; in the ruddy gloaming, an owl had begun to circle about in slow flight, and frogs were croaking in the pond.

Pan Stanislaw made no answer to the young lady’s remark, but said, as if sunk in his own thoughts: “I do not analyze life; I have no time. When I enjoy myself, — as at this moment, for instance, — I feel that I enjoy myself; when I suffer, I suffer, — that is all. But five or six years ago it was different. A whole party of us used to meet for discussions on the meaning of life, — a number of scholars, and one writer, rather well known in Belgium at present. We put to ourselves these questions: Whither are we going? What sense has everything, what value, what end? We read the pessimists, and lost ourselves in various baseless inquiries, like one of my acquaintances, an assistant in the chair of astronomy, who, when he began to lose himself in interplanetary spaces, lost his reason; and, after that, it seemed to him that his head was moving in a parabola through infinity. Afterward he recovered, and became a priest. We, in like manner, could come to nothing, rest on nothing, — just like birds flying over the sea without a place to light on. But at last I saw two things: first, that my Belgians were taking all this to heart less than I, — we are more naïve; second, that my desire for labor

would be injured, and that I should become an incompetent. I seized myself, then, by the ears, and began to color cottons with all my might. After that, I said in my mind: Life is among the rights of nature; whether wise or foolish, never mind, it is a right. We must live, then; hence it is necessary to get from life what is possible. And I wish to get something. Vaskovski says, it is true, that we Slavs are not able to stop there; but that is mere talk. That we cannot be satisfied with money alone, we will admit. But I said to myself, besides money there are two things: peace and – do you know what, Panna Plavitski? – woman. For a man should have some one with whom to share what he has. Later, there must be death. Granted. But where death begins, man's wit ends. 'That is not my business,' as the English say. Meanwhile, it is needful to have some one to whom a man can give that which he has or acquires, whether money or service or fame. If they are diamonds on the moon, it is all the same, for there is no one to learn what their value is. So a man must have some one to know him. And I think to myself, who will know me, if not a woman, if she is only wonderfully good and wonderfully reliable, greatly mine and greatly beloved? This is all that it is possible to desire; for from this comes repose, and repose is the one thing that has sense. I say this, not as a poet, but as a practical man and a merchant. To have near me a dear one, that is an object. And let come then what may. Here you have my philosophy."

Pan Stanislav insisted that he was speaking like a merchant; but he spoke like a dreamer, for that summer evening had acted on him, as had also the presence of that youthful woman, who in so many regards answered to the views announced a moment earlier. This must have come to Pan Stanislav's head, for, turning directly to her, he said, —

"This is my thought, but I do not talk of it before people usually. I was brought to this somehow to-day; for I repeat that Pani Emilia is right. She says that one becomes more intimate with you in a day than with others in a year. You must be fabulously kind. I should have committed a folly if I had not come to Kremen; and I shall come as often as you permit me."

"Come, – often."

"I thank you." He extended his hand, and Marynia gave him hers, as if in sign of agreement.

Oh, how he pleased her with his sincere, manly face, with his dark hair, and a certain vigor in his whole bearing and in his animated eyes! He brought, besides, so many of those inspirations which were lacking in Kremen, – certain new horizons, running out far beyond the pond and the alders which hemmed in the horizon at Kremen. They had opened in one day as many roads as it was possible to open. They sat again a certain time in silence, and their minds wandered on farther in silence as hastily as they had during speech. Marynia pointed at last to the light, which was increasing behind the alders, and said, "The moon."

"Aha! the moon," repeated Pan Stanislav.

The moon was, in fact, rising slowly from behind the alders, ruddy, and as large as a wheel. Now the dogs began to bark; a carriage rattled on the other side of the house; and, after a while, Plavitski appeared in the drawing-room, into which lamps had been brought. Marynia went in, Pan Stanislav following.

"Nothing was the matter," said Plavitski. "Pani Hrometski called. Thinking that she would go soon, they did not let us know. Yamish is a trifle ill, but is going to Warsaw in the morning. She promised to come to-morrow."

"Then is all well?" asked Marynia.

"Well; but what have you been doing here?"

"Listening to the frogs," answered Pan Stanislav; "and it was pleasant."

"The Lord God knows why He made frogs. Though they don't let me sleep at night, I make no complaint. But, Marynia, let the tea be brought."

Tea was waiting already in another room. While they were drinking it, Plavitski described his visit at the Yamishes. The young people were silent; but from time to time they looked at each other with eyes full of light, and at parting they pressed each other's hands very warmly. Marynia felt a

certain heaviness seizing her, as if that day had wearied her; but it was a wonderful and pleasant kind of weariness. Afterward, when her head was resting on the pillow, she did not think that the day following would be Monday, that a new week of common toil would begin; she thought only of Pan Stanislav, and his words were sounding in her ears: “Who will know me, if not a woman, if she is only wonderfully good and wonderfully reliable, greatly mine and greatly beloved?”

Pan Stanislav, on his part, was saying to himself, while lighting a cigarette in bed, “She is kind and shapely, charming; where is there such another?”

CHAPTER III

But the following day was a gray one, and Panna Plavitski woke with reproaches. It seemed to her that, the day before, she had let herself be borne away on some current farther than was proper, and that she had been simply coquetting with Pan Stanislav. She was penetrated with special dissatisfaction, for this reason principally: that Pan Stanislav had only come as a creditor. She had forgotten that yesterday; but to-day she said to herself, “Undoubtedly it will come to his head that I wanted to win him, or to soften him;” and at this thought the blood flowed to her cheeks and her forehead. She had an honest nature and much ambition, which revolted at every idea that she might be suspected of calculation. Believing now in the possibility of such a suspicion, she felt in advance as if offended by Pan Stanislav. Withal, there was one thought which was bitter beyond every expression: she knew that, as a rule, a copper could not overtake a copper in the treasury of Kremen; that there was no money; and that if, in view of the proposed parcelling of Magyerovka, there were hopes of having some in future, her father would make evasions, for he considered other debts more urgent than Pan Stanislav’s. She promised herself, it is true, to do all in her power to see him paid absolutely, and before others; but she knew that she was not able to effect much. Her father assisted her willingly in management; but in money matters he had his own way; and it was rarely that he regarded her opinion. His rôle consisted really in evading everything by all means, – by promises never kept, by delays, by presenting imaginary calculations and hopes, instead of reality. As the collection of debts secured by mortgage on land is difficult and tedious, and defence may be kept up almost as long as one wishes, Plavitski held on to Kremen, thanks to his system. In the end, all this threatened ruin inexorable, as well as complete; but, meanwhile, the old man considered himself “the head of affairs,” and listened the more unwillingly to the opinions and counsels of his daughter, since he suspected at once that she doubted his “head.” This offended his self-esteem to the utmost. Marynia had passed, because of this “head” and its methods, through more than one humiliation. Her country life was only an apparent ideal of work and household occupations. There was wanting to it neither bitterness nor pain; and her calm countenance indicated, not only the sweetness of her character, but its strength, and a great education of spirit. The humiliation which threatened her this time, however, seemed harder to bear than the others.

“At least, let him not suspect me,” said she to herself. But how could she prevent his suspicion? Her first thought was to see Pan Stanislav before he met her father, and describe the whole state of affairs to him; treat him as a man in whom she had confidence. It occurred to her then that such a description would be merely a prayer for forbearance, for compassion; and hence a humiliation. Were it not for this thought, Marynia would have sent for him. She, as a woman noting keenly every quiver of her own heart and the hearts of others, felt half consciously, half instinctively, that between her and that young man something was foreshadowed; that something had begun, as it were; and, above all, that something might and must be inevitable in the future, if she chose that it should be; but, as affairs stood, it did not seem to her that she could choose. Only one thing remained, – to see Pan Stanislav, and efface by her demeanor yesterday’s impressions; to break the threads which had been fastened between them, and to give him full freedom of action. Such a method seemed best to her.

Learning from the servants that Pan Stanislav not only had risen, but had drunk tea and gone out to the road, she decided to find him. This was not difficult, since he had returned from his morning walk, and, standing at the side wall of the entrance, which was grown over with wild grape-vines, was talking with those two dogs which had fawned on him so effusively at his arrival. He did not see her at once; and Marynia, standing on the steps, heard him saying to the dogs, —

“These big dogs take pay for watching the house? They eat? They don’t bark at strangers, but fawn on them. Ei! stupid dogs, lazy fellows!”

And he patted their white heads. Then, seeing her through the openings of the grape-vines, he sprang up as quickly as if thrown from a sling, and stood before her, glad and bright-faced.

“Good-morning. I have been talking with the dogs. How did you rest?”

“Thank you.” And she extended her hand to him coldly; but he was looking at her with eyes in which was to be seen most clearly how great and deep a pleasure the sight of her caused him. And he pleased poor Marynia not less; he simply pleased her whole soul. Her heart was oppressed with regret that she had to answer his cordial good-morning so ceremoniously and coldly.

“Perhaps you were going out to look after affairs? In that case, if you permit, I will go with you. I must return to the city to-day; hence one moment more in your company will be agreeable. God knows if I could I would remain longer. But now I know the road to Kremen.”

“We beg you to come, whenever time may permit.”

Pan Stanislav noticed now the coolness of her words, of her face; and began to look at her with astonishment. But if Marynia thought that he would do as people do usually, – accommodate himself to her tone readily and in silence, – she was mistaken. Pan Stanislav was too vivacious and daring not to seek at once for the cause; so, looking her steadfastly in the eye, he said, —

“Something is troubling you.”

Marynia was confused.

“You are mistaken,” replied she.

“I see well; and you know that I am not mistaken. You act toward me as you did the first evening. But then I made a blunder: I began to speak of money at a wrong time. Yesterday I begged your pardon, and it was pleasant, – how pleasant! To-day, again, it is different. Tell me why!”

Not the most adroit diplomacy could have beaten Marynia from her path. It seemed to her that she could chill him and keep him at a distance by this demeanor; but he, by inquiring so directly, rather brought himself nearer, and he continued to speak in the tone of a man on whom an injustice had been wrought: —

“Tell me what is the matter; tell me! Your father said I was to be a guest yesterday, and a creditor to-day. But that is fol – that is nothing! I do not understand such distinctions; and I shall never be your creditor, rather your debtor. For I am already indebted to you, and grateful for yesterday’s kindness; and God knows how much I wish to be indebted to you always.”

He looked into her eyes again, observing carefully whether there would not appear in them yesterday’s smile; but Marynia, whose heart was oppressed more and more, went on by the way which she had chosen: first, because she had chosen it; and second, lest by acknowledging that to-day she was different, she might be forced to explain why she was so.

“I assure you,” said she, at last, with a certain effort, “that either you were mistaken yesterday, or you are mistaken to-day. I am always the same, and it will always be agreeable to me if you bear away pleasant memories.”

The words were polite, but uttered by a young woman so unlike her of yesterday that on Pan Stanislav’s face impatience and anger began to appear.

“If it is important for you that I should feign to believe this, let it be as you wish. I shall go away, however, with the conviction that in the country Monday is very different from Sunday.”

These words touched Marynia; for from them it seemed as if Pan Stanislav had assumed certain rights by reason of her conduct with him yesterday. But she answered rather with sadness than with anger, —

“How can I help that?”

And after a while she went away, saying that she had to go and wish good-day to her father. Pan Stanislav remained alone. He drove away the dogs, which had tried to fawn on him anew, and began to be angry.

“What does this mean?” asked he in his mind. “Yesterday, kind; to-day, surly, – altogether a different woman. How stupid all this is, and useless! Yesterday, a relative; to-day, a creditor! What is

that to her? Why does she treat me like a dog? Have I robbed any one? She knew yesterday, too, why I came. Very well! If you want to have me as a creditor – not Polanyetski – all right. May thunderbolts crush the whole business!”

Meanwhile Marynia ran into her father’s chamber. Plavitski had risen, and was sitting, attired in his dressing-gown, before a desk covered with papers. For a while he turned to answer the good-day of his daughter, then occupied himself again with reading the papers.

“Papa,” said Marynia, “I have come to speak of Pan Stanislav. Does papa – ”

But he interrupted her without ceasing to look at the papers, —

“I will bend thy Pan Stanislav in my hand like wax.”

“I doubt if that will be easy. Finally, I should wish that he were paid before others, even with the greatest loss to us.”

Plavitski, turning from the desk, gazed at her, and asked coolly, —

“Is this, I pray, a guardianship over him, or over me?”

“It is a question of our honor.”

“In which, as thou thinkest, I need thy assistance?”

“No, papa; but – ”

“What pathetic day has come on us? What is the matter with thee?”

“I merely beg, papa, by all – ”

“And I beg thee also to leave me. Thou hast set me aside from the land management. I yielded; for, during the couple of years that remain to me in life, I have no wish to be quarrelling with my own child. But leave me even this corner in the house, – even this one room, – and permit me to transact such affairs as it is possible to transact here.”

“Dear papa, I only beg – ”

“That I should move out into a cottage, which, for the fourth time, thou art choosing for me?”

Evidently the old man, in speaking of the “pathetic day,” wished merely that no one should divide this monopoly with him. He rose now, in his Persian dressing-gown, like King Lear, and grasped at the arm of his chair; thus giving his heartless daughter to understand that, if he had not done this, he should have fallen his whole length on the floor, stricken down by her cruelty. But tears came to her eyes, and a bitter feeling of her own helplessness flowed to her heart. For a while she stood in silence, struggling with sorrow and a wish to cry; then she said quietly, “I beg pardon of papa,” and went out of the room.

A quarter of an hour later, Pan Stanislav entered, at the request of Plavitski, but ill-humored, irritated through striving to master himself.

Plavitski, after he had greeted his visitor, seated him at his side in an armchair prepared previously, and, putting his palm on the young man’s knee, said, —

“Stas, but thou wilt not burn this house? Thou wilt not kill me, who opened my arms to thee as a relative; thou wilt not make my child an orphan?”

“No,” answered Pan Stanislav; “I will not burn the house, I will not cut uncle’s throat, and I will not make any child an orphan. I beg uncle not to talk in this manner, for it leads to nothing, and to me it is unendurable.”

“Very well,” said Plavitski, somewhat offended, however, that his style and manner of expression had found such slight recognition; “but remember that thou didst come to me and to this house when thou wert still a child.”

“I came because my mother came; and my mother, after the death of Aunt Helen, came because uncle did not pay interest. All this is neither here nor there. The money rests on a mortgage of twenty-one years. With the unpaid interest, it amounts to about twenty-four thousand rubles. For the sake of round numbers, let it be twenty thousand; but I must have those twenty, since I came for them.”

Plavitski inclined his head with resignation. “Thou didst come for that. True. But why wert thou so different yesterday, Stas?”

Pan Stanislaw, who half an hour earlier had put that same question to Marynia, just sprang up in his chair, but restrained himself and said, —

“I beg you to come to business.”

“I do not draw back before business; only permit me to say a couple of words first, and do not interrupt me. Thou hast said that I have not paid the interest. True. But knowest thou why? Thy mother did not give me all her property, and could not without permission of a family council. Perhaps it was worse for you that the permission was not given, but never mind. When I took those few thousand rubles, I said to myself: The woman is alone in the world with one child; it is unknown how she will manage, unknown what may happen. Let the money which she has with me be her iron foundation; let it increase, so that at a given moment she may have something for her hands to seize hold on. And since then I have been in some fashion thy savings bank. Thy mother gave me twelve thousand rubles; to-day thou hast in my hands almost twenty-four thousand. That is the result. And wilt thou repay me now with ingratitude?”

“Beloved uncle,” answered Pan Stanislaw, “do not take me, I pray, for a greater dunce than I am, nor for a madman. I say simply that I am not caught with such chaff; it is too coarse. Uncle says that I have twenty-four thousand rubles; where are they? I am asking for them, without talk, and moreover such talk.”

“But be patient, I pray thee, and restrain thyself, even for this reason, that I am older,” answered Plavitski, offended and with dignity.

“I have a partner, who in a month will contribute twelve thousand rubles to a certain business. I must pay the same amount. I say clearly and declare that, after two years of annoyance with letters, I cannot and will not endure any longer.”

Plavitski rested his arm on the desk, his forehead on his palm, and was silent. Pan Stanislaw looked at him, waiting for an answer; he gazed with increasing displeasure, and in his mind gave himself this question: “Is he a trickster or a lunatic; is he an egotist, so blinded to himself that he measures good and evil by his own comfort merely; or is he all these together?”

Meanwhile Plavitski held his face hidden on his palm, and was silent.

“I should like to say something,” began Pan Stanislaw, at last.

But the old man waved his hand, indicating that he wished to be alone with his thoughts for a time yet. On a sudden he raised his face, which had grown radiant, —

“Stas,” said he, “why are we disputing, when there is such a simple way out of it?”

“How?”

“Take the marl.”

“What?”

“Bring thy partner, bring some specialist; we will set a price on my marl, and form a company of three. Thy — what’s his name? Bigiel, isn’t it? will pay me so much, whatever falls to him; thou wilt either add something or not; and we’ll all go on together. The profits may be colossal.”

Pan Stanislaw rose. “I assure you,” said he, “that there is one thing to which I am not accustomed, that is to be made sport of. I do not want your marl; I want only my money; and what you tell me I regard simply as an unworthy or stupid evasion.”

A moment of oppressive silence followed. Jove’s anger began to gather on the brows and forehead of Plavitski. For a while he threatened boldly with his eyes, then, moving quickly to the hooks on which his weapons were hanging, he took down a hunter’s knife, and, offering it to Pan Stanislaw, said, —

“But there is another way, strike!” and he opened his dressing-gown widely; but Pan Stanislaw, mastering himself no longer, pushed away the hand with the knife, and began to speak in a loud voice, —

“This is a paltry comedy, nothing more! It is a pity to lose words and time with you. I am going away, for I have had enough of you and your Kremen; but I say that I will sell my debt, even for half its value, to the first Jew I meet. He will be able to settle with you.”

Then the right hand of Plavitski was stretched forth in solemnity.

“Go,” said he, “sell. Let the Jew into the family nest; but know this, that the curse, both of me and of those who have lived here, will find thee wherever thou art.”

Pan Stanislav rushed out of the room, white with rage. In the drawing-room he cursed as much as he could, looking for his hat; finding it at last, he was going out to see if the brichka had come, when Marynia appeared. At sight of her he restrained himself somewhat; but, remembering that she it was, precisely, who was occupied with everything in Kremen, he said, —

“I bid farewell to you. I have finished with your father. I came for what belonged to me; but he gave me first a blessing, then marl, and finally a curse. A nice way to pay debts!”

There was a moment in which Marynia wished to extend her hand to him and say, —

“I understand your anger. A while ago I was with father also, and begged him to pay you before all others. Deal with us and with Kremen as may please you; but do not accuse me, do not think that I belong to a conspiracy against you, and retain even a little esteem for me.”

Her hand was already extending, the words were on her lips, when Pan Stanislav, rousing himself internally, and losing his balance still more, added, —

“I say this because, when I spoke to you the first evening, you were offended, and sent me to your father. I give thanks for the effective advice; but, as it was better for you than for me, I will follow my own judgment hereafter.”

Marynia’s lips grew pale; in her eyes were tears of indignation, and, at the same time, of deep offence. She raised her head, and said, —

“You may utter what injuries you like, since there is no one to take my part;” then she turned to the door, with her soul full of humiliation and almost despair, because those were the only returns she had received for that labor in which she had put her whole strength and all the zeal of her honest young soul. Pan Stanislav saw, too, that he had exceeded the measure. Having very lively feelings, he passed in one instant to compassion, and wished to hurry after her to beg her pardon; but it was late: she had vanished.

This roused a new attack of rage. This time, however, the rage included himself. Without taking farewell of any one, he sat in the brichka, which came up just then, and drove out of Kremen. In his soul such anger was seething that for a time he could think of nothing but vengeance. “I will sell it, even for a third of the value,” said he to himself, “and let others distrain you. I give my word of an honest man that I will sell. Even without need, I will sell out of spite!”

In this way his intention was changed into a stubborn and sworn resolve. Pan Stanislav was not of those who break promises given to others or themselves. It was now a mere question of finding a man to buy a claim so difficult of collection; for to receive the amount of it was, without exaggeration, to crack a flint with one’s teeth.

Meanwhile the brichka rolled out of the alley to the road in the open field. Pan Stanislav, recovering somewhat, began to think of Marynia in a form of mind which was a mosaic composed of the impressions which her face and form had made on him, — of recollections of the Sunday conversation; of repulsion, of pity, of offence, animosity; and, finally, dissatisfaction with himself, which strengthened his animosity against her. Each of these feelings in turn conquered the others, and cast on them its color. At times he recalled the stately figure of Marynia, her eyes, her dark hair, her mouth, pleasing, though too large, perhaps; finally, her expression; and an outburst of sympathy for her mastered him. He thought that she was very girlish; but in her mouth, in her arms, in the lines of her whole figure, there was something womanly, something that attracted with irresistible force. He recalled her mild voice, her calm expression, and her very evident goodness. Then, at thought of how harsh he had been to her before going, — at thought of the tone with which he had spoken to

her, – he began to curse himself. “If the father is an old comedian, a trickster, and a fool,” said he to himself; “and if she feels all this, she is the unhappier. But what then? Every man with a bit of heart would have understood the position, taken compassion on her, instead of attacking the poor overworked child. I attacked her. I!” Then he wanted to slap his own face; for at once he imagined what might have been, what an immeasurable approach, what an exceptional tenderness would have arisen, if, after all the quarrels with her father, he had treated her as was proper, – that is, with the utmost delicacy. She would have given him both hands when he was leaving; he would have kissed them; and he and she would have parted like two persons near to each other. “May the devils take the money!” repeated he to himself; “and may they take me!” And he felt that he had done things which could not be corrected. This feeling took away the remnant of his equilibrium, and pushed him all the more along that road, the error of which he recognized. And he began a monologue again, more or less like the following, —

“Since all is lost, let all burn. I will sell the claim to any Jew; let him collect. Let them fly out on to the pavement; let the old man find some office; let her go as a governess, or marry Gantovski.” Then he felt that he would agree to anything rather than the last thought. He would twist Gantovski’s neck. Let any one take her, only not such a wooden head, such a bear, such a dolt. Beautiful epithets began to fall on the hapless Gantovski; and all the venom passed over on to him, as if he had been really the cause of whatever had happened.

Arriving in such a man-eating temper at Chernyov, Pan Stanislaw might, perhaps, like another Ugolino, have gnawed at once into Gantovski with his teeth, “where the skull meets the neck,” if he had seen him at the station. Fortunately, instead of Gantovski’s “skull,” he saw only some officials, some peasants, a number of Jews, and the sad, but intelligent face of Councillor Yamish, who recognized him, and who, when the train arrived soon, invited him – thanks to good relations with the station-master – to a separate compartment.

“I knew your father,” said he; “and I knew him in his brilliant days. I found a wife in that neighborhood. I remember he had then Zvihov, Brenchantsa, Motsare, Rozvady in Lubelsk, – a fine fortune. Your grandfather was one of the largest landowners in that region; but now the estate must have passed into other hands.”

“Not now, but long since. My father lost all his property during his life. He was sickly; he lived at Nice, did not take care of what he had, and it went. Had it not been for the inheritance which, after his death, fell to my mother, it would have been difficult.”

“But you are well able to help yourself. I know your house; I have had business in hops with you through Abdulski.”

“Then Abdulski did business with you?”

“Yes; and I must confess that I was perfectly satisfied with our relations. You have treated me well, and I see that you manage affairs properly.”

“No man can succeed otherwise. My partner, Bigiel, is an honest man, and I am not Plavitski.”

“How is that?” asked Yamish, with roused curiosity.

Pan Stanislaw, with the remnant of his anger unquenched, told the whole story.

“H’m!” said Yamish; “since you speak of him without circumlocution, permit me to speak in like manner, though he is your relative.”

“He is no relative of mine: his first wife was a relative and friend of my mother, – that is all; he himself is no relative.”

“I know him from childhood. He is rather a spoiled than a bad man. He was an only son, hence, to begin with, his parents petted him; later on his two wives did the same. Both were quiet, mild women; for both he was an idol. During whole years matters so arranged themselves that he was the sun around which other planets circled; and at last he came to the conviction that everything from others was due to him, and nothing to others from him. When conditions are such that evil and good are measured by one’s own comfort solely, nothing is easier than to lose moral sense. Plavitski is a

mixture of pompousness and indulgence: of pompousness, for he himself is ever celebrating his own glory; and indulgence, for he permits himself everything. This has become almost his nature. Difficult circumstances came on him. These only a man of character can meet; character he never had. He began to evade, and in the end grew accustomed to evasion. Land ennobles, but land also spoils us. An acquaintance of mine, a bankrupt, said once to me, 'It is not I who evade, but my property, and I am only talking for it.' And this is somewhat true, – truer in our position than in any other."

"Imagine to yourself," answered Pan Stanislav, "that I, who am a descendant of the country, have no inclination for agriculture. I know that agriculture will exist always, for it must; but in the form in which it exists to-day I see no future for it. You must perish, all of you."

"I do not look at it in rose-colors either. I do not mention that the general condition of agriculture throughout Europe is bad, for that is known. Just consider. A noble has four sons; hence each of these will inherit only one-fourth of his father's land. Meanwhile, what happens? Each, accustomed to his father's mode of living, wishes to live like the father; the end is foreseen easily. Another case: A noble has four sons; the more capable choose various careers; you may wager that the least capable remains on the land. A third case: what a whole series of generations have acquired, have toiled for, one light head ruins. Fourth, we are not bad agriculturists, but bad administrators. Good administration means more than good cultivation of land; what is the inference, then? The land will remain; but we, who represent it at present under the form of large ownership, must leave it most likely. Then, do you see, when we have gone, we may return in time."

"How is that?"

"To begin with, you say that nothing attracts you to land; that is a deception. Land attracts, and attracts with such force that each man, after he has come to certain years, to a certain well-being, is unable to resist the desire of possessing even a small piece of land. That will come to you too, and it is natural. Finally, every kind of wealth may be considered as fictitious, except land. Everything comes out of land; everything exists for it. As a banknote is a receipt for metallic money in the State Bank, so industry and commerce and whatever else you please is land turned into another form; and as to you personally, who have come from it, you must return to it."

"I at least do not think so."

"How do you know? To-day you are making property; but how will you succeed? And that, too, is a question of the future. The Polanyetskis were agriculturists; now one of them has chosen another career. The majority of sons of agriculturists must choose other careers also, even because they cannot do otherwise. Some of them will fail; some will succeed and return – but return, not only with capital, but with new energy, and with that knowledge of exact administration which is developed by special careers. They will return because of the attraction which land exercises, and finally through a feeling of duty, which I need not explain to you."

"What you say has this good side, that then my such-an-uncle-not-an-uncle Plavitski will belong to a type that has perished."

Pan Yamish thought a while and said, —

"A thread stretches and stretches till it breaks, but at last it must break. To my thinking, they cannot hold out in Kremen, even though they parcel Magyerovka. But do you see whom I pity? – Marynia. She is an uncommonly honest girl. For you do not know that the old man wanted to sell Kremen two years ago; and that that did not take place partly through the prayers of Marynia. Whether this was done out of regard to the memory of her mother, who lies buried there, or because so much is said and written about the duty of holding to the soil, it is sufficient that the girl did what she could to prevent the sale. She imagined, poor thing, that if she would betake herself with all power to work, she could do everything. She abandoned the whole world for Kremen. For her it will be a blow when the thread breaks at last, and break it must. A pity for the years of the girl!"

"You are a kind person, councillor!" cried Pan Stanislav, with his accustomed vivacity.

The old man smiled. "I love that girl: besides, she is my pupil in agriculture; of a truth it will be sad when she is gone from us."

Pan Stanislav fell to biting his mustaches, and said at last, "Let her marry some man in the neighborhood, and remain."

"Marry, marry! As if that were easy for a girl without property. Who is there among us? Gantovski. He would take her. He is a good man, and not at all so limited as they say. But she has no feeling for him, and she will not marry without feeling. Yalbrykov is a small estate. Besides, it seems to the old man that the Gantovskis are something inferior to the Plavitskis, and Gantovski too believes this. With us, as you know, that man passes for a person of great family who is pleased to boast himself such. Though people laugh at Plavitski, they have grown used to his claim. Moreover, one man raises his nose because he is making property, another because he is losing it, and nothing else remains to him. But let that pass. I know one thing, whoever gets Marynia will get a pearl."

Pan Stanislav had in his mind at that moment the same conviction and feeling. Sinking, therefore, into meditation, he began again to muse about Marynia, or, rather, to call her to mind and depict her to himself. All at once it even seemed to him that he would be sad without her; but he remembered that similar things had seemed so to him more than once, and that time had swept away the illusion. Still he thought of her, even when they were approaching the city; and when he got out at Warsaw, he muttered through his teeth, —

"How stupidly it happened! how stupidly!"

CHAPTER IV

On his return to Warsaw, Pan Stanislaw passed the first evening at the house of his partner, Bigiel, with whom, as a former schoolmate, he was connected by personal intimacy.

Bigiel, a Cheh by descent, but of a family settled in the country for a number of generations, had managed a small commercial bank before his partnership with Pan Stanislaw, and had won the reputation of a man not over-enterprising, it is true, but honorable and uncommonly reliable in business. When Pan Stanislaw entered into company with him, the house extended its activity, and became an important firm. The partners complemented each other perfectly. Pan Stanislaw was incomparably more clever and enterprising; he had more ideas and took in a whole affair with greater ease; but Bigiel watched its execution more carefully. When there was need of energy, or of pushing any one to the wall, Pan Stanislaw was the man; but when it was a question of careful thought, of examining interests from ten sides, and of patience, Bigiel's rôle began. Their temperaments were directly opposite; and for that reason, perhaps, they had sincere friendship for each other. Preponderance was relatively on the side of Pan Stanislaw. Bigiel believed in his partner's uncommon capacity; and a number of ideas really happy for the house, which Pan Stanislaw had given, confirmed this belief. The dream of both was to acquire in time capital sufficient to build cotton-mills, which Bigiel would manage, and Pan Stanislaw direct. But, though both might count themselves among men almost wealthy, the mills were in a remote future. Less patient, and having many relatives, Pan Stanislaw tried, it is true, immediately after his return from abroad, to direct to this object local, so-called "our own," capital; he was met, however, with a general want of confidence. He noticed at the same time a wonderful thing: his name opened all doors to him, but rather injured than helped him in business. It might be that those people who invited him to their houses could not get it into their heads that one of themselves, hence a man of good family and with a name ending in *ski*, could conduct any business successfully. This angered Polanyetski to such a degree that the clever Bigiel had to quench his outburst by stating that such want of confidence was in fact caused by years of experience. Knowing well the history of different industrial undertakings, he cited to Pan Stanislaw a whole series of cases, beginning with Tyzenhaus, the treasurer, and ending with various provincial and land banks, which had nothing of the country about them except their names, – in other words, they were devoid of every home basis.

"The time has not come yet," said Bigiel; "but it will come, or, rather, it is in sight. Hitherto there have been only amateurs and dilettanti; now for the first time are appearing here and there trained specialists."

Pan Stanislaw who, in spite of his temperament, had powers of observation rather well developed, began to make strange discoveries in those spheres to which his relatives gave him access. He was met by a general recognition for having done something. This recognition was offered with emphasis even; but in it there was something like condescension. Each man let it be known too readily that he approved Polanyetski's activity, that he considered it necessary; but no one bore himself as if he considered the fact that Polanyetski was working at some occupation as a thing perfectly common and natural. "They all *protect* me," said he; and that was true. He came also to the conclusion that if, for example, he aspired to the hand of any of the young ladies of so-called "society," his commercial house and his title of "affairist" would, notwithstanding the above recognition, have injured more than helped him. They would rather give him any of those maidens if, instead of a lucrative business, he had some encumbered estate, or if, while living as a great lord, he was merely spending the interest of his capital, or even the capital itself.

When he had made dozens of observations of this kind, Pan Stanislaw began to neglect his relatives, and at last abandoned them altogether. He restricted himself to the houses of Bigiel and Pani Emilia Hvastovski, and to those male acquaintances who were a necessity of his single life. He

took his meals at Francois's with Bukatski, old Vaskovski, and the advocate Mashko, with whom he discussed and argued various questions; he was often at the theatre and at public amusements of all kinds. For the rest, he led rather a secluded life; hence he was unmarried yet, though he had great and fixed willingness to marry, and, besides, sufficient property.

Having gone after his return from Kremen almost directly to Bigiel's, he poured out all his gall on "uncle" Plavitski, thinking that he would find a ready and sympathetic listener; but Bigiel was moved little by his narrative, and said, —

"I know such types. But, in truth, where is Plavitski to find money, since he has none? If a man holds mortgages, he should have a saint's patience. Landed property swallows money easily, but returns it with the greatest difficulty."

"Listen, to me, Bigiel," said Pan Stanislaw; "since thou hast begun to grow fat and sleep after dinner, one must have a saint's patience with thee."

"But is it true," asked the unmoved Bigiel, "that thou art in absolute need of this money? Hast thou not at thy disposal the money that each of us is bound to furnish?"

"I am curious to know what that is to thee, or Plavitski. I have money with him; I must get it, and that is the end of the matter."

The entrance of Pani Bigiel, with a whole flock of children, put a curb on the quarrel. She was young yet, dark-haired, blue-eyed, very kind, and greatly taken up with her children, six in number, — children liked by Pan Stanislaw uncommonly; she was for this reason his sincere friend, and also Pani Emilia's. Both these ladies, knowing and loving Marynia Plavitski, had made up their minds to marry her to Pan Stanislaw; both had urged him very earnestly to go to Kremen for the money. Hence Pani Bigiel was burning with curiosity to know what impression the visit had made on him. But as the children were present, it was impossible to speak. Yas, the youngest, who was walking on his own feet already, embraced Pan Stanislaw's leg and began to pull it, calling "Pan, Pan!" which in his speech sounded, "Pam, Pam!" two little girls, Evka and Yoasia, climbed up without ceremony on the knees of the young man; but Edzio and Yozio explained to him their business. They were reading the "Conquest of Mexico," and were playing at this "Conquest." Edzio, raising his brows and stretching his hands upwards, spoke excitedly, —

"I will be Cortez, and Yozio a knight on horseback; but as neither Evka nor Yoasia wants to be Montezuma, what can we do? We can't play that way, can we? Somebody must be Montezuma; if not, who will lead the Mexicans?"

"But where are the Mexicans?" asked Pan Stanislaw.

"Oh," said Yozio, "the chairs are the Mexicans, and the Spaniards too."

"Then wait, I'll be Montezuma; now take Mexico!"

An indescribable uproar began. Pan Stanislaw's vivacity permitted him to become a child sometimes. He offered such a stubborn resistance to Cortez that Cortez fell to denying him the right to such resistance, exclaiming, not without historic justice, that since Montezuma was beaten, he must let himself be beaten. To which Montezuma answered that he cared little for that; and he fought on. In this way the amusement continued a good while. And Pani Bigiel, unable to wait for the end, asked her husband at last, —

"How was the visit to Kremen?"

"He did what he is doing now," answered Bigiel, phlegmatically: "he overturned all the chairs, and went away."

"Did he tell thee that?"

"I had no time to ask him about the young lady; but he parted with Plavitski in a way that could not be worse. He wants to sell his claim; this will cause evidently a complete severance of relations."

"That is a pity," answered Pani Bigiel.

At tea, when the children had gone to bed, she questioned Pan Stanislaw plainly concerning Marynia.

"I do not know," said he; "perhaps she is pretty, perhaps she is not. I did not linger long over the question."

"That is not true," said Pani Bigiel.

"Then it is not true; and she is lovable and pretty, and whatever you like. It is possible to fall in love with her, and to marry her; but a foot of mine will never be in their house again. I know perfectly why you sent me there; but it would have been better to tell me what sort of a man her father is, for she must be like him in character, and if that be true, then thanks for the humiliation."

"But think over what you say: 'She is pretty, she is lovable, it is possible to marry her,' and then again: 'She must be like her father.' These statements do not hold together."

"Maybe not; it is all one to me! I have no luck, and that is enough."

"But I will tell you two things: first, you have come back deeply impressed by Marynia; second, that she is one of the best young ladies whom I have seen in life, and he will be happy who gets her."

"Why has not some one taken her before now?"

"She is twenty-one years old, and entered society not long since. Besides, don't think that she has no suitors."

"Let some other man take her."

But Pan Stanislav said this insincerely, for the thought that some other man might take her was tremendously bitter for him. In his soul, too, he felt grateful to Pani Bigiel for her praises of Marynia.

"Let that rest," said he; "but you are a good friend."

"Not only to Marynia, but to you. I only ask for a sincere, a really sincere, answer. Are you impressed or not?"

"I impressed? to tell the truth, – immensely."

"Well, do you see?" said Pani Bigiel, whose face was radiant with pleasure.

"See what? I see nothing. She pleased me immensely, – true! You have no idea what a sympathetic and attractive person she is; and she must be good. But what of that? I cannot go a second time to Kremen, I came away in such anger. I said such bitter things, not only to Plavitski, but to her, that it is impossible."

"Have you complicated matters much?"

"Rather too much than too little."

"Then a letter might soften them."

"I write a letter to Plavitski, and beg his pardon! For nothing on earth! Moreover, he has cursed me."

"How, cursed?"

"As patriarch of the family; in his own name and the names of all ancestors. I feel toward him such a repulsion that I could not write down two words. He is an old pathetic comedian. I would sooner beg her pardon; but what would that effect? She must take her father's part; even I understand that. In the most favorable event, she would answer that my letter is very agreeable to her; and with that relations would cease."

"When Emilia returns from Reichenhall we will bring Marynia here under the first plausible pretext, and then it will be your work to let misunderstandings vanish."

"Too late, too late!" repeated Pan Stanislav; "I have promised myself to sell the claim, and I will sell it."

"That is just what may be for the best."

"No, that would be for the worst," put in Bigiel; "but I will persuade him not to sell. I hope, too, that a purchaser will not be found."

"Meanwhile Emilia will finish Litka's cure." Here Pani Bigiel turned to Pan Stanislav: "You will learn now how other young ladies will seem to you after Marynia. I am not so intimate with her as Emilia is, but I will try to find the first convenient pretext to write to her and find out what she thinks of you."

The conversation ended here. On the way home, Pan Stanislaw saw that Marynia had taken by no means the last place in his soul. To tell the truth, he could hardly think of aught else. But he had at the same time the feeling that this acquaintance had begun under unfavorable conditions, and that it would be better to drive the maiden from his mind while there was time yet. As a man rather strong than weak mentally, and not accustomed to yield himself to dreams simply because they were pleasant, he resolved to estimate the position soberly, and weigh it on all sides. The young lady possessed, it is true, almost every quality which he demanded in his future wife, and also she was near his heart personally. But at the same time she had a father whom he could not endure; and, besides the father, a real burden in the form of Kremen and its connections.

“With that pompous old monkey I should never live in peace; I could not,” thought Pan Stanislaw. “For relations with him are possible only in two ways: it is necessary either to yield to him (to do this I am absolutely unable), or to shake him up every day, as I did in Kremen. In the first case, I, an independent man, would enter into unendurable slavery to an old egotist; in the second, the position of my wife would be difficult, and our peace might be ruined.”

“I hope that this is sober, logical reasoning. It would be faulty only if I were in love with the maiden already. But I judge that this is not the case. I am occupied with her, not in love with her. These two are different. *Ergo*, it is necessary to stop thinking of Marynia, and let some other man take her.”

At this last idea, a feeling of bitterness burned him vividly, but he thought, “I am so occupied with her that this is natural. Finally, I have chewed more than one bitter thing in life; I will chew this one as well. I suppose also that it will be less bitter each day.”

But soon he discovered that besides bitterness there remained in him also a feeling of sorrow because the prospects had vanished which had been opening before him. It seemed to him that a curtain of the future had been raised, and something had shown him what might be; then the curtain had fallen on a sudden, and his life had returned to its former career, which led finally to nothing, or rather led to a desert. Pan Stanislaw felt in every ease that the old philosopher Vaskovski was right, and that the making of money is only a means. Beyond that, we must solve life’s riddle in some fashion. There must be an object, an important task, which, accomplished in a manner straightforward and honorable, leads to mental peace. That peace is the soul of life; without it life has, speaking briefly, no meaning.

Pan Stanislaw was in some sense a child of the age; that is, he bore in himself a part of that immense unrest which in the present declining epoch is the nightmare of mankind. In him, too, the bases on which life had rested hitherto were crumbling. He too doubted whether rationalism, stumbling against every stone at the wayside, could take the place of faith; and faith he had not found yet. He differed, however, from contemporary “decadents” in this, – that he had not become disenchanted with himself, his nerves, his doubts, his mental drama, and had not given himself a dispensation to be an imbecile and an idler. On the contrary, he had the feeling, more or less conscious, that life as it is, mysterious or not mysterious, must be accomplished through a series of toils and exploits. He judged that if it is impossible to answer the various “whys,” still it behooves a man to do something because action itself may, to a certain degree, be an answer. It may be inconclusive, it is true; but the man who answers in that way casts from himself at least responsibility. What remains then? The founding of a family and social ties. These must, to a certain degree, be a right of human nature and its predestination, for otherwise people would neither marry nor associate in societies. A philosophy of this kind, resting on Pan Stanislaw’s logical male instinct, indicated marriage to him as one of the main objects of life. His will had for along time been turned and directed to this object. A while before, Panna Marynia seemed to him the pier “for which his ship was making in that gloomy night.” But when he understood that the lamp on that pier had not been lighted for him, that he must sail farther, begin a new voyage over unknown seas, a feeling of weariness and regret seized him. But

his reasoning seemed to him logical, and he went home with an almost settled conviction that “it was not yet that one,” and “not yet this time.”

Next day, when he went to dine, he found Vaskovski and Bukatski at the restaurant. After a while Mashko also came in, with his arrogant, freckled face and long side whiskers, a monocle on his eye, and wearing a white waistcoat. After the greeting, all began to inquire of Pan Stanislaw touching his journey, for they knew partly why the ladies had insisted on his personal visit, and, besides, they knew Marynia through Pani Emilia.

After they had heard the narrative, Bukatski, transparent as Sevres porcelain, said with that phlegm special to him, —

“It is war, then? That is a young lady who acts on the nerves, and now would be the time to strike for her. A woman will accept more readily the arm offered on a stony path than on a smooth road.”

“Then offer an arm to her,” said Pan Stanislaw, with a certain impatience.

“See thou, my beloved, there are three hindrances. First, Pani Emilia acts on my nerves still more; second, I have a pain in my neck every morning, and in the back of my head, which indicates brain disease; third, I am naked.”

“Thou naked?”

“At least now. I have bought a number of Falks, all *avant la lettre*. I have plucked myself for a month, and if I receive from Italy a certain Massaccio, for which I have been bargaining, I shall ruin myself for a year.”

Vaskovski, who from his features, or rather from the freckles on his face, was somewhat like Mashko, though much older, and with a face full of sweetness, fixed his blue eyes on Bukatski, and said, —

“And that too is a disease of the age, — collecting and collecting on all sides!”

“Oh, ho! there will be a dispute,” remarked Mashko.

“We have nothing better to do,” said Pan Stanislaw.

And Bukatski took up the gauntlet.

“What have you against collecting?”

“Nothing,” answered Vaskovski. “It is a kind of old-womanish method of loving art, worthy of our age. Do you not think there is something decrepit about it? To my thinking, it is very characteristic. Once people bore within them enthusiasm for high art: they loved it where it was, in museums, in churches; to-day they take it to their own private cabinets. Long ago people ended with collecting; to-day they begin with it, and begin at oddities: I am not talking at Bukatski; but to-day the youngest boy, if he has a little money, will begin to collect — and what? Not objects of art, but its oddities, or in every case its trifles. You see, my dear friend, it has seemed to me always that love and amateurism are two different things; and I insist that a great amateur of women, for example, is not a man capable of lofty feeling.”

“Perhaps so. There is something in that,” said Pan Stanislaw.

“How can this concern me?” inquired Mashko, passing his fingers through his English side whiskers. “It contains, to begin with, the decree of an ancient pedagogue about modern times.”

“Of a pedagogue?” repeated Vaskovski. “Why, since a morsel of bread fell to me, as from heaven,³ I renounced the slaughter of innocents and the rôle of Herod; secondly, you are mistaken in saying that I utter a decree. Almost with joy I see and note new proofs every hour that we are at the end of an epoch, and that a new one will begin shortly.”

“We are in the open sea, and will not turn to shore soon,” muttered Mashko.

“Give us peace,” said Pan Stanislaw.

But the unconquered Vaskovski continued, —

³ He had received an inheritance some time before.

“Amateurism leads to refinement; in refinement great ideals perish, and yield to desire for enjoyment. All this is nothing but paganism. No one can realize to what a degree we are paganized. But is there something? There is the Aryan spirit, which does not ossify, which never grows cold, – a spirit which has within it the divine afflatus, hence creative power; and this spirit feels hampered in pagan fetters. The reaction has set in already, and a rebirth in Christ will begin in this field, as in others. That is undoubted.”

Vaskovski, who had eyes like a child, – that is, reflecting only external objects and ever fixed, as it were, on infinity, – fixed them on the window, through which were visible gray clouds pierced here and there by sun-rays.

“It is a pity that my head aches, for that will be a curious epoch,” said Bukatski.

But Mashko, who called Vaskovski “a saw,” and was annoyed by his discussions, begun from any cause or without cause, took from the side-pocket of his coat a cigar, bit off the end, and, turning to Pan Stanislaw, said, —

“Here, Stas, wouldst thou really sell that claim on Kremen?”

“Decidedly. Why dost thou ask?”

“Because I might consider it.”

“Thou?”

“Yes. Thou knowest that I consider this kind of business frequently. We can talk about it. I cannot say anything certain to-day; but to-morrow I will ask thee to send me the mortgage on Kremen, and I will tell thee whether the thing is possible. Perhaps after dinner to-morrow thou wilt come to me to drink coffee; we may settle something then.”

“Well. If anything is to be done, I should prefer it done quickly; for the moment I finish with Bigiel, I wish to go abroad.”

“Whither art thou going?” asked Bukatski.

“I do not know. It is too hot in the city. Somewhere to trees and water.”

“Another old prejudice,” said Bukatski. “In the city there is always shade on one side of the street, which there is not in the country. I walk on the shady side quietly and feel well; therefore I never go out of the city in summer.”

“But Professor, art thou not going somewhere?” asked Pan Stanislaw.

“Of course. Pani Emilia has been urging me to go to Reichenhall. Perhaps I shall go.”

“Then let us go together. It is all one to me where I go. I like Salzburg, and, besides, it will be pleasant to see Pani Emilia and Litka.”

Bukatski stretched forth his transparent hand, took a tooth-pick from a glass, and, picking his teeth, began to speak in his cool and careless voice, —

“There is such a mad storm of jealousy raging within me that I am ready to go with you. Have a care, Polanyetski, lest I explode, like dynamite.”

There was something so amusingly contradictory between the words and the tone of Bukatski that Pan Stanislaw laughed, but after a while he answered, —

“It had not occurred to me that it is possible to fall in love with Pani Emilia. Thank thee for the idea.”

“Woe to you both!” said Bukatski.

CHAPTER V

Next day, after an early dinner at Bigiel's, Pan Stanislaw betook himself to Mashko's at the appointed hour. The host was waiting for him evidently; for in the study he found an exquisite coffee service ready, and glasses for liqueurs. Mashko himself did not appear at once, however; for, as the servant said, he was receiving some lady. In fact, his voice and the words of a woman came through the door from the drawing-room.

Meanwhile, Pan Stanislaw fell to examining Mashko's ancestors, a number of whose portraits were hanging on the walls. The authenticity of these the friends of the young advocate doubted. A certain cross-eyed prelate afforded Bukatski a special subject for witticisms; but Mashko was not offended. He had determined, cost what it might, to force on the world himself, his ancestors, his genius for business, knowing that, in the society in which he moved, people would ridicule him, but no one would have energy to attack his pretensions. Possessing energy, limitless insolence, and a real turn for business besides, he determined to force himself upward by those qualities. People who did not like him called him shameless; and he was, but with calculation. Coming from a family uncertain even as to its nobility, he treated people of undoubted ancient families as if he were of incomparably better birth than they, people who were of undoubted wealth, as if he were wealthier than they. And this succeeded: those tactics of his were effective. He was careful not to fall into complete ridicule; but he had marked out for himself in this procedure uncommonly wide margins. At last he reached the point which he sought: he was received everywhere, and had established his credit firmly. Certain transactions brought him really generous profits; but he did not hoard money. He judged that the time for that had not come yet, and that he must invest more in the future, with the intent that it would repay him in the way which he wanted. He did not squander money, and was not over liberal, for he looked on those as marks of a parvenu; but, when the need came, he showed himself, to use his own phrase, "solidly munificent." He passed for a very smooth man in business, and, above all, a man of his word. His word rested on credit, it is true; but it kept him in a high position, which in turn permitted him to make really important transactions. He did not draw back before trifles. He possessed daring, and a certain energy which excluded long hesitation; he had faith, too, in his own fortune. Success strengthened that faith. He did not know, in fact, how much property he had; but he handled large sums of money, and people considered him wealthy.

Finally, Mashko's life motive was vanity, rather than greed. He wanted to be rich, it is true; but, beyond all, he wanted to pass for a great lord in English fashion. He went so far as to adapt his exterior thereto, and was almost proud of his personal ugliness: it seemed to him even aristocratic. There was, indeed, a certain something, which, if not uncommon, was at least peculiar, in his pouting mouth, in his broad nostrils, and the red freckles on his face. There was a certain power and brutality, such as the English have sometimes, and that expression was increased by his monocle. To wear this, he had to rear his head somewhat; and when he passed his fingers through his light side whiskers, he reared it still more.

Pan Stanislaw could not endure the man at first, and concealed his dislike even too slightly. Later on he became accustomed to him, especially since Mashko treated him differently from others, – perhaps through secret regard; perhaps because, wishing to gain in advance a man so demanding, to act otherwise would be to expose himself to an immediate account, disagreeable in the best case. At last, the young men, by meeting often, grew used to each other's weaknesses, and endured each other perfectly. On this occasion, for example, when Mashko had conducted the lady to the door, he showed himself in the study, set aside for the moment his greatness, and, greeting Pan Stanislaw, began to speak like an ordinary mortal, not like a great lord or an Englishman.

“With women! with women! *c’est toujours une mer à boire* (there is always a sea to drink). I have invested their little capital, and I pay them the interest most regularly. Not enough! They come at least once a week to inquire if there has not been some earthquake.”

“What wilt thou say to me?” asked Pan Stanislaw.

“First of all, drink some coffee.”

And, igniting the alcohol under the lamp, he added, —

“With thee there will be no delay. I have seen the mortgage. The money is not easy of recovery; but we need not look on it as lost. Evidently the collection will involve costs, journeys, etc. Hence I cannot give thee what the face of the mortgage indicates; but I will give two-thirds, and pay in three instalments in the course of a year.”

“Since I have said to myself that I would sell the claim, even for less than the face of it, I agree. When will the first instalment be paid?”

“In three months.”

“Then I will leave my power of attorney with Bigiel in case I must go on a journey.”

“But art thou going to Reichenhall?”

“Possibly.”

“Ai! Who knows but Bukatski has given thee an idea?”

“Every one has his own thoughts. Thou, for example. Why art thou buying this claim on Kremen? The business is too small for thee, is it not?”

“Among great affairs small ones too are transacted. But I will be outspoken. Thou knowest that neither my position nor my credit belongs to the lowest; both one and the other will increase when I have behind me a piece of land, and that such a large one. I have heard myself from Plavitski that he would sell Kremen. I will suppose that he is still more inclined now, and that it will be possible to acquire all that property cheaply, even very cheaply, for some payments, for some unimportant ready money, with a life annuity in addition; I shall see! Afterward, when it is put in order a little, like a horse for the market, it may be sold; meanwhile I shall have the position of a landholder, which, *entre nous*, concerns me very greatly.”

Pan Stanislaw listened to Mashko’s words with a certain constraint, and said, —

“I must tell thee plainly that the purchase will not be easy. Panna Plavitski is very much opposed to selling. She, in woman fashion, is in love with her Kremen, and will do all she can to retain it in the hands of herself and her father.”

“Then in the worst case I shall be Plavitski’s creditor, and I do not think that the money will be lost to me. First, I may sell it, as thou hast; second, as an advocate, I can dispose of it with far greater ease. I may myself find means of paying, and indicate them to Plavitski.”

“Thou canst foreclose too, and buy it at auction.”

“I might if I were some one else, but to foreclose would be devilishly unbecoming in Mashko. No; other means will be found, to which ready consent may be given by Panna Plavitski herself, for whom, by the way, I have great esteem and regard.”

Pan Stanislaw, who at that moment was finishing his coffee, put his cup suddenly on the table. “Ah,” said he, “and it is possible in that way to get at the property.” Again a feeling of great anger and bitterness seized him. At the first moment he wished to rise, say to Mashko, “I will not sell the claim!” and go out. He restrained himself, however, and Mashko, passing his fingers through his side whiskers, answered, —

“But if? – I can assure thee, on my word, that at this moment I have no such plan; at least I have not placed it before myself definitely. But if? – I made the acquaintance of Panna Plavitski once in Warsaw, in the winter, and she pleased me much. The family is good, the property ruined, but large, and can be saved. Who knows? Well, that is an idea like any other. I am perfectly loyal with thee, as, for that matter, I have been always. Thou didst go there as if for money, but I knew why those ladies sent thee. Thou hast returned, however, as angry as the devil; therefore I take it that thou hast

no intentions. Say that I am mistaken, and I will withdraw at once, not from the plan, for, as I have assured thee, I have no plan yet, but even from thinking over it as something possible. I give thee my word on that. In the opposite case, however, do not hold to the position, 'Not for me, not for any one,' and do not bar the lady's way. But now I listen to thee."

Pan Stanislaw, recalling his reasonings of yesterday, thought also that Mashko was right when he said that in such a case he ought not to bar any one's road to the lady, and after a certain time he said, —

"No, Mashko, I have no intentions touching Panna Plavitski. Thou art free to marry her or not. I will say, nevertheless, openly, there is one thing which does not please me, though for me it is profitable; namely that thou art buying this claim. I believe that thou hast no plan yet; but in case thou shouldst have one, it will seem somewhat strange — But any pressure, any trap — this, however, is thy affair."

"It is so much my affair that if some one else, and not thou, had said this, I should have been quick to remind him. I may tell thee, however, that should I form such a plan, which I doubt, I shall not ask the hand of Panna Plavitski as interest for my money. Since I can say to myself conscientiously that I would buy the debt in any case, I have the right to buy it. Above all, as matters stand to-day, I wish to buy Kremen, for I need it; hence I am free to use all honorable means which may lead to that end."

"Very well; I will sell. Give directions to write the contract, and send it, or bring it thyself to me."

"I have directed my assistant. It is ready, and needs only the signatures."

In fact, the contract was signed a quarter of an hour later. Pan Stanislaw, who spent the evening of that day at Bigiel's, was in such anger as he had never been before; Pani Bigiel could not hide her vexation; and Bigiel, thinking the whole over carefully said, toward the end of the evening, with his usual balance and deliberation, —

"That Mashko has a plan is beyond doubt. The question is merely whether he is deceiving thee by saying that he has no plan, or is deceiving himself!"

"God preserve her from Mashko!" answered Pani Bigiel. "We all saw that she pleased him greatly."

"I supposed," said Bigiel, "that a man like Mashko would look for property, but I may be mistaken. It may be also that he wants to find a wife of good stock, strengthen thereby his social position, become related to numerous families, and at last take into his hands the business of a certain whole sphere of society. That also is not badly calculated, especially since, if he uses his credit, which will be increased by Kremen, it may with his cleverness clear him in time."

"And as you say," remarked Pan Stanislaw, "Panna Plavitski pleases him really. I remember now that Plavitski said something too on this subject."

"What then?" asked Pani Bigiel; "what will happen then?"

"Panna Plavitski will marry Pan Mashko if she wishes," said Pan Stanislaw.

"But you?"

"Oh I am going to Reichenhall straightway."

CHAPTER VI

In fact, Pan Stanislav went a week later to Reichenhall; but before that he received a letter from Pani Emilia inquiring about his journey to Kremen. He did not write in return, for he intended to answer the letter orally. He heard too, but only on the eve of his departure, that Mashko had gone to Kremen the day before; and that news touched him more than he thought it would. He said to himself, it is true, that he would forget the affair when no farther away than Vienna; but he could not forget it, and he had his head so occupied with thinking whether Panna Plavitski would marry Mashko or not, that he wrote to Bigiel from Salzburg, as it were on business, but really asking him to send news of Mashko. He listened without attention to the discussions of his travelling companion, Vaskovski, about the mutual relations of nationalities in Austria, and the mission of modern nations in general. More than once he was so occupied with thinking about Marynia that he simply did not answer questions. It astonished him, too, that at times he saw her as clearly as if she had been standing before him, not only as an exact image, but as a living person. He saw her pleasant, mild face, with shapely mouth, and the little ensign on the upper lip; the calm gaze of her eyes, in which were visible the attention and concentration with which she listened to his words; he saw her whole posture, lithe, supple, from which came the warmth of great and genuine maiden youthfulness. He remembered her bright robe, the tips of her feet, peeping from under it, her hands, delicate, though slightly sunburnt, and her dark hair, moved by the breeze in the garden. He had never thought that there could be a memory almost palpable, and that the memory of a person seen during such a brief time. But he understood this to be a proof of how deep an impression she had, in truth, made on him; and when at moments it passed through his head that all this, which had fixed itself thus in his memory, might be possessed by Mashko, he could hardly believe it. In those moments his first feeling, which was, moreover, in accord with his active nature, was an irresistible impulse to hinder it. He had to remember then that the affair was decided already, and that he had resolved to drop Panna Plavitski.

He and Vaskovski reached Reichenhall early in the morning; and that very day, before they had learned the address of Pani Emilia, they met her and Litka in the park. She had not expected to see either, especially Pan Stanislav, and was sincerely delighted when she met them; her delight was darkened only by this, that Litka, a child exceptionally sensitive, and ailing with asthma and heart-disease, was still more delighted, so much delighted, indeed, that she had a violent palpitation of the heart, with stifling and almost a swoon.

Such attacks were frequent with her; and, when this one passed, calmness came back to all faces. On the way to the house, the child held "Pan Stas" by the hand, and in her eyes, usually pensive, there shone deep delight. From time to time she pressed his hand, as if to convince herself that he had come really to Reichenhall and was near her. Pan Stanislav had simply no time to speak to Pani Emilia, or to make an inquiry, for Litka was showing him Reichenhall, and chattering unceasingly; she wanted to show him all the nice places at once. Every moment she said, —

"This is nothing yet. Thumsee is prettier; but we will go there to-morrow."

Then turning to her mother, "Mamma will let me go, isn't it true? I can walk much now. It is not far. Mamma will let me go, will she not?"

At moments again she pushed away from Pan Stanislav, and, without dropping his hand, looked at him with her great eyes, repeating, —

"Pan Stas, Pan Stas!"

Pan Stanislav showed her the greatest tenderness, or tenderness as great as an elder brother might show; time after time he chided her good-naturedly, —

"Let the kitten not run so; she will choke."

And she nestled up to him, pouted, and answered, as if in anger, —

"Hush, Pan Stas!"

Pan Stanislav glanced, however, frequently at the serene face of Pani Emilia, as if desiring to let her know that he wished to converse with her. But there was no opportunity, since she did not like to destroy Litka's joyousness, and preferred to leave their mutual friend in her possession exclusively. Only after dinner, which they ate in the garden together, amid foliage and the twittering of sparrows, when Vaskovski had begun to tell Litka about birds, and the love which Saint Francis Assisi had felt for them, and the child, with her head on her hand, was lost completely in listening, did Pan Stanislav turn to Pani Emilia and ask, —

“Do you not wish to walk to the end of the garden?”

“I do,” answered she. “Litka, stay here a minute with Pan Vaskovski; we will come back in that time.”

They walked along, and Pani Emilia asked immediately, —

“Well, what?”

Pan Stanislav began to tell; but whether it was that he wished to appear better before Pani Emilia, or that he determined to reckon with that delicate nature, or, finally, that the last thoughts concerning Marynia had attuned him to a note more sensitive than usual, it is sufficient that he changed the affair altogether. He confessed, it is true, to a quarrel with Plavitski, but he was silent touching this, that before his departure from Kremen he had answered Marynia almost with harshness; besides, he did not spare praises on her in his story, and finally he finished, —

“Since that debt became a cause of misunderstanding at once between me and Plavitski, — a thing which must be reflected on Panna Marynia, — I chose to sell it; and just before I left Warsaw, I sold it to Mashko.”

Pani Emilia, who had not the slightest conception of business, and, besides, was of a simplicity truly angelic, remarked, —

“You did well. There should be no such thing as money between you.”

Ashamed to deceive such a simple soul, he answered, —

“True! Or rather the contrary, I think I did badly. Bigiel, too, is of the opinion that it was not well. Mashko may press them; he may put various demands before them; he may offer Kremen for sale. No, that was not a delicate act, nor one to bring us nearer; and I should not have committed it, were it not that I came to the conviction that it was necessary to drive all that out of my head.”

“But no; do not say so. I believe that there is predestination in everything; and I believe, too, that Providence designed you for each other.”

“I do not understand that. If that be true, then I need not do anything, for in every case I must marry Panna Plavitski.”

“I have a woman's head, and say stupid things, perhaps; but it seems to me that Providence wills and arranges everything for the best, but leaves people freedom. Frequently they do not wish to follow that which is predestined, and this is why so many are unhappy.”

“Maybe. It is difficult, however, to follow anything but one's own convictions. Reason is like a lantern, which God puts in our hands. Who will assure me meanwhile that Panna Marynia will marry me?”

“I ought to have news from her of your visit to Kremen, and I wonder that so far I have none. I think that a letter will come to-morrow at latest, for we write every week to each other. Does she know of your departure for Reichenhall?”

“She does not. I did not know myself when in Kremen where I should go.”

“That is well; for she will be outspoken, though she would be so in any case.”

The first day's conversation ended here. In the evening it was decided at Litka's request to walk to Thumsee, and go in the morning so as to dine at the lake, return in a carriage, or on foot, if Litka was not tired and they could return before sunset. The two men presented themselves at the lady's villa before nine in the morning. Pani Emilia and Litka were dressed and waiting on the veranda; both were so like visions that Vaskovski, the old pedagogue, was astonished at sight of them.

“The Lord God makes perfect flowers of people sometimes,” said he, pointing at mother and daughter from a distance.

Indeed, Pani Emilia and Litka were admired by all Reichenhall. The first, with her spiritualized, angelic face, appeared the incarnation of love, motherly tenderness, and exaltation; the other, with her great pensive eyes, yellow hair, and features that were almost too delicate, seemed rather the idea of an artist than a living little girl. Bukatski, the decadent, said that she was formed of mist made just a trifle rosy by light. Indeed, there was something in the little maiden, as it were, not of earth, which impression was heightened by her illness and exceeding sensitiveness. Her mother loved her blindly; those who surrounded her loved her also; but attention did not spoil this child, exceptionally sweet by nature.

Pan Stanislaw, who visited Pani Emilia in Warsaw a number of times every week, was sincerely attached to both mother and daughter. In a city where woman’s reputation is less respected than anywhere else in the world, scandal was created by this, without the least cause, of course; for Pani Emilia was as pure as an infant, and simply carried her exalted head in the sky as if she knew not that evil existed. She was even so pure that she did not understand the necessity of paying attention to appearances. She received gladly those whom Litka loved; but she refused a number of good offers of marriage, declaring that she needed nothing on earth except Litka. Bukatski alone insisted that Pani Emilia acted on his nerves. Pan Stanislaw adapted himself to those azure heights surrounding that crystal woman, so that he never approached her with a thought dimmed by temptation.

Now he answered with simplicity Vaskovski’s remark, —

“In truth, they both seem marvellous.”

And, greeting them, he repeated more or less the same thing to Pani Emilia, as something that in the given case had attracted his attention. She smiled with pleasure, — likely because the praise included Litka, — and, gathering up her skirt for the road, she said, —

“I received a letter to-day, and have brought it to you.”

“May I read it right away?”

“You may; I beg you to do so.”

They set out by the forest road for Thumsee — Pani Emilia, Vaskovski, and Litka in advance, Pan Stanislaw a little behind them, his head bent over the letter, which was as follows: —

My dear Emilka, — To-day I have received thy litany of questions, and will answer at once, for I am in haste to share my thoughts with thee. Pan Stanislaw Polanyetski went from here on Monday; hence, two days ago. The first evening I received him as I receive every one, and nothing whatever came to my head; but the next day was Sunday. I had time to spare; and almost the entire afternoon we were not only together, but alone, for papa went to the Yamishes. What shall I say? Such a sympathetic, sincere, and, at the same time, honest man! From what he said of Litka and of thee, I saw at once that he has a good heart. We walked a long time by the pond in the garden. I bound up his hand, for he cut himself with the boat. He spoke so wisely that I forgot myself in listening to his words. Ah, my Emilka, I am ashamed to confess it, but my poor head was turned a little by that evening. Thou knowest, moreover, how alone I am and overworked, and how rarely I see men like him. It seemed to me that a guest had come from another world, and a better one. He not only pleased, but captivated me with his heartiness, so that I could not sleep, and was thinking all the time of him. It is true that in the morning he quarrelled with papa, and even I received a little; though God sees how much I would give that there might be no question of that kind between us. At the first moment it touched me greatly; and if that ugly man had known how much I cried in my chamber, he would have pitied me. But, afterward, I thought that he must be very sensitive; that papa was not right; and I am not angry now. I will say, also, in thy ear, that a certain

voice whispers to me continually that he will not sell to any one the claim which he has on Kremen, if only to be able to come here again. That he parted in such anger with papa is nothing. Papa himself does not take it to heart; for those are his ways, not his convictions or feelings. Pan Stanislav has in me a true friend, who, after the sale of Magyerovka, will do everything to end all causes of misunderstanding, and in general all those nasty money questions. He will have to come then, even to take what belongs to him, – is it not true? It may be also that I please him a little. That a man as quick as he is should say something bitter gives no cause for wonder. Speak not of this when thou seest him, and do not scold him; God keep thee from that. I know not why I feel a certain confidence that he will do no injustice to me, or papa, or my beloved Kremen; and I think it would be well in the world if all were like him.

My dear, I embrace thee and Litka most heartily. Write to me of her health minutely, and love me as I do thee.

When he had finished reading, Pan Stanislav put the letter in the side-pocket of his coat, which he buttoned. Then he pushed his hat down to the back of his head, and felt a certain intense desire to break his cane into small bits and throw them into the river: he did not do this, however; he only began to mutter, while gritting his teeth, —

“Yes; very well. Thou knowest Polanyetski! Be confident that he will not injure thee! Thou wilt come out in safety.”

Then he addressed himself as follows, —

“Thou hast thy deserts; for she is an angel, and thou art not worthy of her.” And again a desire seized him to break his cane into bits. Now he saw clearly that the soul of that maiden had been ready to give itself with all faith and trust to him; and he prepared for her one of those painful and wounding disillusiones, the memory of which, fixed once and forever, pains eternally. To sell the claim was nothing; but to sell it to a man wishing to buy it with the intention which Mashko had, was to say to the woman, “I do not want thee; marry him, if it please thee.” What a bitter disillusion for her, after all that he had said to her on that Sunday, – after those words friendly, open, and at the same time intended to enter her heart! They were chosen for that purpose, and he felt that she had taken them in that sense. He might repeat as often as he pleased that they bound him to nothing; that in the first meeting and in the first conversation which a man has with a woman, he merely pushes out horns, like a snail, and tries the ground to which he has come. That would be no consolation to him now. Besides, he was not merely not in humor for self-justification, but wished rather to give himself a slap on the face. He saw for the first time so definitely that he might have received Marynia’s heart and hand; and the more real that possibility was to him, the more the loss seemed irreparable. Moreover, from the moment of reading that letter, a new change appeared in him. His own reasoning that now he ought to let Marynia go, seemed pitiful and paltry. With all his faults, Pan Stanislav had a grateful heart; and that letter moved him to a high degree, by the kindness and understanding, by the readiness to love, which were revealed in it. Hence the remembrance of Marynia became rosy in his heart and mind all at once, – became rosy even with such power that he thought, —

“As God is in heaven, I shall fall in love with her now!” And such a tenderness seized him that in presence of it even anger at himself had to yield. He joined the company after a while, and, pushing forward a little with Pani Emilia, said, —

“Give me this letter.”

“With the greatest pleasure. Such an honest letter, is it not? And you did not confess to me that she suffered somewhat at parting; but I will not reprove, since she herself takes you under her protection.”

“If it would help, I would beg you to beat me; but there is nothing to be said, for those are things incurable.”

Pani Emilia did not share this opinion; on the contrary, seeing Pan Stanislaw's emotion, she felt sure that an affair in which both sides had such vivid feelings was in the best state and must end satisfactorily. At that very thought her sweet face became radiant.

"We shall see after some months," said she.

"You do not even divine what we may see," said Pan Stanislaw, thinking of Mashko.

"Remember," continued Pani Emilia, "that he who once wins Marynia's heart will never be disappointed."

"I am certain of that," answered he, gloomily; "but also such hearts, when once wounded, do not return again."

They could not speak further, for Litka and Pan Vaskovski caught up with them. After a while the little girl took Pan Stanislaw, as usual, for her own exclusive property. The forest, sunk in the mild morning light of a fair day, occupied her uncommonly; she began to inquire about various trees; every little while she cried out with pleasure, —

"Mushrooms!"

But he answered mechanically, thinking of something else, —

"Mushrooms, kitten, mushrooms."

At last the road descended, and they beheld Thumsee under their feet. In the course of half an hour they came down to a beaten path, stretching along the shore, on which were visible here and there wooden foot-piers, extending a few yards into the lake. Litka wished to look from near by at big fish which were visible in the clear water. Pan Stanislaw, taking her by the hand, led her out on to one of the piers.

The fish, accustomed to crumbs thrown by visitors, instead of fleeing, approached still nearer, and soon a whole circle surrounded Litka's feet. In the blue water were visible the golden-brown backs of the carp, and the gray spotted scales of the salmon trout, while the round eyes of these creatures were fixed on the little girl as if with an expression of entreaty.

"Coming back, we will bring lots of bread," said Litka. "How strangely they look at us! What are they thinking of?"

"They are thinking very slowly," said Pan Stanislaw; "and only after an hour or two will they say: 'Ah! here is some little girl with yellow hair and rosy dress and black stockings.'"

"And what will they think of Pan Stas?"

"They will think that I am some gypsy, for I have not yellow hair."

"No. Gypsies have no houses."

"And I have no house, Litka. I had the chance of one, but I sold it."

He uttered this last phrase in a certain unusual manner, and in general there was sadness in his voice. The little girl looked at him carefully; and all at once her sensitive face reflected his sadness, just as that water reflected her form. When they joined the rest of the company, from time to time she raised her sad eyes with an inquiring and disturbed expression. At last, pressing more firmly his hand, which she held, she asked, —

"What troubles Pan Stas?"

"Nothing, little child; I am looking around at the lake, and that is why I do not talk."

"I was pleasing myself yesterday, thinking to show Pan Stas Thumsee."

"Though there are no rocks here, it is very beautiful But what house is that on the other side?"

"We will take dinner there."

Pani Emilia was talking merrily with Vaskovski, who, carrying his hat in his hand, and seeking in his pockets for a handkerchief to wipe his bald head, gave his opinions about Bukatski, —

"He is an Aryan," concluded he; "and therefore in continual unrest, he is seeking peace. He is buying pictures and engravings at present, thinking that thus he will fill a void. But what do I see? This, those children of the century bear in their souls an abyss like this lake, for example; besides, the abyss in them is bottomless, and they think to fill it with pictures, strong waters, amateurship,

dilettantism, Baudelaire, Ibsen, Maeterlinck, finally dilettante science. Poor birds, they are beating their heads against the sides of their cages! It is just I tried to fill this lake by throwing in a pebble.”

“And what can fill life?”

“Every sincere idea, all great feelings, but only on condition that they begin in Christ. Had Bukatski loved art in the Christian way, it would have given him the peace which he is forced to seek.”

“Have you told him that?”

“Yes, that and many other things. I urge him and Pan Stanislav always to read the Life of Saint Francis of Assisi. They are not willing to do so, and laugh at me. Yet he was the greatest man and the greatest saint of the Middle Ages, – a saint who renewed the world. If such a man were to come now, a renewal in Christ would follow, still more sincerely and with greater completeness.”

Midday approached, and with it heat. The forest began to have the odor of resin; the lake became perfectly smooth in the calm air full of glitter, and, while reflecting the spotless blue of the sky, seemed to slumber.

At last they reached the house and the garden, in which there was a restaurant, and sat under a beech-tree at a table already laid. Pan Stanislav called a waiter in a soiled coat, ordered dinner, then looked about silently at the lake and the mountains around it. A couple of yards from the table grew a whole bunch of iris, moistened by a fountain fixed among stones. Pani Emilia, looking at the flowers, said, —

“When I am at a lake and see irises, I think that I am in Italy.”

“For nowhere else are there so many lakes or so many irises,” answered Pan Stanislav.

“Or so much delight for every man,” added Vaskovski. “For many years I go there in the autumn to find a refuge for the last days. I hesitated long between Perugia and Assisi, but last year Rome gained the day. Rome seems the anteroom to another life, in which anteroom light from the next world is visible already. I will go there in October.”

“I envy you sincerely,” said Pani Emilia.

“Litka is twelve years old,” began Vaskovski.

“And three months,” interrupted Litka.

“And three months: therefore for her age she is very small and a great little giddy-head; it is time to show her various things in Rome,” continued Vaskovski. “Nothing is so remembered as that which is seen in childhood. And though childhood does not feel many things completely, nor understand them, that comes later, and comes very agreeably, for it is as if some one were to illuminate on a sudden impressions sunk in shadow. Come with me to Italy in October.”

“In October I cannot; I have my woman’s reasons, which detain me in Warsaw.”

“What are they?”

Pani Emilia began to laugh.

“The first and most important, but purely womanly, reason, is to marry that gentleman sitting there so gloomy,” said she, pointing to Pan Stanislav, “but really so much in love.”

He woke from thoughtfulness, and waved his hand. But Vaskovski inquired with his usual naïveté of a child, —

“Always with Marynia Plavitski?”

“Yes,” replied Pani Emilia. “He has been in Kremen, and it would be vain for him to deny that she took his heart greatly.”

“I cannot deny,” answered Pan Stanislav.

But further conversation was interrupted in an unpleasant manner, for Litka grew weak on a sudden. In a moment she was choking, and had one of her attacks of palpitation of the heart, which alarmed even doctors. The mother seized her at once in her arms; Pan Stanislav ran to the restaurant for ice; Vaskovski began to draw the garden bench with effort toward the table, so that she might stretch on it and breathe with more freedom.

“Thou art wearied, my child, art thou not?” asked Pani Emilia, with pale lips. “See, my love, it was too far – Still the doctor permitted. So anxious! But this is nothing; it will pass, it will pass! My treasure, my love!” And she began to kiss the damp face of the little girl.

Meanwhile Pan Stanislaw came with ice, and after him the mistress of the place hurried out with a pillow in her hand. They laid the little girl on the bench, and while Pani Emilia was wrapping the ice in a napkin, Pan Stanislaw bent over the child and asked, —

“How art thou, kitten?”

“I was only choking a little; but I am better,” answered she, opening her mouth, like a fish to catch breath.

She was not much better, however, for even through her dress one could see how violently the little sick heart was beating in her breast. But under the influence of ice, the attack decreased gradually, and at last ceased altogether, leaving behind only weariness. Litka began again to smile at her mother, who also recovered from her alarm somewhat. It was needful to strengthen the child before they returned home. Pan Stanislaw ordered dinner, which was scarcely touched by any one except Litka, for all looked at her from moment to moment with secret fear lest the choking might seize her a second time. An hour passed in this way. Guests began now to enter the restaurant. Pani Emilia wished to go home, but she had to wait for the carriage, which Pan Stanislaw had sent for to Reichenhall.

The carriage came at last, but new alarm was in wait for them. On the road, though they moved at a walk and the road was very smooth, even light jolting troubled Litka, so that when they were just near Reichenhall, a choking attacked her again. She begged permission to get out of the carriage; but it appeared that walking wearied her. Then Pani Emilia decided to carry the child. But Pan Stanislaw, anticipating that motherly devotion, which moreover was not at all in proportion to the woman's strength, said, —

“Come, Litus, I will carry thee. If not, mamma will weary herself and be sick.”

And without asking further, he lifted her lightly from the ground, and carried her with perfect ease on one arm only; to assure both her and Pani Emilia that it did not trouble him in the least, he said playfully, —

“When such a kitten is walking on the ground, she seems not at all heavy; but now, see where those great feet are hanging. Hold on by my neck; thou wilt be steadier.”

And he went on, as firmly as he could, and quickly, for he wished the doctor to attend her as soon as possible; as he went, he felt her heart beating against his shoulder, and she, while grasping him with her thin, meagre arms, repeated, —

“Let me down; I cannot – Let me down!”

But he said, —

“I will not. Thou seest how bad it is to be tired out from walking. In future we will take a big easy armchair on wheels; and when the child is wearied, we will seat her in it, and I will push her.”

“No, no!” said Litka, with tears in her voice.

He carried her with the tenderness of an elder brother or a father; and his heart was overflowing: first, because really he loved that little maid; and second, because this came to his head of which he had never thought before, – or, at least, had never felt clearly, – that marriage opens the way to fatherhood and to all its treasures of happiness. While carrying that little girl, who was dear to him, though a stranger, he understood that God had created him for a family; not only to be a husband, but a father; also that the main object and meaning of life were found specially in the family. And all his thoughts flew to Marynia. He felt now with redoubled force that of women whom he had met so far he would have chosen her for a wife before all, and would wish her to be the mother of his children.

CHAPTER VII

During some days that succeeded the choking, Litka was not ill, but she felt weak; she went out, however, to walk, because the doctor not only ordered her to go, but recommended very urgently moderate exercise up hill. Vaskovski went to the doctor to learn the condition of her health. Pan Stanislaw awaited the old man's return in the reading-room, and knew at once from his face that he was not a bearer of good tidings.

"The doctor sees no immediate danger," said Vaskovski; "but he condemns the child to an early death, and in general gives directions to watch over her, for it is impossible, he says, to foresee the day or the hour."

"What a misfortune, what a blow!" said Pan Stanislaw, covering his eyes with his hand. "Her mother will not be able to survive her. One is unwilling to believe in the death of such a child."

Vaskovski had tears in his eyes. "I asked whether she must suffer greatly. 'Not necessarily,' said the doctor; 'she may die as easily as if falling asleep.'"

"Did he tell the mother anything about her condition?"

"He did not. He said, it is true, that there was a defect of the heart; but he added that with children such things often disappear without a trace. He has no hope himself."

Pan Stanislaw did not yield to misfortune easily.

"What is one doctor!" said he. "We must struggle to save the child while there is a spark of hope. The doctor may be mistaken. We must take her to a specialist at Monachium, or bring him here. That will alarm Pani Emilia, but it is difficult to avoid it. Wait; we can avoid it. I will bring him, and that immediately. We will tell Pani Emilia that such and such a celebrated doctor has come here to see some one, and that there is a chance of taking counsel concerning Litka. We must not leave the child without aid. We need merely to write to him, so that he may know how to talk to the mother."

"But to whom will you write?"

"To whom? Do I know? The local doctor here will indicate a specialist. Let us go to him at once, and lose no time."

The matter was arranged that very day. In the evening the two men went to Pani Emilia. Litka was well, but silent and gloomy. She smiled, it is true, at her mother and her friend; she showed gratitude for the tenderness with which they surrounded her; but Pan Stanislaw had not power to amuse her. Having his head filled with thoughts of the danger which threatened the child, he considered her gloom a sign of increasing sickness and an early premonition of near death, and with terror he said in his soul that she was not such as she had been; it seemed as if certain threads binding her to life had been broken. His fear increased still more when Pani Emilia said, —

"Litka feels well, but do you know what she begged of me to-day? To go back to Warsaw."

Pan Stanislaw with an effort of will put down his alarm, and, turning to the little one, said while feigning joyfulness, —

"Ah, thou good-for-nothing! Art thou not sorry for Thumsee?"

The little maid shook her yellow hair.

"No!" answered she, after a time, and in her eyes tears appeared; but she covered these quickly with her lids, lest some one might see them.

"What is the matter with her?" thought Pan Stanislaw.

A very simple thing was the matter. In Thumsee she had learned that her friend, her "Pan Stas," her dearest comrade, was to be taken from her. She had heard that he loved Marynia Plavitski; until then she had felt sure that he loved only her and mamma. She had heard that mamma wanted him to marry Marynia; but up to that time she, Litka, had looked on him as her own exclusive property. Without knowing clearly what threatened her, she felt that this "Pan Stas" would go, and that a wrong would be done her, the first which she had experienced in life. She would have suffered less if some

one else had inflicted the wrong; but, just think, her mamma and “Pan Stas” were wronging her! That seemed a vicious circle out of which the child knew not how to escape and could not. How could she complain to them of what they were doing! Evidently they wanted this, wished it; it was necessary for them, and they would be happy if it happened. Mamma said that “Pan Stas” loved Panna Marynia, and he did not deny; therefore Litka must yield, must swallow her tears, and be silent in presence of her mamma even.

And she hid in herself her first disappointment in life. Yes, she had to yield; but because grief is a bad medicine for a heart sick already, this yielding might be more thoroughly and terribly tragic than any one around her could imagine.

The specialist came two days later from Monachium, and remaining two days, confirmed fully the opinion of the doctor in Thumsee. He set Pani Emilia at rest, though he told Pan Stanislaw that the life of the child might continue months and years, but would be always as if hanging on a thread which might break from any cause. He gave directions to spare the little girl every emotion, as well joyous as sad, and to watch over her with the greatest alertness.

They surrounded her therefore with care and attention. They spared her even the slightest emotion, but they did not spare her the greatest, which was caused by Marynia’s letters. The echo of the one which came a week later struck her ears, which were listening then diligently. True, it might dispel her fears touching “Pan Stas,” but it was a great shock to her. Pani Emilia had hesitated all day about showing Pan Stanislaw that letter. He had been asking daily for news from Kremen; she had to lie simply to conceal the arrival of the letter. Finally, she felt bound to tell the truth, so that he might know the difficulties which he had to encounter.

The next evening after receiving the letter, when she had put Litka to sleep, she began conversation herself on this subject.

“Marynia has taken it greatly to heart that you sold the claim on Kremen.”

“Then you have received a letter?”

“I have.”

“Can you show it to me?”

“No; I can only read you extracts from it. Marynia is crushed.”

“Does she know that I am here?”

“It must be that she has not received my letter yet; but it astonishes me that Pan Mashko, who is in Kremen, has not mentioned it to her.”

“Mashko went to Kremen before I left Warsaw; and he was not sure that I would come here, especially as I told him that doubtless I should change my plan.”

Pani Emilia went to her bureau for the package of letters. Returning to the table, she trimmed the lamp, and, sitting opposite Pan Stanislaw, took the letter from the envelope.

“You see,” said she, “that for Marynia it is not a question of the sale alone. You know that her head was a little imaginative, therefore this sale had for her another meaning. A great disenchantment has met her indeed!”

“I should not confess to any other person,” said Pan Stanislaw, “but I will to you. I have committed one of the greatest follies of my life, but I have never been so punished.”

Pani Emilia raised her pale blue eyes to him with sympathy.

“Poor man, are you so captivated, then, by Marynia? I do not ask through curiosity, but friendship, for I should like to mend everything, but wish to be certain.”

“Do you know what conquered me?” broke in Pan Stanislaw, excitedly, – “that first letter. In Kremen she pleased me; I began to think about her. I said to myself that she would be more agreeable and better than others. She is such precisely as I have been seeking. But what next? Long before, I had said to myself that I would not be a soft man, and yield what belongs to me. You understand that when a man makes a principle of anything, he holds to it even for pride’s sake. Besides, in each one of us there are, as it were, two distinct persons; the second of these criticises whatever is done by the

first one. This second man began to say to me: 'Drop this affair; you cannot live with the father.' In truth, he is unendurable. I resolved to drop the affair. I got rid of the claim. That is how it happened. Only later did I find that I could not dismiss the thought of Panna Plavitski; I had always this same impression: 'She is such as thou art seeking.' I saw that I had committed a folly, and was sorry. When that letter came, and I convinced myself that on her side there was a feeling that she could love me and be mine, I loved her. And I give you my word that either I am losing my head, or this is true. It is nothing while a man is fancying something; but when he sees that there were open arms before him, what a difference! That letter conquered me; I cannot help myself."

"I prefer not to read you all this letter," said Pani Emilia, after a while. "Naturally she writes that the brief dream ended by an awakening more sudden than she had looked for. She writes that Pan Mashko is very considerate in money questions, though he wishes them to turn to his profit."

"She will marry him, as God is in heaven!"

"You do not know her. But of Kremen she writes: 'Papa has a wish to dispose of his property, and settle in Warsaw. Thou knowest how I love Kremen, how I grew up with it; but in view of what has happened, I doubt whether my work can be of service. I shall make one more struggle to defend the dear bit of land. Still papa says that his conscience will not let him imprison me in the country, and this is all the more bitter, since it is as if I were the question. Indeed, life seems at times to be touching on irony. Pan Mashko offers papa three thousand life annuity, and the whole amount for the parcelling of Magyerovka. I do not wonder that he seeks his own profit, but through such a bargain he would get the property for almost nothing. Papa himself said to him, "In this way, if I live one year I shall get from Kremen three thousand, for Magyerovka is mine anyhow." Pan Mashko answered that in the present state of affairs the creditors would take the money for Magyerovka; but if papa agrees to the conditions proposed he will receive ready money and may live thirty years, perhaps longer. Which is true also. I know that this project pleases papa in principle; the only question with him is to get as much as he can. In all this there is one consolation, – that if we live in Warsaw, I shall see thee, dear Emilia, and Litka oftener. Sincerely and from my whole soul do I love you both, and know that on your hearts at least I can count always.'"

"So then I deprived her of Kremen, but sent her a suitor," said Pan Stanislaw, after a moment of silence.

While saying this, he did not know that Marynia had put almost the same words into the letter. Pani Emilia had omitted them purposely, not wishing to wound him.

During the last visit of the Plavitskis in Warsaw, Mashko had made some advances for the hand of Marynia; she had no need, therefore, of great keenness to divine his reason for buying the claim and coming to Kremen. Just in this was the bitterness that filled her heart, and the deep offence which she felt that Polanyetski had inflicted on her.

"It is absolutely needful to explain all this," said Pani Emilia.

"I have sent her a suitor!" repeated Pan Stanislaw. "I cannot even make the excuse that I did not know of Mashko's designs."

Pani Emilia turned Marynia's letter in her delicate fingers some time, and then said suddenly, —

"It cannot rest this way. I wanted to unite you with her because of my friendship for both of you, but now there is a motive the more; to wit, your suffering. It would be a reproach for me to leave you as you are, and I cannot. Do not lose hope. There is a pretty French proverb, and a very ugly Polish one, about woman's strength and will. In truth, I wish greatly to help you."

Pan Stanislaw seized her hand and raised it to his lips.

"You are the best and most honorable person that I have met in the world."

"I have been very happy," answered Pani Emilia; "and since I think that there is only one road to happiness, I wish those who are near me to go by it."

"You are right. That road, or none! Since I have life, I wish that life to be of use to some one else and to me."

“As to me,” said Pani Emilia, laughing, “since I have undertaken the rôle of matchmaker for the first time in life, I wish to be of service. But it is necessary to think what must be done now.”

Saying this, she raised her eyes. The light of the lamp fell directly on her delicate face, which was still very youthful; on her light hair, which was somewhat disarranged above her forehead. There was something in her so bewitching and at the same time so virginal that Pan Stanislav, though he had a head occupied with other things, recalled the name, “maiden widow,” which Bukatski had given her.

“Marynia is very candid,” said she, after a moment’s thought, “and will understand better if I write the pure truth to her. I will tell her what you told me: that you went away much pleased with her; that what you have done was done without reckoning with yourself, purely under the influence of the thought that you could not come to an agreement with her father; but at present you regret this most sincerely, you beg her not to take it ill, and not to take away the hope that she will yield to entreaty.”

“And I will write to Mashko that I will purchase the debt of him at whatever profit he likes.”

“See,” said Pani Emilia, smiling, “that sober, calculating Pan Stanislav, who boasts that he has freed himself from the Polish character and from Polish fickleness.”

“Yes, yes!” cried Pan Stanislav, with a more joyous tone. “Calculation consists in this, to spare nothing on an object that is worth it.” At that moment, however, he grew gloomy and said, “But if she answers that she is Mashko’s betrothed?”

“I will not admit that. Pan Mashko may be the most honorable of men, but he is not for her. She will not marry without affection. I know that Mashko did not please her at all. That will never take place; you do not know Marynia. Only do, on your part, what you can, and be at rest as to Mashko.”

“Then, instead of writing, I will telegraph to him to-day. He cannot stop in Kremen long at one time, and must receive my despatch in Warsaw.”

CHAPTER VIII

Mashko's answer, which Pan Stanislaw received two days later, was, "I bought Kremen yesterday."

Though it might have been foreseen from Marynia's letter that affairs would take this and no other turn, and the young man was bound to be prepared for it, the news produced the impression of a thunder-clap. It seemed to him that a misfortune had happened, as sudden as it was incurable, – a misfortune for which the whole responsibility fell on him. Pani Emilia, knowing better than any one else Marynia's attachment to Kremen, had also a presentiment which she could not conceal, that by this sale the difficulty of bringing these two young people nearer each other would be increased greatly.

"If Mashko does not marry Marynia," said Pan Stanislaw, "he will strip old Plavitski in such fashion as to save himself and leave the old man without a copper. If I had sold my claim to the first usurer I met, Plavitski would have wriggled out, paid something, promised more; and the ruin of Kremen would have been deferred for whole years, in the course of which something favorable might have happened; in every case there would have been time to sell Kremen on satisfactory conditions. Now, if they are left without a copper, the fault will be mine."

But Pani Emilia looked on the affair from another side: "The evil is not in this alone," said she, "that Kremen is sold. You have caused this sale, and that immediately after seeing Marynia. If some one else had done so, the affair would not have such a significance; but the worst is just this, that Marynia was greatly confident that you would not act thus."

Pan Stanislaw felt this as vividly as she; and since he was accustomed to give himself a clear account of every position, he understood also that Marynia was the same as lost to him. In view of this, one thing remained, – to acknowledge the fact and seek another wife. But Pan Stanislaw's whole soul revolted against this. First, his feeling for Marynia, though sudden, strengthened neither by time nor nearer acquaintance, though resting mainly on the charm, almost exclusively physical, which her form had wrought on him, had grown considerably in recent days. Her letter effected this, and the conviction that he had inflicted a wrong on her. Compassion for her seized him now, and he could not think of her without emotion; in consequence of this, the feeling itself increased through two causes, which play a very important rôle in each masculine heart. First, that energetic, muscular man could never yield passively to the course of events. His nature simply could not endure this. The sight of difficulty roused him to action particularly. Finally, his self-love also was opposed to letting Marynia go. The thought which he must acknowledge to himself sometimes, – that he was only a spring in the hand of that Mashko and one of the means to his objects; that he had let himself be abused, or at least used by the advocate, – filled him with rage. Though Mashko should not receive Marynia's hand, though the affair should end with Kremen, even that was more than Pan Stanislaw could suffer. Now an irrestrainable desire seized him to go and take the field against Mashko, to throw a stone under his feet, to cross his further plans, at least, and show him that his keenness of an advocate was not enough in a meeting with real manly energy. All these, as well as the more noble motives, urged Pan Stanislaw with irresistible force to undertake something, to do something. Meanwhile the position was such that there remained well-nigh nothing to do. Precisely in this contradiction was hidden the tragedy. To remain in Reichenhall, let Mashko carry out his plans, extend his nets, work for the hand of Panna Plavitski – no! not for anything! But what was he to do? To this last question there was no answer. For the first time in life Pan Stanislaw felt as if he were chained; and the less he was accustomed to such a position, the more did he bear it with difficulty. He learned too, for the first time, what sleeplessness means, what excited nerves are. Since Litka, during the days just preceding, felt worse again, there hung over the whole society a leaden atmosphere in which life was becoming unendurable.

After a week another letter came from Marynia. This time there was no mention either of Pan Stanislaw or Mashko. Marynia wrote only about the sale of Kremen, without complaint, and without explanation of how the affair had taken place. But from this alone he might infer how deeply the sale had wounded her.

It would have pleased Pan Stanislaw more had she complained. He understood clearly, too, that silence in the letter touching him showed how far he had been excluded from the heart of that lady, while silence touching Mashko might show directly the opposite. Finally, if she valued that Kremen so much, she might return to it by giving her hand to its present owner; perhaps she had become reconciled by that thought. Old Plavitski had his prejudices of a noble, it is true, and Pan Stanislaw counted on them; but, considering the man as an egotist above all, he admitted that in the present case he would sacrifice his daughter and his prejudices.

In the end of ends, to remain with folded arms at Reichenhall, and wait for news as to whether Pan Mashko would be pleased to offer his hand to Panna Plavitski, became for Pan Stanislaw simply impossible. Litka, too, from time to time begged her mother to return to Warsaw. Pan Stanislaw determined, therefore, to return, all the more as the time was approaching when he and Bigiel had to begin a new affair.

This decision brought him great solace at once. He would return; he would examine the position with his own eyes, and perhaps undertake something. In every case it would be better than sitting at Reichenhall. Both Pani Emilia and Litka heard the news of his departure without surprise. They knew that he had come only for a few weeks, and they hoped to see him soon in Warsaw. Pani Emilia was to go in the middle of August. For the rest of the month she decided to remain with Vaskovski in Salzburg, and return then to Warsaw. Meanwhile she promised to inform Pan Stanislaw of Litka's health frequently, and besides correspond with Marynia and learn what her thoughts really were touching Mashko.

On the day of his departure, Pani Emilia and Litka, with Vaskovski, took farewell of him at the station. When in the compartment, he was rather sorry to go. Happen what might, he knew not how things would turn out at Warsaw; here he was surrounded by persons who were the sincerest well-wishers that he had in the world. Looking out through the window, he beheld the sad eyes of Litka raised toward him, and the friendly face of Pani Emilia, with the same feeling as if they had been his own family. And again that uncommon beauty of the young widow struck him, – her features, delicate to the verge of excess, her angelic expression of face, and her form perfectly maidenlike, dressed in black.

"Farewell," said Pani Emilia, "and write to us from Warsaw; we shall see each other in three weeks or sooner."

"In three weeks," repeated Pan Stanislaw. "I will write certainly. Till we meet again, Litus!"

"Till we meet again! Bow from me to Evka and Yoasia."

"I will do so."

And he stretched out his hand through the window again:

"Till our next meeting! Remember your friend."

"We will not forget; we will not forget. Do you wish me to repeat a novena for your intention?" asked Pani Emilia, smiling.

"Thank you for that too. Do so. Till we meet again, Professor."

The train moved that moment. Pani Emilia and Litka waved their parasols till the more frequent puffing of the engine hid, with rolls of steam and smoke, the window through which Pan Stanislaw was looking.

"Mamma," asked Litka, "is it really necessary to say a novena for Pan Stas?"

"Yes, Litus. He is so kind to us, we must pray to God to make him happy."

"But is he unhappy?"

"No – that is – seest thou, every one has trouble, and he has his."

“I know; I heard in Thumsee,” said the little girl. And after a while she added in a low voice, —
“I will say a novena.”

But Professor Vaskovski, who was so honest that he could not hold his tongue, said after a time to Pani Emilia, when Litka had gone forward, —

“That is a golden heart, and he loves you both as a brother. Now that the specialist has assured us that there is not the least fear, I can tell everything. Pan Stanislaw brought him here purposely, for he was alarmed about the little girl in Thumsee.”

“Did he bring him?” asked Pani Emilia. “What a man!” And tears of gratitude came to her eyes. After a while she said, “But I will reward him, for I will give him Marynia.”

Pan Stanislaw went away with a heart full of good wishes and gratitude to Pani Emilia, for the man who has failed and for that reason falls into trouble, feels the friendship of people more keenly than others. Sitting in the corner of the compartment, with the image of Pani Emilia fresh in his mind, he said to himself, —

“If I had fallen in love with her! What rest, what certainty of happiness! An object in life would have been found; I should know for whom I am working, I should know whose I am, I should know that my existence has some meaning. She says, it is true, that she will not marry, but me! — she might, who knows? That other is perfection, perhaps, but she may have a very dry heart.”

Here he feels suddenly: “Still I can think calmly about Pani Emilia; while at every recollection of that other a certain unquiet seizes me, which is at once both bitter and agreeable. I am drawn by something toward that other. I have just pressed Pani Emilia’s hand, and that pressure has left no sensation; while even now I remember the warm palm of Marynia, and feel a certain species of quiver at the very thought of it.”

As far as Salzburg, Pan Stanislaw thought only of “that other.” This time his thoughts began to take the form, if not of resolves, at least of questions, — how is he to act toward her, and what in this state of affairs is his duty?

“It is not to be denied that I caused the sale of Kremen,” said he to himself. “Kremen had for her not only the money value, which might perhaps have been drawn from it had the sale not been hastened, but also the value with which her heart was bound to the place. I have deprived her of both. Briefly speaking, I have wronged her. I have acted legally; but for a conscience made up of something more than paragraphs, that is not sufficient. I have offended her, I confess, and I must correct my fault in some way. But how? Buy Kremen from Mashko? I am not rich enough. I might perhaps do so by dissolving partnership with Bigiel and withdrawing all my capital; but that is materially impossible. Bigiel might fail, should I do that; hence I will not do it. There is one other way, — to keep up relations as best I can with Plavitski, and propose later on for the hand of his daughter. If rejected, I shall have done at least what behooves me.”

But here that second internal man, of whom Pan Stanislaw made mention, raised his voice and began, —

“Do not shield thyself with a question of conscience. If Panna Plavitski were ten years older and ugly, thou mightst have caused in the same way the sale of Kremen, and taken from her everything which thou hast taken, and still it would not have come to thy head to ask for her hand. Tell thyself straightway that Panna Plavitski draws thee, as with nippers, by her face, her eyes, her lips, her arms, her whole person, and do not tempt thyself.”

But, in general, Pan Stanislaw held that second internal man firmly, and treated him sometimes with very slight ceremony. Following this method, he said to him, —

“First, thou knowest not, fool, that even in that case I should not try to make good the injury. That at present I wish to make it good by proposing for the lady is natural. Men always ask to marry women who please them, not those for whom they feel repulsion. If thou hast nothing better to say, then be silent.”

The internal man ventured a few more timid remarks, as, for instance, that Plavitski might give command to throw Pan Stanislaw downstairs; that in the best case he might not permit him to cross the threshold. But somehow Pan Stanislaw was not afraid of this. "People," thought he, "do not use such means now; and if the Plavitskis do not receive me, so much the worse for them."

He admitted, however, that if they had even a little tact they would receive him. He knew that he would see Marynia at Pani Emilia's.

Meditating in this way, he arrived at Salzburg. There was one hour till the arrival of the train from Monachium, by which he was to go to Vienna; hence he decided to walk about the town. That moment he saw in the restaurant the bright-colored pea-jacket of Bukatski, his monocle, and his small head, covered with a still smaller soft cap.

"Bukatski or his spirit!" cried he.

"Calm thyself, Pan Stanislaw," answered Bukatski, phlegmatically, greeting him as if they had parted an hour before. "How art thou?"

"What art thou doing here?"

"Eating a cutlet."

"To Reichenhall?"

"Yes. But thou art homeward?"

"Yes."

"Thou hast proposed to Pani Emilia?"

"No."

"Then I forgive thee. Thou mayst go."

"Keep thy conceits for a fitter season. Litka is in very great danger."

Bukatski grew serious, and said, raising his brows, – "Ai, ai! Is that perfectly certain?"

Pan Stanislaw told briefly the opinion of the doctor. Bukatski listened for a while; then he said,

"And is a man not to be a pessimist in this case? Poor child and poor mother! In the event of misfortune, I cannot imagine in any way how she will endure it."

"She is very religious; but it is terrible to think of this."

"Let us walk through the town a little," said Bukatski; "one might stifle here."

They went out.

"And a man in such straits is not to be a pessimist!" exclaimed Bukatski. "What is Litka? Simply a dove! Every one would spare her; but death will not spare her."

Pan Stanislaw was silent.

"I know not myself now," continued Bukatski, "whether to go to Reichenhall or not. In Warsaw, when Pani Emilia is there, even I can hold out. Once a month I propose to her, once a month I receive a refusal; and thus I live from the first of one month to the first of the next. The first of the month has just passed, and I am anxious for my pension. Is the mother aware of the little girl's condition?"

"No. The child is in danger; but perhaps a couple of years remain yet to her."

"Ah! perhaps no more remain to any of us. Tell me, dost thou think of death often?"

"No. How would that help me? I know that I must lose the case; therefore I do not break my head over it, especially before the time."

"In this is the point, – we must lose, but still we keep up the trial to the end. This is the whole sense of life, which otherwise would be simply a dreary farce, but now it is a dull tragedy as well. As to me, I have three things at present to choose from: to hang myself, go to Reichenhall, or go to Monachium to see Boecklin's pictures once more. If I were logical, I should choose the first; since I am not, I'll choose Reichenhall. Pani Emilia is worth the Boecklins, both as to outline and color."

"What is to be heard in Warsaw?" asked on a sudden Pan Stanislaw, who had had that question on his lips from the first of the conversation. "Hast thou seen Mashko?"

“I have. He has bought Kremen, he is a great landholder, and, since he has wit, he is using all his power not to seem too great. He is polite, sensible, flattering, accessible; he is changed, not to my advantage, it is true, for what do I care? but surely to his own.”

“Isn’t he going to marry Panna Plavitski?”

“I hear that he wants to. Thy partner, Bigiel, said something of this, also that Mashko bought Kremen on conditions more than favorable. Thou wilt find clearer news in the city.”

“Where are the Plavitskis at present?”

“In Warsaw. They are living in the Hotel Rome. The young woman is not at all ugly. I called on them as a cousin, and talked about thee.”

“Thou mightst have chosen a more agreeable subject for them.”

“Plavitski, who is glad of what has happened, told me that thou hadst done them a service, without wishing it certainly, but thou hadst done it. I asked the young lady how it was that she saw thee in Kremen for the first time. She answered that during her visit in Warsaw thou must have been in foreign countries.”

“In fact, I was gone then on business of the firm to Berlin, and I remained there some time.”

“Indeed, I did not observe that they were offended at thee. I heard so much, however, of the young lady’s love of country life, that she must, I admit, be a little angry at thee for having taken Kremen from her. In every case, she does not show any anger.”

“Perhaps she will show it only to me; and the opportunity will not be lacking, for I shall visit them immediately after my return.”

“In that case do me one little service: marry the lady, for of two evils I prefer to be thy cousin rather than Mashko’s.”

“Very well,” replied Pan Stanislav, curtly.

CHAPTER IX

After his return to Warsaw, Pan Stanislaw went first of all to Bigiel, who told him minutely the conditions on which Kremen was sold. Those conditions were very profitable for Mashko. He bound himself to pay at the end of a year thirty-five thousand rubles, which were to come from the parcelling of Magyerovka, and besides to pay three thousand yearly till the death of Pan Plavitski. To Pan Stanislaw the bargain did not seem at first too unfavorable for Plavitski; but Bigiel was of another opinion.

"I do not judge people too hastily," said he; "but Plavitski is an incurable old egotist who has sacrificed the future of his child to his own comfort, and, besides, he is frivolous. In this case the annuity is placed as it were on Kremen; but Kremen, as a ruined estate, on which there is need to spend money, has a fictitious value. If Mashko puts it in order, very well; if not, in the most favorable event he will fall behind in payment, and Plavitski may not see a copper for years. What will he do then? He will take Kremen back. But before that time Mashko will contract new debts, even to pay the old ones; and, in case of his bankruptcy, God knows how many creditors will stretch their hands after Kremen. Finally, all depends on the honesty of Mashko, who may be a correct man, but he is carrying on business riskily; if he takes one false step, it may ruin him. Who knows if this very purchase of Kremen be not such a step? – for, wishing to bring the estate into order, he must draw on his credit to the utmost. I have seen men who succeeded a long time until they turned to buying great estates."

"The ready money for Magyerovka will remain with the Plavitskis always," said Pan Stanislaw, as if wishing to quiet his own fears for their future.

"If old Plavitski does not eat it up, or play it away, or waste it."

"I must think of something. I caused the sale; I must help."

"Thou?" asked Bigiel, with astonishment. "I thought that thy relations were broken forever."

"I shall try to renew them. I will visit the Plavitskis to-morrow."

"I do not know that they will be glad to see thee."

"And I myself do not know."

"Dost wish I will go with thee? For it is a question of breaking the ice. They may not receive thee alone. It is a pity that my wife is not here. I sit by myself whole evenings and play on the violoncello. During the day I have time enough too; I can go with thee."

Pan Stanislaw, however, refused, and next day he dressed himself with great care and went alone. He knew that he was a presentable man; and though usually he did not think much of this, he resolved now to omit nothing which might speak in his favor. On the way he had his head full of thoughts as to what he should say, what he should do in this case or that one, and he tried to foresee how they would receive him.

"I will be as simple and outspoken as possible," said he to himself; "that is the best method absolutely."

And, before he noted it, he found himself at the Hotel Rome. His heart began to beat then more quickly.

"It would not be bad," thought he, "if I should not find them at home. I could leave a card and see later on if Plavitski would acknowledge my visit."

But straightway he said to himself, "Don't be a coward," and went forward. Learning from the servant that Plavitski was at home, he sent in his card, and after a while was invited to enter.

Plavitski was sitting at a table writing letters, drawing at intervals smoke from a pipe with a great amber mouthpiece. At sight of Pan Stanislaw he raised his head, and, looking at him through gold-rimmed glasses, said, —

"I beg, I beg!"

"I learned from Bigiel that you and Panna Plavitski were in Warsaw," said Pan Stanislaw, "and I came to pay my respects."

"That was very pretty on thy part," answered Plavitski, "and, to tell the truth, I did not expect it. We parted in a bitter manner and through thy fault. But since thou hast felt it thy duty to visit me, I, as the older, open my arms to thee a second time."

The opening of the arms, however, was confined to reaching across the table a hand, which Pan Stanislaw pressed, saying in his own mind, —

"May the Evil One take me, if I come here to thee, and if I feel toward thee any obligation!" After a while he asked, "You and your daughter are coming to live in Warsaw?"

"Yes. I am an old man of the country, accustomed to rise with the sun and to work in the fields; it will be grievous for me in your Warsaw. But it was not right to imprison my child; hence I made one sacrifice more for her."

Pan Stanislaw, who had spent two nights in Kremen, remembered that Plavitski rose about eleven in the forenoon, and that he labored specially about the business of Kremen, not its fields; he passed this, however, in silence, for he had a head occupied with something else at that moment. From the chamber which Plavitski occupied, an open door led to another, which must be Marynia's. It occurred to Pan Stanislaw, who was looking in the direction of that door from the time of his entrance, that perhaps she did not wish to come out; therefore he inquired, —

"But shall I not have the pleasure of seeing Panna Marynia?"

"Marynia has gone to look at lodgings which I found this morning. She will come directly, for they are only a couple of steps distant. Imagine to thyself a plaything, not lodgings. I shall have a cabinet and a sleeping-room; Marynia also a very nice little chamber, — the dining-room is a trifle dark, it is true; but the drawing-room is a candy-box."

Here Plavitski passed into a narrative concerning his lodgings, with the volubility of a child amused by something, or of an old lover of comfort, who smiles at every improvement. At last he said, —

"I had barely looked around when I found myself at home. Dear Warsaw is my old friend; I know her well."

But at that moment some one entered the adjoining room.

"That is Marynia, surely," said Plavitski. "Marynia, art thou there?" called he.

"I am," answered a youthful voice.

"Come here; we have a guest."

Marynia appeared in the door. At sight of Pan Stanislaw, astonishment shone on her face. He, rising, bowed; and when she approached the table, he stretched out his hand in greeting. She gave him her own with as much coldness as politeness. Then she turned to her father, as if no one else were present in the room, —

"I have seen the lodgings; they are neat and comfortable, but I am not sure that the street is not too noisy."

"All streets are noisy," answered Plavitski. "Warsaw is not a village."

"Pardon me; I will go to remove my hat," said Marynia. And, returning to her room, she did not appear for some time.

"She will not show herself again," thought Pan Stanislaw.

But evidently she was only arranging her hair before the mirror, after removing her hat; she entered a second time, and asked, —

"Am I interrupting?"

"No," said Plavitski, "we have no business now, for which, speaking in parenthesis, I am very glad. Pan Polanyetski has come only through politeness."

Pan Stanislaw blushed a little, and, wishing to change the subject, said, —

"I am returning from Reichenhall; I bring you greetings from Pani Emilia and Litka, and that is one reason why I made bold to come."

For a moment the cool self-possession on Marynia's face vanished.

"Emilia wrote to me of Litka's heart attack," said she. "How is she now?"

"There has not been a second attack."

"I expect another letter, and it may have come; but I have not received it, for Emilia addressed it very likely to Kremen."

"They will send it," said Plavitski; "I gave directions to send all the mail here."

"You will not go back to the country, then?" asked Pan Stanislaw.

"No; we will not," answered Marynia, whose eyes recovered their expression of cool self-possession.

A moment of silence followed. Pan Stanislaw looked at the young lady, and seemed to be struggling with himself. Her face attracted him with new power. He felt now more clearly that in such a person precisely he would find most to please him, that he could love such a one, that she is the type of his chosen woman, and all the more her coldness became unendurable. He would give now, God knows what, to find again in those features the expression which he saw in Kremen, the interest in his words, and the attention, the transparency in those eyes full of smiles and roused curiosity. He would give, God knows what, to have all this return, and he knew not by what method to make it return, by a slow or a quick one; for this cause he hesitated. He chose at last that which agreed best with his nature.

"I knew," said he, suddenly, "how you loved Kremen, and in spite of that, perhaps, it is I who caused its sale. If that be the case, I tell you openly that I regret the act acutely, and shall never cease to regret it. In my defence I cannot even say that I did it while excited, and without intent. Nay, I had an intent; only it was malicious and irrational. All the greater is my fault, and all the more do I entreat your forgiveness."

When he had said this, he rose. His cheeks were flushed, and from his eyes shone truth and sincerity; but his words remained without effect. Pan Stanislaw went by a false road. He knew women in general too slightly to render account to himself of how far their judgments, especially their judgments touching men, are dependent on their feelings, both transient and permanent. In virtue of these feelings, anything may be taken as good or bad money; anything interpreted for evil or good, recognized as true or false; stupidity may be counted reason, reason stupidity, egotism devotion, devotion egotism, rudeness sincerity, sincerity lack of delicacy. The man who in a given moment rouses dislike, cannot be right with a woman, cannot be sincere, cannot be just, cannot be well-bred. So Marynia, feeling deep aversion and resentment toward Pan Stanislaw from the time of Mashko's coming to Kremen, took sincerity simply ill of him. Her first thought was: "What kind of man is this who recognizes as unreasonable and bad that which a few days ago he did with calculation?" Then Kremen, the sale of the place, Mashko's visit and the meaning of that visit, which she divined, were for her like a wound festering more and more. And now it seemed to her that Pan Stanislaw was opening that wound with all the unsparingness of a man of rough nature and rude nerves.

He rose, and with eyes fixed on her face, waited to see if a friendly and forgiving hand would not be extended to him, with a clear feeling that one such stretching forth of a hand might decide his fate; but her eyes grew dark for a moment, as if from pain and anger, and her face became still colder.

"Let not that annoy you," said she, with icy politeness. "On the contrary, papa is very much satisfied with the bargain and with the whole arrangement with Pan Mashko."

She rose then, as if understanding that Pan Stanislaw wished to take leave. He stood a moment stricken, disappointed, full of resentment and suppressed anger, full of that feeling of mortification which a man has when he is rejected.

"If that is true, I desire nothing more."

"It is, it is! I did a good business," concluded Plavitski.

Pan Stanislav went out, and, descending a number of steps at a time with hat pressed down on his head, he repeated mentally, —

“A foot of mine will not be in your house again.”

He felt, however, that, if he were to go home, anger would stifle him; he walked on, therefore, not thinking whither his feet were bearing him. It seemed to him at that moment that he did not love Marynia, that he even hated her; but still he thought about her, and if he had thought more calmly he would have told himself that the mere sight of her had affected him deeply. He had seen her now a second time, had looked on her, had compared that image of her which he had borne in his memory with the reality; the image became thereby still more definite, more really attractive, and acted the more powerfully on him. And, in spite of the anger, in the depth of his soul an immense liking for her raised its head, and a delight in the woman. There existed, as it were, for him two Marynias, — one the mild, friendly Marynia of Kremen, listening and ready to love; the other that icy young lady of Warsaw, who had rejected him. A woman often becomes dual in this way in the heart of a man, which is then most frequently ready to forgive this unfriendly one for the sake of that loved one. Pan Stanislav did not even admit that Marynia could be such as she had shown herself that day; hence there was in his anger a certain surprise. Knowing his own undeniable worth, and being conceited enough, he carried within him a conviction, which he would not acknowledge to himself, that it was enough for him to extend his hand to have it seized. This time it turned out differently. That mild Marynia appeared suddenly, not only in the rôle of a judge, who utters sentences and condemns, but also in the rôle, as it were, of a queen, with whom it is possible to be in favor or disfavor. Pan Stanislav could not accustom himself to this thought, and he struggled with it; but such is human nature that, when he learned that for that lady he was not so much desired as he had thought, that she not only did not over-value him, but esteemed him lower than herself, in spite of his displeasure, offence, and anger, her value increased in his eyes. His self-love was wounded; but, on the other hand, his will, in reality strong, was ready to rush to the struggle with difficulties, and crush them. All these thoughts were circling chaotically in his head, or, instead of thoughts, they were rather feelings torn and tearing themselves. He repeated a hundred times to himself that he would drop the whole matter, that he must and wished to do so; and at the same time he was so weak and small that somewhere in the most secret corner of his soul he was counting that very moment on the arrival of Pani Emilia, and on the aid which her arrival would bring him. Sunk in this mental struggle, he did not recollect himself till he was halfway on the Zyazd, when he asked, “Why the misery have I gone to Praga?” He halted. The day was fine and was inclining toward evening. Lower down, the Vistula was flowing in the gleam of the sun; and beyond it and beyond the nearer clumps of green, a broad country was visible, covered on the horizon with a rosy and blue haze. Far away, beyond that haze, was Kremen, which Marynia had loved and which she had lost. Pan Stanislav, fixing his eyes on the haze, said to himself, —

“I am curious to know what she would have done had I given Kremen to her.”

He could not imagine that to himself definitely; but he thought that the loss of that land was for her a great bitterness really, and he regretted it. In this sorrow his anger began to scatter and vanish as mist. His conscience whispered that he had received what he earned. Returning, he said to himself, “But I am thinking of all this continually.”

And really he was. Never had he experienced, in the most important money questions, even half the disquiet, never had he been absorbed so deeply. And again he remembered what Vaskovski had said of himself, that his nature, like Pan Stanislav’s, could not fix its whole power on the acquisition of money. Never had he felt with such clearness that there might be questions more important than those of wealth, and simply more positive. For the second time a certain astonishment seized him.

It was nearly nine when he went to Bigiel’s. Bigiel was sitting in a spacious, empty house with doors opening on the garden veranda; he was playing on a violoncello in such fashion that everything through the house was quivering. When he saw Pan Stanislav he broke off a certain tremolo and inquired, —

“Hast thou been at the Plavitskis’ to-day?”

“Yes.”

“How was the young lady?”

“Like a decanter of chilled water. On such a hot day that is agreeable. They are polite people, however.”

“I foresaw this.”

“Play on.”

Bigiel began to play “Träumerei,” and while playing closed his eyes, or turned them to the moon. In the stillness the music seemed to fill with sweetness the house, the garden, and the night itself. When he had finished, he was silent for a time, and then said, —

“Knowest what? When Pani Emilia comes, my wife will ask her to the country, and with her Marynia. Maybe those ices will thaw then between you.”

“Play the ‘Träumerei’ once more.”

The sounds were given out a second time, with calmness and imagination. Pan Stanislaw was too young not to be somewhat of a dreamer; hence he imagined that Marynia was listening with him to the “Träumerei,” with her hand in his hands, with her head on his bosom, loving much, and beloved above all in the world.

CHAPTER X

Pan Plavitski was what is called a well-bred man, for he returned Pan Stanislaw's visit on the third day. He did not return it on the second, for such haste would have indicated a wish to maintain intimate relations; and not on the fourth nor the fifth, for that would have shown a want of acquaintance with the habits of society, – but only within the period most specially and exclusively indicated by command of *savoir vivre*. Plavitski prided himself all his life on a knowledge of those commands, and esteemed them as his own; the observances of them he considered as the highest human wisdom. It is true that, as a man of sense, he permitted other branches of knowledge to exist, on condition, however, that they should not be overestimated; and especially, that they should not have the claim to force themselves on to people who were truly well-bred.

Pan Stanislaw – for whom everything was desirable that would strengthen in any way the thread of further relations with Marynia – was hardly able to conceal his delight at the arrival of Plavitski. That delight was evident in his agreeable reception, full of good-humor. He must have been astonished, besides, at Plavitski, and the influence which the city had exercised on him. His hair shone like the wing of a raven; his little mustaches were sticking up, vying with the color of his hair; his white shirt covered a slender form; his scarf-pin and black vest gave a certain holiday brilliancy to his whole figure.

“On my word, I did not recognize my uncle at the first moment!” cried Pan Stanislaw. “I thought that some youngster was coming.”

“*Bon jour, bon jour!*” answered Plavitski. “The day is cloudy; a little dark here. It must be for that reason that thou didst mistake me for a stripling.”

“Cloudy or clear, what a figure!” answered Pan Stanislaw.

And seizing Plavitski by the side, without ceremony, he began to turn him around and say —

“A waist just like a young lady's! Would that I might have such a one!”

Plavitski, offended greatly by such an unceremonious greeting, but still more delighted at the admiration roused by his person, said, defending himself, —

“*Voyons!* Thou art a lunatic. I might be angry. Thou art a lunatic!”

“But uncle will turn as many heads as he pleases.”

“What dost thou say?” asked Plavitski, sitting down in an armchair.

“I say that uncle has come here for conquest.”

“I have no thought whatever of that. Thou art a lunatic!”

“But Pani Yamish? or haven't I seen with my own eyes — ”

“What?”

Here Plavitski shut one eye and thrust out the point of his tongue; but that lasted only an instant, then he raised his brows, and said, —

“Well, as to Pani Yamish? She is well enough in Kremen. Between thee and me, I cannot endure affectation, – it savors of the country. May the Lord God not remember, for Pani Yamish, how much she has tortured me with her affectation: a woman should have courage to grow old, then a relation would end in friendship; otherwise it becomes slavery.”

“And my dear uncle felt like a butterfly in bonds?”

“But don't talk in that way,” answered Plavitski, with dignity, “and do not imagine that there was anything between us. Even if there had been, thou wouldst not have heard a word about it from me. Believe me, there is a great difference between you of this and us of the preceding generation. We were not saints, perhaps; but we knew how to be silent, and that is a great virtue, without which what is called true nobility cannot exist.”

“From this I infer that uncle will not confess to me where he is going, with this carnation in his buttonhole?”

“Oh, yes, yes! Mashko invited me to-day to dine with a number of other persons. At first I refused, not wishing to leave Marynia alone. But I have sat so many years in the country for her sake that in truth a little recreation is due to me. But art thou not invited?”

“No.”

“That astonishes me: thou art, as thou sayest, an ‘affairist’; but thou bearest a good family name. For that matter, Mashko is an advocate himself. But, in general, I confess that I did not suspect in Mashko the power to place himself as he has.”

“Mashko could place himself even on his head – ”

“He goes everywhere; all receive him. Once I had a prejudice against him.”

“And has uncle none now?”

“I must acknowledge that he has acted with me in all that business of Kremen like a gentleman.”

“Is Panna Marynia of the same opinion?”

“Certainly; though I think that Kremen lies on her heart. I got rid of it for her sake, but youth cannot understand everything. I knew about her views, however, and am ready to endure every bitterness with calm. As to Mashko, in truth, she cannot cast reproach at him for anything. He bought Kremen, it is true, but – ”

“But he is ready to give it back?”

“Thou art of the family, so, speaking between us, I think that that is true. Marynia occupied him greatly, even during our former visit to Warsaw; but somehow the affair did not move. The maiden was too young; he did not please her sufficiently; I was a little opposed myself, for I was prejudiced as to his family. Bukatski sharpened his teeth at him, so it ended in nothing.”

“It did not end, since it is beginning again.”

“It is, for I am convinced that he comes of a very good family, once Italian and formerly called Masco. They came here with Queen Bona, and settled in White Russia at that time. He, if thou hast noticed it, has a face somewhat Italian.”

“No; he has a Portuguese face.”

“That is all one, however. But the plan to sell Kremen and still to keep it – no common head could have worked that out. As to Mashko – yes I think that such is his plan. Marynia is a strange girl, though. It is bitter to say this, that a man understands a stranger sooner than his own child. But if she will only say as Talleyrand did, *‘Paris vaut la messe.’*”

“Ah, I thought that it was Henry IV. who said that.”

“Thou didst, for thou art an ‘affairist,’ a man of recent times. History and ancient deeds are not to the taste of you young men, ye prefer to make money. Everything depends, then, on Marynia; but I will not hurry her. I will not, for, finally, with our connections, a better match may be found. It is necessary to go out a little among people and find old acquaintances. That is only toil and torment; but what is necessary, is necessary. Thou thinkest that I go to this dinner with pleasure. No! but I must receive young people sometimes. I hope too that thou wilt not forget us.”

“No, no; I will not.”

“Dost know what they say of thee? – that thou art making money infernally. Well, well, I don’t know whom thou art like – not like thy father! In every case, I am not the man to blame thee, no, no! Thou didst throttle me without mercy, didst treat me as the wolf did the lamb; but there is in thee something which pleases me, – I have for thee a kind of weakness.”

“The feeling is mutual.” said Pan Stanislav.

In fact, Plavitski did not lie. He had an instinctive respect for property, and that young man, who was gaining it, roused in him a certain admiration, bordering on sympathy. He was not some poor relative who might ask for assistance; and therefore Plavitski, though for the moment he had no calculations in regard to Pan Stanislav, resolved to keep up relations with him. At the end of the visit he began to look around on the apartments.

“Thou hast fine lodgings!” said he.

That, too, was true. Pan Stanislav had a dwelling furnished as if he were about to marry. The furnishing itself caused him pleasure, for it gave a certain show of reality to his wishes.

Plavitski, looking around at the drawing-room, beyond which was another smaller apartment furnished very elegantly, inquired, —

“Why not marry?”

“I will when I can.”

Plavitski smiled cunningly, and, patting Pan Stanislav on the knee, began to repeat, —

“I know whom; I know whom.”

“Wit is needed in this case!” cried Pan Stanislav; “try to keep a secret from such a diplomat.”

“Ah ha! whom? The widow, the widow – whom?”

“Dear uncle!”

“Well? May God bless thee, as I bless thee! But now I am going, for it is time to dine, and in the evening there will be a concert in Dolina.”

“In company with Mashko?”

“No, with Marynia; but Mashko too will be there.”

“I will go also, with Bigiel.”

“Then we shall see each other. A mountain cannot meet a mountain, but a man may meet a man any time.”

“As Talleyrand said.”

“Till our next meeting, then!”

Pan Stanislav liked music at times; he had had no thought, though, of going to this concert; but when Plavitski mentioned it, a desire of seeing Mashko seized him. After Plavitski had gone, he thought some time yet whether to go or not; but it might be said that he did this for form's sake, since he knew in advance that he would not hold out and would go. Bigiel, who came to him for a business consultation in the afternoon, let himself be persuaded easily, and about four o'clock they were in Dolina.

The day, though in September, was so warm and pleasant that people had assembled numerously; the whole audience had a summer look. On all sides were bright-colored dresses, parasols, and youthful women, who had swarmed forth like many-colored butterflies, warmed by the sun. In this swarm, predestined for love, or already the object of that feeling and entertaining it, and assembled there for the pursuit of love and for music, Marynia also was to appear. Pan Stanislav remembered his student years, when he was enamoured of unknown maidens whom he sought in throngs of people, and made mistakes every moment, through similarity of hat, hair, and general appearance. And it happened now to him, to mistake at a distance a number of persons for Marynia, – persons more or less like her; and now, as before, whenever he said to himself, “This is she!” he felt those quivers at the heart, that disquiet which he had felt formerly. To-day, however, anger came on him, for this seemed to him ridiculous; and, besides, he felt that such eagerness for meetings and interviews, by occupying a man, and fixing his attention on one woman, increases the interest which she excites, and binds him all the more to her.

Meanwhile the orchestra began to play before he could find her for whom he was looking. It was necessary to sit down and listen, which he did unwillingly, secretly impatient with Bigiel, who listened with closed eyes. After the piece was ended, he saw at last Plavitski's shining cylinder, and his black mustaches; beyond him the profile of Marynia. Mashko sat third, calm, full of distinction, with the mien of an English lord. At times he talked to Marynia, and she turned to him, nodding slightly.

“The Plavitskis are there,” said Pan Stanislav. “We must greet them.”

“Where dost thou see them?”

“Over there, with Mashko.”

“True. Let us go.”

And they went.

Marynia, who liked Pani Bigiel, greeted Bigiel very cordially. She bowed to Pan Stanislaw not with such coolness as to arrest attention; but she talked with Bigiel, inquiring for the health of his wife and children. In answer, he invited her and her father very earnestly to visit them on the following week, at his place in the country.

“My wife will be happy, very happy!” repeated he. “Pani Emilia too will come.”

Marynia tried to refuse; but Plavitski, who sought entertainment, and who knew from his former stay in Warsaw that Bigiel lived well, accepted. It was settled that they would dine, and return in the evening. The trip was an easy one, for Bigiel’s villa was only one station distant from Warsaw.

“Meanwhile sit near us,” said Plavitski; “right here a number of seats are unoccupied.”

Pan Stanislaw had turned already to Marynia, —

“Have you news from Pani Emilia?”

“I wished to ask if you had,” answered she.

“I have not; but to-morrow I shall inquire about Litka by telegram.”

Here the conversation stopped. Bigiel took the seat next to Plavitski, Pan Stanislaw on the outside. Marynia turned to Mashko again, so that Pan Stanislaw could see only her profile, and that not completely. It seemed to him that she had grown somewhat thin, or at least her complexion had become paler and more delicate during her stay of a few weeks in Warsaw; hence her long eyelashes were more sharply defined and seemed to cast more shade. Her whole form had become more exquisite, as it were. The effect was heightened by a careful toilet and equally careful arrangement of hair, the style of which was different from what it had been. Formerly she wore her hair bound lower down, now it was dressed more in fashion; that is, high under her hat. Pan Stanislaw noted her elegant form at a glance, and admired with his whole soul the charm of it, which was evident in everything, even in the way in which she held her hands on her knees. She seemed very beautiful to him. He felt again with great force that if every man bears within him his own type of female charm, which is the measure of the impression that a given woman makes on him, Marynia is for him so near his type that she and it are almost identical, and, looking at her, he said to himself, —

“Oh to have such a wife, to have such a wife!”

But she turned to Mashko. Perhaps she turned even too often; and if Pan Stanislaw had preserved all his coolness of blood, he might have thought that she did so to annoy him, and that was the case, perhaps. Their conversation must have been animated, however, for, from time to time, a bright blush flashed over her face.

“But she is simply playing the coquette with him,” thought Pan Stanislaw, gritting his teeth. And he wanted absolutely to hear what they were saying; that was difficult, however. The audience, during the long intervals, was noisy enough. Separated by two persons from Marynia, Pan Stanislaw could not hear what she said; but after a new piece of music had been finished, he heard single words and opinions from Mashko, who had the habit of speaking with emphasis, so as to give greater weight to each word.

“I like him,” said Mashko. “Every man has a weakness; his weakness is money — I am grateful to him, for he persuaded me — to Kremen — I think, besides, that he is a sincere well-wisher of yours, for he has not spared — I confess, too, that he roused my curiosity.”

Marynia answered something with great vivacity; then Pan Stanislaw heard again the end of Mashko’s answer, —

“A character not formed yet, and intelligence perhaps less than energy, but a nature rather good.”

Pan Stanislaw understood perfectly that they were talking of him, and recognized Mashko’s tactics equally well. To judge, as it were, with reason and impartially, rather, to praise, or at least to recognize various qualities, and at the same time to strip them of every charm, was a method well known to the young advocate. Through this he raised himself to the exceptional, and, as it were, higher position of a judge. Pan Stanislaw knew, too, that Mashko spoke not so much with intent to

lower him, as to exalt himself, and that likely he would have said the same thing of every other young man in whom he might suspect a possible rival.

They were finally the tactics which Pan Stanislav himself might have used in a similar case; this did not hinder him, however, from considering them in Mashko as the acme of perversity, and he determined to pay him if the opportunity offered.

Toward the end of the concert he was able to see how far Mashko was assuming the rôle of suitor. When Marynia, wishing to tie her veil, had removed her gloves and they had fallen from her knees, Mashko raised them and held them, together with her parasol; at the same time he took her wrap from the side of the chair and placed it across his arm, so as to give it to her when they were leaving the garden, – in a word, he was entirely occupied with the lady, though he preserved the coolness and tact of a genuine man of society. He seemed also sure of himself and happy. In fact, Marynia, beyond the brief conversation with Bigiel, talked only with Mashko during the time when she was not listening to the music. When they moved toward the gate, she went with him and before her father. Again Pan Stanislav saw her smiling profile turning to Mashko. While talking, they looked into each other's eyes. Her face was vivacious, and her attention directed exclusively to what he was saying. She was, in fact, coquetting with Mashko, who saw it himself, without admitting, however, for a moment, in spite of his cleverness, that she could do so merely to worry Pan Stanislav.

Before the gate a carriage was waiting in which Mashko seated her and her father. He began then to take leave of them; but Marynia, inclining toward him, said, —

“How is this? Papa has invited you; is it not true, papa?”

“He was to come with us,” said Plavitski.

Mashko took his seat in the carriage, and they drove away, exchanging bows with Bigiel and Pan Stanislav. The two friends walked on a good while in silence; at last Pan Stanislav said, feigning calmness in his voice, —

“I am curious to know if they are betrothed.”

“I do not think they are,” said Bigiel; “but it is tending that way.”

“I too see that.”

“I thought that Mashko would seek property. But he is in love, and that may happen even to a man who is thinking only of a career. Mashko is in love. Besides, by taking her he will free himself from paying for Kremen. No, the business is not so bad as it seems, and the lady is very pretty; what is true, is true.”

And they were silent again. But Pan Stanislav felt so oppressed that he could not control himself.

“This thought that she will marry him is simply a torment to me. And this helplessness! I should prefer anything to such helplessness. I speak to thee openly. What a stupid and ridiculous rôle I have played in the whole affair!”

“Thou hast gone too far, – that may happen to any one; that thou wert her father's creditor is the fault of remarkable circumstances. Thy understanding of such matters differs utterly from his: thou and he are men from two different planets, hence the misunderstanding. Perhaps the affair was too sharply put by thee; but when I think it all over, too great mildness was not proper, even out of regard to Panna Marynia. By making too great abatements thou wouldst have made them for her, – is it not true? What would have resulted? This, that she helped her father in exploiting thee. No; it was for thee to finish the matter.”

Here the prudent Bigiel checked himself, thought a moment, and said, —

“And as to thy rôle, there is one escape: to withdraw completely, leave events to their course, and tell thyself that all is going according to thy idea.”

“How will it help me,” cried Pan Stanislav, violently, “to say that, when all is going against my idea? – and since I feel foolish, there is no help for it. How could there be? To begin with, I did all this myself, and now I want to undo it. All my life I have known what I wanted, but this time I have acted as if I didn't know.”

“There are passages in life to be forgotten.”

“That may be, my dear man, but meanwhile interest in life falls away. Is the question whether I am well or ill, rich or naked, the same to me now as it once was? I feel sick at the very thought of the future. Thou art established and connected with life; but what am I? There was a prospect; now there is none. That gives a great distaste for things.”

“But surely Panna Marynia is not the only woman on earth.”

“Why say that? She is the only one now; were there another, I should think of that other. What is the use of such talk? In this lies the question, in this the whole evil, – that she is the only one. A year from now a tile may fall on my head, or I may find another woman: what will happen tomorrow I know not; but that the deuce is taking me to-day, I do know. This is connected in me with other things too, of which to-day I do not care to speak. In external life it is necessary to eat bread in peace, – is not that true? In internal life it is the same. And this is an urgent affair; but I defer internal life till after marriage, for I understand that new conditions work out a new way of thinking, and moreover, I wish to finish one thing before beginning another. But everything grows involved, – not only involved, but vanishes. Barely has something appeared when it is gone. This is the case now. I live in uncertainty. I would prefer if they were already betrothed, for then all would end of itself.”

“I tell thee only this,” said Bigiel: “when I was a boy, I got a thorn in me sometimes; it pained much less to draw the thorn out myself than to let some one else draw it.”

“In that thou art right,” said Pan Stanislaw, who added after a while, “The thorn may be drawn if it has not gone in too deeply, and one can seize it. But what are comparisons! When a thorn is drawn out, nothing is lost; but my hope of the future is ruined.”

“That may be true; but if there is no help for it?”

“To accept that view is just what grieves the man who is not an imbecile.”

The conversation stopped here. At the moment of parting Pan Stanislaw said, —

“By the way, I should prefer not to be with you on Sunday.”

“Maybe thou wilt do well to stay away.”

CHAPTER XI

A surprise was waiting at home for Pan Stanislaw; he found the following despatch from Pani Emilia, "I leave here for home to-morrow evening; Litka is well." This return was unexpected, or at least uncommonly hurried; but since the despatch contained an assurance as to Litka's health, Pan Stanislaw understood that Pani Emilia was returning for the sole purpose of occupying herself with his affair, and his heart rose in gratitude. "There is an honest nature," said he to himself; "that is a friend." And with thankfulness there rose in his heart such hope, as if Pani Emilia had the ring of an enchantress, or a magic rod, with which she could change the heart of Panna Marynia in an instant. Pan Stanislaw did not know clearly how this could be done; but he knew that one person at least wished him well with deep sincerity, would speak for him, would justify him, would exalt his heart and character and diminish prejudices, which the course of events had accumulated against him. He calculated that Pani Emilia would be very persevering, and that for her this would be a question of duty. A man who is troubled by something is glad to find a person on whom to put responsibility. So in moments of rising bitterness, especially, it seemed to Pan Stanislaw that Pani Emilia was responsible for his relations with Marynia; for if she had not shown that letter from which Marynia's readiness to love him was evident, he would have been able to take his mind and heart from her. Perhaps this was true, since in the history of his feelings this letter did in fact play a leading part. It showed him how near happiness had been, almost secured; to what extent in her own mind Marynia had given him heart and soul. It is more difficult to throw away happiness which is not only desired, but begun; and, had it not been for that letter, Pan Stanislaw might have regretted the past less, forgotten it more easily, and reconciled himself to the position more readily. At present he thought it even her duty to help him with all her power. Finally, he understood that the affair would move, as it were, of itself; he hoped to see Marynia often, and in conditions most favorable, since he would see her in a house where he was loved and esteemed, and where like feelings must be communicated to each guest. All this strengthened Pan Stanislaw's hope; but it added new links to those which bound his thoughts to Marynia. Previously he had promised himself not to go to Bigiel's (on Sunday); now he changed his decision, thinking that, if only health permitted, Pani Emilia too would take part in the trip. Aside from reasons connected with Marynia, he rejoiced from his whole soul to see the beloved faces of Pani Emilia and Litka, who were his greatest attachments in life so far.

That same evening he wrote a few words to Plavitski touching the arrival, supposing that Marynia would be thankful for that information; he gave notice at Pani Emilia's, so that servants would be waiting in the morning with tea; and he hired a commodious carriage to take her and Litka to their home.

Next morning at five he was at the station; while waiting for the train, he began to run briskly along the platform to warm himself somewhat, since the morning was cool. Remote objects, the station buildings, and the cars standing on the near rails, were sunk in fog, which, very dense near the ground, became rose-colored and shining higher up, announcing that the day would be pleasant. Except officials and servants, there was no one on the platform yet, because of the early hour; gradually, however, people began to arrive. All at once two forms came out of the fog; in one of these Pan Stanislaw, with beating heart, recognized Marynia, who was hastening, with her maid, to greet Pani Emilia. As he had not expected the meeting, he was greatly confused at the first moment. She stopped short, as if astonished or troubled. After a while, however, he approached and extended his hand to her, —

"Good-day!" said he. "And truly it will be a good day for us both if our travellers arrive."

"Then is it not certain?" asked Marynia.

"Of course it is certain, unless something unlooked for prevents. I received a despatch yesterday, and sent the news to Pan Plavitski, thinking that you would be glad to hear it."

“Thank you. The surprise was so pleasant!”

“The best proof of that is that you have risen so early.”

“I have not lost the habit of early rising yet.”

“We came too soon. The train will arrive only in half an hour. Meanwhile I advise you to walk, for the morning is cool, though the day promises to be fine.”

“The fog is clearing,” said Marynia, raising her blue eyes, which to Pan Stanislaw seemed violet in the light of the morning.

“Do you wish to walk along the platform?”

“Thank you; I prefer to sit in the waiting-room.”

And, nodding, she went away. Pan Stanislaw began to fly with hurried steps along the platform. It was somewhat bitter to think that she would not remain; but he explained to himself that perhaps this was not proper, and, besides, the bitterness was overcome by the pleasant thought of how the coming of Pani Emilia would bring them nearer, and how many meetings it would cause. A certain wonderful solace and good-humor continued to rise in him. He thought of the violet eyes of Marynia, and her face made rosy by the coolness of the morning; he rushed past the windows of the hall in which she was sitting, and said to himself almost joyfully, —

“Ah, ha! sit there, hide thyself! I will find thee.” And he felt with greater force than ever how dear she might become to him, if she would be kind even in a small degree. Meanwhile bells sounded; and a few minutes later, in the fog, still dense at the earth, though the sky above was blue, appeared the dim outlines of the train, which, as it approached, became more clearly defined. The engine, puffing interrupted clumps of smoke, rolled in with decreasing movement, and, stopping, began with noise and hissing to belch forth under its front wheels the useless remnant of steam.

Pan Stanislaw sprang to the sleeping-car; the first face at the window was Litka’s, which at sight of him grew as radiant as if a sudden sunbeam had fallen on it. The little girl’s hands began to move joyously, beckoning to Pan Stanislaw, who was in the car in one moment.

“My dearest little kitten!” cried he, seizing Litka’s hand, “and hast thou slept; art thou well?”

“I am well; and we have come home. And we’ll be together – and good-day, Pan Stas!”

Right behind the little girl stood Pani Emilia, whose hand “Pan Stas” kissed very cordially; and he began to speak quickly, as people do at time of greeting, —

“Good day to the dear lady. I have a carriage. You can go at once. My servant will take your baggage; I ask only for the check. They are waiting for you at home with tea. Pray give the check. Panna Plavitski is here too.”

Panna Plavitski was waiting, in fact, outside the car; and she and Pani Emilia shook hands, with faces full of smiles. Litka looked for a moment at Marynia, as if hesitating; after a while, however, she threw herself on her neck with her usual cordiality.

“Marynia, thou wilt go with us to tea,” said Pani Emilia. “It is ready, and thou art fasting, of course.”

“Thou art tired, travelling all night.”

“From the boundary we slept as if killed; and when we woke, we had time to wash and dress. In every case we must drink tea. Thou wilt go with us?”

“I will, with the greatest pleasure.”

But Litka began to pull at her mother’s dress.

“Mamma, and Pan Stas.”

“But, naturally, Pan Stas too, – he thought of everything. Thanks to him, everything is ready. He must go with us, of course.”

“He must; he must!” cried Litka, turning to Pan Stanislaw, who answered, smiling, —

“Not he must; but he wants to.”

And after a moment all four took their places in the carriage. Pan Stanislaw was in excellent humor. Marynia was before him, and at his side little Litka. It seemed to him that the morning

brightness was entering him, and that better days were beginning. He felt that henceforth he would belong to an intimate circle of beings bound together by comradeship and friendship, and in that circle would be Marynia. Now she was sitting there before him, near his eye, and near the friendship which both felt for Pani Emilia and Litka. Meanwhile all four were talking joyously.

“What has happened, Emilka,” asked Marynia, “that thou hast come so soon?”

“Litka begged so every day to come home.”

“Dost not like to live abroad?” asked Pan Stanislaw.

“No.”

“Homesick for Warsaw?”

“Yes.”

“And for me? Now tell quickly, or it will be bad.”

Litka looked at her mother, at Marynia, and then at Pan Stanislaw; and at last she said, —

“And for Pan Stas too.”

“Take this for that!” said Pan Stanislaw, and he seized her little hand to kiss it; but she defended herself as she could. At last she hid her hand. He, turning to Marynia, and showing his sound white teeth, said, —

“As you see, we are always quarrelling; but we love each other.”

“That is the way generally,” answered Marynia.

And he, looking her straight and honestly in the eyes, said, —

“Oh that it were the way generally!”

Marynia blushed slightly and grew more serious, but said nothing, and began to converse with Pani Emilia.

Pan Stanislaw turned to Litka.

“But where is Professor Vaskovski? Has he gone to Italy?”

“No. He stopped at Chenstohova, and will come the day after to-morrow.”

“Is he well?”

“He is.”

Here the little girl looked at her friend, and said, —

“But Pan Stas has grown thin; hasn’t he, mamma?”

“Indeed he has,” answered Pani Emilia.

Pan Stanislaw was changed somewhat, for he had been sleeping badly, and the cause of that sleeplessness was sitting before him in the carriage. But he laid the blame on cares and labor in his business. Meanwhile they arrived at Pani Emilia’s.

When the lady went to greet her servants, Litka ran after her. Pan Stanislaw and Marynia remained alone in the dining-room.

“You have no nearer acquaintance here, I suppose, than Pani Emilia?” said Pan Stanislaw.

“None nearer; none so beloved.”

“In life kindness is needed, and she is very kind and well-wishing. I, for example, who have no family, can look on this as the house of a relative. Warsaw seems different to me when they are here.” Then he added, with a voice less firm, “This time I comfort myself also with their arrival, because there will be at last something mutual and harmonious between us.”

Here he looked at her, with a prayer in his eyes, as if he wished to say, “Give me a hand in conciliation; be kind to me, too, since a pleasant day has come to us.”

But she, just because she could not be for him altogether indifferent, went always farther in the direction of dislike. The more he showed cordial kindness, the more sympathetic he was, the more his action seemed to her unheard of, and the more offended she felt at heart.

Having a delicate nature, and being, besides, rather timid, and feeling really that a reply, if too ill-natured, might spoil the day’s harmony, she preferred to be silent; but he did not need an answer in words, for he read in her eyes as follows: The less you try to improve our relations, the better they

will be; and they will be best if most distant. His joy was quenched in one moment; anger took its place, and regret, still stronger than anger, – for it rose from that charm which nothing could conquer, and to which Pan Stanislaw yielded himself with the conviction, too, that the gulf between him and Marynia was in reality growing deeper each day. And now, looking on her sweet and kind face, he felt that she was as dear as she was lost irrecoverably.

The arrival of Litka put an end to that interval, grievous to him beyond description. The little girl ran in with great delight, her hair in disorder, a smile on her lips; but seeing them, she stopped suddenly, and looked now at one, now at the other, with her dark eyes. At last she sat down quietly at a table with tea. Her joyousness had vanished too, though Pan Stanislaw, confining the pain in his heart, strove to talk and be gladsome.

But he turned scarcely any attention to Marynia; he occupied himself only with Pani Emilia and Litka; and, wonderful thing! Marynia felt that as an additional bitterness. To the series of offences still another was added.

On the following day Pani Emilia and Litka were invited to tea in the evening at the Plavitskis'. Plavitski invited Pan Stanislaw too, but he did not go. And such is human nature that this again touched Marynia. Dislike, as well as love, demands an object. Involuntarily Marynia looked toward the door all the evening, till the hour struck in which it was certain that Pan Stanislaw would not come; then she began to coquet so with Mashko that she transfixed Pani Emilia with amazement.

CHAPTER XII

Mashko was a very clever man, but full of self-love; he had no reason, however, not to take the kindness which Marynia showed him in good earnest. The unequal degree of it he attributed a little to coquetting, a little to the changing disposition of the young lady; and though the latter filled him with a certain alarm, this alarm was not great enough to restrain him from taking a decisive step.

Bigiel divined the true state of affairs when he declared that Mashko was in love. Such was the case really. At first Panna Plavitski pleased him in a high degree; afterward, when he had thought the pros and cons over, he came to the conviction that the pros had prevailed. The young advocate valued property, it is true; but, gifted with great sobriety of mind, and understanding perfectly the conditions in which he found himself, he concluded that a very wealthy lady he could not find and would not get. Richly dowered young ladies were found either among the aristocracy of descent, – and for him their thresholds were too lofty, – or among the world of financiers, who sought connections with families bearing names more or less famous. Mashko knew perfectly that his painted bishops and armored men, whom Bukatski ridiculed, would not open bankers' safes to him. He understood that even if they had been less fantastic, his profession of advocate would itself be a certain *diminutio capitis* in the eyes of great financial whales. On the other hand, he had, in truth, a certain racial repugnance to that kind of connection; while maidens of good descent had the uncommon attraction which they have for parvenus generally.

Panna Plavitski had no dower, or at least a very insignificant one. In taking her, however, he would free himself from all obligations to the Plavitskis created by the purchase of Kremen. Secondly, by connecting himself with a good family, he would endeavor to bring in a whole group of noble clients, and this might be a very real profit; finally, through the family relations of Marynia, he might in time manage the business of a number, or a number of tens, of really wealthy families, – a thing which had long been the object of his efforts.

The Plavitskis, like all who are a little above middling country families, had indeed relatives whom they did not greatly recognize; they had also others who did not greatly recognize them. This, however, was done not so much from reasons of pride as involuntarily, by virtue of a certain social selection, through which people seek in society persons who are more or less in the same conditions of life as they themselves are. Great family festivals united such separated relatives temporarily; and Mashko not only found it agreeable to think that at his wedding there would be perfectly well-sounding names, but he foresaw various possible profits. The question would be merely one of cleverness to give people of this kind an idea that it would be well on their part, good and safe, to intrust their business to a man noted for energy, and, more than all, one of their own class, since he is a relative. That would be something like a dower given to a poor cousin. Mashko, taking note of his own qualities, hoped to force himself on them, and in time tower above them. He knew that this man or that would come at first to him for such counsel as he might find in conversation with an acquaintance, or a distant relative, who happened to understand various questions; later on, as the counsels proved good, he would come oftener, and at last put everything into the hands of the counsellor. Helping others in this fashion, he could himself sail out into broad waters, clear Kremen in time, advance to considerable property, throw aside at last legal pursuits, which he did not like, and which he considered only as a means of reaching his object, and fix himself finally in lofty spheres of society as an independent man, and at the same time a representative of superior landed property resting on a firm basis. He had foreseen all this, calculated and counted, before he determined to try for the hand of Panna Plavitski.

He had not foreseen, however, one thing; to wit, that he would fall in love to such a degree as he had. For the time this made him angry, for he judged that too strong a feeling was something opposed to the balance which a man of high society should preserve at all times. That balance was

one of his illusions. If he had had no need of forcing himself into that society, or had been born in it, he might have permitted himself to love to his heart's satisfaction.

In spite of all his keenness, he had not understood that one of the chief privileges of this society, which considers itself privileged, is freedom. For this reason he was not altogether content when his heart melted too much in presence of Marynia. But, on the other hand, the object toward which he strove grew identified the more in him with that personal happiness which was verging almost on intoxication.

These were new things for him, so new that the brightness of those unknown horizons blinded him. Mashko had arrived at thirty and some years of his life without knowing what rapture is. Now he understood what happiness and charms were described by that word, for he was enraptured with Marynia to the depth of his soul. Whenever Plavitski received him in his room, and she was in the adjoining one, Mashko was with her in thought to such a degree that hardly could he understand what the old man was saying.

When she entered, there rose in his heart feelings utterly unknown to him hitherto, – feelings tender and delicate, which made him a better man than he was usually. His blue eyes changed their ordinary steel and cold gleam to an expression of sweetness and delight; the freckles on his face, by which he called to mind Professor Vaskovski, became still more distinct; his whole form lost its marks of formality, and he passed his fingers through his light side whiskers, not like an English lord, but an ordinary love-stricken mortal. He rose at last so high that he wished not only his own good, but her good, evidently not understanding it otherwise than through him and in him.

He was so much in love that, if rejected, he might become dangerous, especially in view of his want of moral development, his great real energy, and lack of scruples. Till then he had not loved, and Marynia roused first in him all that was capable of loving. She was not a brilliant beauty; but she possessed in the highest degree the charm of womanliness, and that womanliness was the reason that she attracted energetic natures specially. In her delicate form there was something in common with a climbing plant; she had a calm face, clear eyes, and a mouth somewhat thoughtful, – all this, taken together, did not produce a mighty impression at the first glance, but after a time every man, even the most indifferent, saw that there was in her something peculiar, which made him remember that he had in his presence a woman who might be loved.

In so far as Mashko felt himself better than usual, and in reality was so during that epoch of his life, in that far had the spiritual level of Marynia sunk since the Plavitskis came to Warsaw. The sale of Kremen had deprived her of occupation and a moral basis of life. She lacked a lofty object. Besides, the course of events had accumulated in her bitterness and dissatisfaction, which turn always to the injury of the heart. Marynia felt this herself distinctly; and a few days after that evening when Pan Stanislav did not come to them, she began first to speak of this to Pani Emilia, when at twilight they were left by themselves in the drawing-room adjoining Litka's chamber.

"I see," said she, "that we are not so outspoken with each other as we used to be. I have wished to speak with thee openly, and I cannot bring myself to do so, for it has seemed to me that I am not worthy of thy friendship."

Pani Emilia brought her sweet face up to Marynia's head, and began to kiss her on the temples.

"Ai, thou Marynia, Marynia! What art thou saying, thou, always calm and thoughtful?"

"I say so, for in Kremen I was more worthy than I am now. Thou wilt not believe how attached I was to that corner. I had all my days occupied, and had some sort of wonderful hope that in time something very happy would come to me. To-day all that has passed; and I cannot find myself in this Warsaw, and, what is worse, I cannot find my former honesty. I saw how astonished thou wert because I was coquetting with Pan Mashko. Do not tell me that thou didst not see it. And dost thou think that I myself know why I acted so? It must be because I am worse, or from some anger at myself, at Pan Stanislav, at the whole world. I do not love Mashko; I will not marry him. Therefore I act dishonestly,

and with shame I confess it; but moments come in which I should like to do an intended injustice to some one. Thou shouldst break thy old friendship with me, for in truth I am other than I have been.”

Here tears began to roll down Marynia’s face, and Pani Emilia fell to quieting her and fondling her all the more; at last she said, —

“Pan Mashko is striving for thee most evidently; and I thought, I confess, that thou hadst the intention of accepting him. I tell thee now sincerely that that pained me, for he is not the man for thee; but, knowing thy love for Kremen, I admitted thy wish to return to it in this way.”

“At first I had such thoughts, it is true. I wished to persuade myself that Pan Mashko pleased me; I did not like to repulse him. It was a question with me of something else too, but it was a question also of Kremen. But I could not convince myself. I do not want even Kremen at such a price; but precisely in this lies the evil. For, in such a case, why am I leading Pan Mashko into error, why am I deluding him? Through simple dishonesty.”

“It is not well that thou art deluding him; but it seems to me that I understand whence that flows. From repugnance to some one else, and from the offence given by him. Is it not true? Console thyself, however, with this, that the evil is not beyond remedy; for thou mayst change thy action with Pan Mashko to-morrow. And, Marynia, it is needful to change it while there is time yet, while nothing is promised.”

“I know, Emilia; I understand that. But see, when I am with thee I feel as formerly, like an upright and honest woman; I understand, that not only a word binds, but conduct. And he may say that to me.”

“Then tell him that thou hast tried to convince thyself that thou wert in love with him, but could not. In every case, that is the only way.”

Silence followed; but both Marynia and Pani Emilia felt that they had not begun yet to talk of that which, if it did not concern both, concerned Pani Emilia most seriously. So, taking Marynia’s hands, she said, —

“Now confess, Marynia, thou art coquetting with Mashko because thou art offended by Pan Stanislaw?”

“That is true,” answered Marynia, in a low voice.

“But does not this mean that the impression of his visit to Kremen, and of thy first conversations with him, are not effaced yet?”

“Better if it were.”

Pani Emilia began to stroke her dark hair. “Thou wilt not believe how good, clever, and noble a man he is. For us he has some friendship. He has liked Litka always; this makes me grateful from my whole soul to him. But thou knowest what an unardent and lukewarm feeling friendship is usually. He in this regard even is exceptional. When Litka was sick in Reichenhall, wilt thou believe it, he brought a celebrated doctor from Monachium; but, not wishing to alarm us, he said that the doctor had come to another patient, and that we should take advantage of his presence. Think what care and kindness! He is extremely reliable, a man to be trusted; and he is energetic and just. There are intelligent men, but without energy; others have energy, but lack delicacy of heart. He unites one to the other. I forgot to tell thee that when Litka’s property was in danger, and when my husband’s brother set about saving it, he found the greatest aid in Pan Stanislaw. If Litka were grown up, I would give her to no one in the world with such confidence as to him. I could not even recount to you how much kindness we have experienced from him.”

“If as much as I have of evil, then very much.”

“Marynia, he did not intend that. If thou couldst but know how he suffers for his rashness, and how sincerely he acknowledges his fault touching thee.”

“He told me that himself,” answered Marynia. “I, my Emilka, have pondered much over this, — to tell the truth, I have not thought of another thing; and I cannot find that he is to blame. In Kremen he was so pleasant that it seemed to me — to thee alone will I say this; for to thee I have written it

already – that on the Sunday evening which he passed in our house I went to sleep with my head and heart so filled with him that I am ashamed to speak of it now. And I felt that one day longer, one friendly word more on his part, and I should love him for my lifetime. It seemed to me that he also – The next day he went away in anger. The fault was my father's; it was mine also. I was able to understand that; and dost remember the letter I wrote thee at Reichenhall? Precisely the same trust which thou hast in him, I too had. He went away; I myself do not know why I thought, that he would return, or would write to me. He did not return; he did not write. Something told me that he would not take away Kremen; he took it. And afterward – I know that Pan Mashko talked with him openly, and he urged Pan Mashko, and assured him that he was thinking of nothing himself. Oh, my Emilia! If it please thee, he is not to blame; but how much harm has he done to me! Through him I have lost not only a beloved corner in which I was working; but more, I have lost faith in life, in people, in this, – that better and nobler things in this world conquer the low and the evil. I have become worse. I tell thee sincerely that I cannot find myself. He had the right to act as he has acted, I admit that; I say so, and do not say that he is guilty. But he has broken some vital spring in me. There is no cure for that; it cannot be mended. How can it? What is it to me that a change rose in him afterward; that he regrets what he did; that he would be ready even to marry me? What is that to me, if I, who almost loved him, not only do not love him now, but must guard against repugnance? That is worse than if I did not care for him. I know what thy wish is; but life must be built on love, not on repugnance. How can I give my hand to him with that feeling of offence in my soul and with that regret, that through him, guilty or not guilty, so much has been lost to me? Thou thinkest that I do not see his charm; but what can I do, when the more I see him, the more I am repulsed, and if I had to choose I should choose Pan Mashko, though he is less worthy? To everything good which thou canst say of him I agree; but to everything I answer: I do not love him; I never will love him.”

Pani Emilia's eyes were filled with tears. “Poor Pan Stas,” said she, as if to herself. And after a moment of silence she asked, “And art thou not sorry for him?”

“I am sorry for him when I think of him as he was in Kremen; I am sorry for him when I do not see him. But from the moment that I see him, I feel nothing but – repulsion.”

“Yes; because thou knowest not how unhappy he was in Reichenhall, and now he is still more unhappy. He has no one in the world.”

“He has thy friendship, and he loves Litka.”

“My Marynia, that is something different. I am thankful to him from my whole soul for his attachment to Litka; but that is something different altogether, and thou knowest thyself that he loves thee a hundred times more than Litka.”

In the chamber it had grown dark already; but soon the servant brought in a lamp, and, placing it on the table, went out. By the lamplight Pani Emilia beheld a whitish form crouched on the sofa near the door which led to Litka's room.

“Who is there? Is that Litka?”

“I, mamma.”

In her voice there was something; Pani Emilia rose and went hurriedly toward her.

“When didst thou come out? What is the matter?”

“I feel so ill in some way.”

Pani Emilia sat down on the sofa, and, drawing the little girl up to her, saw tears in her eyes.

“Art thou crying, Litus? What is the matter?”

“Oh, so sad, so sad!”

And, inclining her head to her mother's shoulder, she began to cry. She was in reality sad, for she had learned that “Pan Stas” was more unhappy than in Reichenhall, and that he loves Marynia a hundred times more than her. That evening, when going to sleep and in her nightdress, she nestled up to her mother's ear and whispered, —

“Mamma, mamma, I have one very great sin on my conscience.”

“My poor little girl, what is troubling thee?”

She whispered in a still lower voice, “I do not like Panna Marynia.”

CHAPTER XIII

Pani Emilia, with Litka and Marynia, and with them Plavitski, were going to the Bigiels to dine at their country house, which stood in a forest at the distance of one hour and a half from the city. It was a fine day in September; there were myriads of glittering spider-webs in the air and on the stubbles. Leaves still fresh and green adhered to the trees yet; here and there, through leafy openings, were visible as it were fountains and bouquets of red and yellow. That pale and faded autumn brought to Marynia's mind her occupations in the country, the odor of grain in the barns, the fields with stacks, and the clear extent of the meadows, bounded way off somewhere on the horizon by stretches of alder. She felt a yearning for that life and that composure, in comparison with which the city, notwithstanding the labor which seethed in its every-day existence, but which Marynia was unable to appreciate, seemed to her idle and empty. She felt now that that life in which she had found her own worth and merit was lost beyond return to her, and on the other hand there was not outlined before her anything that could take its place and redeem it. She might, it is true, return by becoming Pani Mashko; but her heart was filled with bitterness at that thought alone, and Mashko, with his Warsaw self-confidence, with his freckles and his side whiskers, with his aping an English lord, seemed to her simply repulsive. Never had she felt withal a deeper feeling against Pan Stanislav, who had taken Kremen from her, and put Mashko in place of it. She was disgusted with Mashko at that moment, and it seemed to her that she hated Pan Stanislav. She saw before her life with her father on the pavement of Warsaw, without an object, without occupation, without an ideal, with regret for the past and in view of the past, and with emptiness in the future. For this reason that calm autumn day, instead of quieting her, filled her with bitterness and sorrow. On the whole, the journey was not joyous. Litka sat in gloom because "Pan Stas" was not with them. Pani Emilia gave all attention to her, fearing lest that gloomy feeling might be connected with her health. Plavitski alone was in genuine good-humor, especially at the beginning of the journey. In his buttoned frock-coat, with a red flower in the buttonhole, with a light-colored overcoat, and with mustaches as pointed as needles, he thought himself beautiful, and was sprightly, since rheumatism, which he felt at times, was not troubling him, by reason of the good weather; secondly, before him sat one of the most presentable women in Warsaw, who, as he supposed, would not remain indifferent to so many charms, or in any case would esteem them in so far as she would be able to note them. Let her say at least to herself, "Oh, what a charming man that must have been!" In the worst event, Plavitski would have been satisfied with such a retrospective recognition. In this hope he was really enchanting; for at one time he was lofty and fatherly, at another sportive, setting out with the theory that young men of the present do not know how to act politely with ladies. In politeness, as he told Pani Emilia, he went as far as mythology, which was true under a certain aspect, for he looked at her as would a satyr.

But all this was received with a faint smile and with too little attention, hence he grew offended at last and began to speak of something else; namely, that, thanks to the relations of his daughter, he would become acquainted with the bourgeoisie, of which he was glad, however, for hitherto he had seen that society only on the stage, but it is necessary in life to meet the most varied kinds of people, for it is possible to learn something from each of them. He added finally, that it is the duty of certain circles not to estrange the commonalty, but on the contrary to gather them in, and thus plant in them sound principles; therefore he who had striven always to fulfil his social duties did not halt before that mission. Here the noble expression of his face took on a certain style of pensiveness, and in that state of feeling they drove up to the villa of the Bigiels.

It stood in a forest of unmixed pines, in the neighborhood of other villas, among old trees, which in places were felled, in places standing in groups of a few, or of a few tens. They seemed to wonder a little what such a new house was doing among them in the old forest stillness; but they

hospitably shielded it from the wind; on fine days they surrounded it with balsamic air, permeated with the odor of gum and resin.

The Bigiels, with a row of children, came out to meet the guests. Pani Bigiel, who liked Marynia much, greeted her very cordially, desiring, besides, to prepossess her thereby for Pan Stanislav; she considered that the better Marynia understood how pleasant it might be for her among them, the less difficulty would she make.

Plavitski, who, during his previous stay with Marynia in Warsaw, had made the acquaintance of the Bigiels at Pani Emilia's, but had limited himself to leaving cards with them simply, showed himself now such a gracious prince as was possible only to the most refined man, who at the same time was fulfilling his mission of gathering in the "bourgeoisie."

"At the present day it is agreeable for any man to find himself under the roof of a person like you; but all the more for me, since my cousin, Polanyetski, has entered the career of commerce and is your partner."

"Polanyetski is a strong man," answered Bigiel, with directness, pressing the gloved hand of Plavitski.

The ladies retired for a moment to remove their hats; then, the air being quite warm, they returned to the veranda.

"Is Pan Stanislav not here yet?" inquired Pani Emilia.

"He has been here since morning," answered Bigiel; "but now he is visiting Pani Kraslavski. The place is near by," added he, turning to Marynia; "not even half a verst distant. There are summer residences everywhere about, and those ladies are our nearest neighbors."

"I remember Panna Terka Kraslavski since the time of the carnival," said Marynia. "She was always very pale."

"Oh, she is very pale yet. The past winter she spent in Pau."

Meanwhile the little Bigiels, who loved Litka wonderfully, drew her out to play in front of the house. The little girls showed her their gardens, made in the sand among the pines, in which gardens, to tell the truth, nothing would grow. These surveys were interrupted every little while by the girls, who stood on their toes and kissed Litka's cheeks; she, bending her beautiful flaxen head, returned these kisses with tenderness.

But the boys wanted their share as well. First, they stripped to the stalk the georgina at the house, gathering for Litka the most beautiful blossoms; then they disputed about this, – what play does Litka like; and they went to Pani Emilia for information. Edzio, who had the habit of speaking in a very loud voice, and closing his eyes at the same time, called out, —

"Please, Pani, I say that she likes ball better, only I don't know that you will let her play ball."

"Yes; if she will not run, for that hurts her."

"Oh, she will not, Pani; we will throw the ball so that it will go straight to her every time, then she will not run any. And if Yozio doesn't know how to throw that way, let her throw the ball."

"I want to play with her," said Yozio, pitifully. And at the very thought that he might be deprived of that pleasure, his mouth took the form of a horseshoe and began to quiver; but Litka anticipated his outburst of sorrow, saying, —

"I will throw to thee, Yozio; I'll throw to thee very often."

Yozio's eyes, already moist, began to smile at once.

"They will not hurt her," said Bigiel to Pani Emilia. "This is remarkable: the boys are what is called regular tearers; but with her they are wonderfully careful. It is Pan Stanislav who has trained them in this devotion to her."

"Such lovely children! there are few in the world like them," remarked Pani Emilia.

In a moment the children gathered in a group to arrange the play. In the middle of the group stood Litka, the oldest and the tallest; and though the little Bigiels were well-behaved children, she,

with her sweet, poetic face and features, almost over-refined, seemed, among those ruddy, round faces, like a being from another planet. Pani Bigiel turned attention to that first of all.

“Is she not a real queen?” asked she. “I say truly that never can I look at her sufficiently.”

“She is so noble in appearance,” added Bigiel.

And Pani Emilia looked at her only one with a glance in which there was a sea of love. The children ran apart now, and stood in a great circle forming, on the gray background of fallen pine needles, parti-colored spots, which seemed as small under the immense pines as colored mushrooms.

Marynia went from the veranda and stood near Litka, to assist her in catching the ball, for which it was necessary to run, and in that way save her from exertion.

On the broad forest road leading to the villa, Pan Stanislaw appeared at that moment. The children did not notice him at once; but he took in with a glance the veranda, as well as the space in front; and, seeing the bright robe of Marynia under a pine, he hastened his steps. Litka, knowing her mamma’s alarm at every more animated movement which she made, and, not wishing to disquiet her for anything, stood almost without stirring from her place, and caught on her club only those balls which came directly toward her. Marynia ran after all that went farther. By reason of that running, her hair was loosened so that she had to arrange it; and, at the moment when Pan Stanislaw was coming in at the gate, she stood bent backward somewhat and with arms raised to her head.

He did not take his eyes from her, and saw no one save her. She seemed to him on that broad space younger and smaller than usual, and therewith so maidenlike, so unapproachably attractive, so created for this, that a man should put his arms around her and press her to his bosom; she was so feminine, so much the dearest creature on earth, – that never till that moment had he felt with such force how he loved her.

At sight of him, the children threw down their balls and clubs, and ran with a cry to meet him. The amusement was stopped. Litka at the first instant sprang also toward Pan Stas, but restrained herself on a sudden, and looked with her great eyes, now toward him, now toward Marynia.

“But thou art not rushing to meet Pan Polanyetski,” said Marynia.

“No.”

“Why, Litus?”

“Because – ”

And her cheeks flushed somewhat, though the child did not know and did not dare to express her thought, which might be expressed in the words: “Because he does not love me any more; he loves only thee, and looks only at thee.”

But he approached, freeing himself from the children, and repeating, —

“Do not hang on, little rogues, or I’ll throw you.”

And he extended his hand to Marynia, looking at her in the eyes, with an entreaty for a pleasant smile and a greeting even a whit less indifferent than usual; then he turned to Litka, —

“But is the dearest kitten well?”

At sight of him, and under the influence of his voice, she, forgetting all the suffering of her little heart, gave him both hands, saying, —

“Oh, yes, well; but yesterday Pan Stas did not come to us, and it was sad. To-day I’ll take Pan Stas to mamma to give account.”

After a while all were on the veranda.

“How are Pani Kraslavski and her daughter?” asked Pani Emilia.

“They are well, and are coming here after dinner,” answered Pan Stanislaw.

Just before dinner Professor Vaskovski came, bringing Bukatski, who had returned to Warsaw the evening before. His intimacy with the Bigiels permitted him to come without being invited; and the presence of Pani Emilia was too great a temptation to be resisted. He met her, however, without a trace of sentiment, in his usual jesting fashion; she was glad to see him, for he amused her with his strange and original way of uttering ideas.

“Were you not going to Monachium and Italy?” asked she, when they had sat down to dinner.

“Yes; but I forgot a card-knife in Warsaw, and came back to get it.”

“Oh, that was a weighty reason.”

“It always makes me impatient that people do everything from weighty reasons. What privilege have weighty reasons, that every man must accommodate himself to them? Besides, I gave, without wishing it, the last services to a friend, for yesterday I was at the funeral of Lisovich.”

“What! that thin little sportsman?” inquired Bigiel.

“The same. And imagine that to this moment I cannot escape astonishment that a man who played the jester all his life could bring himself to such a serious thing as death. Simply I cannot recognize my Lisovich. At every step a man meets disappointment.”

“But,” said Pan Stanislaw, “Pani Kraslavski told me that Ploshovski, he with whom all the women of Warsaw were in love, shot himself in Rome.”

“He was a relative of mine,” said Plavitski.

This news affected Pani Emilia mainly. She scarcely knew Ploshovski himself, but she had often seen his aunt, for whom her husband’s elder brother was agent. She knew also how blindly this aunt loved her sister’s son.

“My God, what a misfortune!” said she. “But is it true? A young man so capable, so wealthy – poor Panna Ploshovski!”

“And such a great estate will be without an heir,” added Bigiel. “I know their property, for it is near Warsaw. Old Panna Ploshovski had two relatives: Pani Krovitski, though she was distant, and Leo Ploshovski, who was nearer. Neither are living now.”

These words moved Plavitski again. He was indeed some sort of a distant relative of Panna Ploshovski, and even had seen her two or three times in his life; but there remained to him merely the remembrance of fear, for she had told him the bitter truth each time without circumlocution, or rather, speaking simply, had scolded him as much as he could hold. For this reason, in the further course of his life he avoided her most carefully, and all communication between them was stopped, though on occasions he liked to say a word in society of his relationship with a family so well known and important. He belonged to that category of people, numerous in our country, who are convinced that the Lord God created for their special use an easy road to fortune through inheritance, and who consider every hope of that kind as certain. He cast a solemn glance, therefore, on the assembly, and said, —

“Perhaps, too, Providence decided that those properties should pass to other hands, which are able to make better use of them.”

“I met Ploshovski abroad once,” said Pan Stanislaw; “and on me he made the impression of a man altogether uncommon. I remember him perfectly.”

“He was so brilliant and sympathetic,” added Pani Bigiel.

“May God show him mercy!” said Professor Vaskovski. “I too knew him; he was a genuine Aryan.”

“Azoryan,” said Plavitski.

“Aryan,” repeated the professor.

“Azoryan,” corrected Plavitski, with emphasis and dignity.

And the two old men looked at each other with astonishment, neither knowing what the other wanted, and this to the great delight of Bukatski, who, raising his monocle, said, —

“How is that, Aryan or Azoryan?”

Pan Stanislaw put an end to the misunderstanding by explaining that Azorya was the name of the family escutcheon of the Ploshovskis, that therefore it was possible to be at once an Aryan and an Azoryan; to which Plavitski agreed unwillingly, making the parenthetical remark that whoso bears a decent name, need not be ashamed of it, nor modify it.

Bukatski, turning to Pani Emilia, began to converse in his usual frigid tone, —

“One kind of suicide alone do I consider justifiable, suicide for love; therefore I am persuading myself for a number of years to it, but always in vain.”

“They say that suicide is cowardice,” put in Marynia.

“This is a reason too why I do not take my life: I am excessively brave.”

“Let us not speak of death, but of life,” said Bigiel, “and of that which is best in it, health. To the health of Pani Emilia!”

“And Litka,” added Pan Stanislaw.

Then he turned to Marynia and said, “To the health of our mutual friends!”

“Most willingly,” answered Marynia.

Then he lowered his voice and continued, “For see, I consider them not only as friends of mine, but also – how is it to be expressed? – as advocates. Litka is a child yet, but Pani Emilia knows to whom friendship may be offered. Therefore if a certain person had a prejudice against me, even justly; if I had acted with that person not precisely as I should, or simply ill, and if that person knew me to be suffering from my act, – that person ought to think that I am not the worst of men, since Pani Emilia has sincere good-will for me.”

Marynia was confused at once; she was sorry for him. He finished in a still lower voice, —

“But in truth I am suffering. This is a great question for me.”

Before she had answered, Plavitski raised a health to Pani Bigiel, and made a whole speech, the substance of which was that the Queen of Creation is no other than woman; therefore all heads should incline before woman, as the queen, and, for this reason, he had bowed down all his life before woman in general, and at present he bowed before Pani Bigiel in particular.

Pan Stanislaw from his soul wished him to choke, for he felt that he might have received some kind word from Marynia, and he felt that the moment had passed. In fact, Marynia went to embrace Pani Bigiel; on her return she did not resume the interrupted conversation, and he dared not ask her directly for an answer.

Immediately after dinner came Pani and Panna Kraslavski: the mother, a woman about fifty years old, animated, self-confident, talkative; the daughter, the complete opposite of her mother, formal, dry, cold, pronouncing “tek,” instead of “tak,” but for the rest with a full, though pale face, reminding one somewhat of the faces of Holbein’s Madonnas.

Pan Stanislaw began out of malice to entertain her; but, looking from time to time at the fresh face and blue eyes of Marynia, he said to himself, “If thou hadst given even one kind word! thou, – thou, the pitiless.” And he grew more and more angry, so that when Panna Kraslavski said “memme” instead of “mamma,” he inquired harshly, —

“Who is that?”

“Memme,” however, displayed her whole supply of facts, or rather suppositions, concerning the suicide of Ploshovski.

“Imagine,” said she, with warmth, “it came to my head at once that he shot himself because of the death of Pani Krovitski. Lord light her soul! she was a coquette, and I never liked her. She coquetted with him so that I was afraid to take Terka to any place where they were together, because her conduct was simply a bad example for such a young girl. What is true, is true! Lord light her soul! Terka, too, had no sympathy for her.”

“Ah, Pani,” said Pani Emilia, “I have always heard that she was an angel.”

And Bukatski, who had never seen Pani Krovitski in his life, turned to Pani Kraslavski and said phlegmatically, —

“Madame, *je vous donne ma parole d’honneur* that she was an archangel.”

Pani Kraslavski was silent a moment, not knowing what to answer; then, flushing up, she would have answered something sharp, were it not that Bukatski, as a man of wealth, might in a given event be a good match for Terka. Pan Stanislaw enjoyed the same consideration in her eyes; and for these

two exclusively she kept up summer relations with the Bigiels, whom she did not recognize when they met her by chance on the street.

“With gentlemen,” said she, “every presentable woman is an angel or an archangel. I do not like this, even when they say it to me about Terka. Pani Krovitski might be a good person, but she had no tact; that is the whole question.”

In this way conversation about Ploshovski dropped, the more since the attention of Pani Kraslavski was turned exclusively to Pan Stanislav, who was entertaining Panna Terka. He was entertaining her a little out of anger at himself, a little out of anger at Marynia, and he tried to convince himself that it was pleasant for him near her; he tried even to find in her a charm, and discovered that her neck was too slender and her eyes as it were quenched eyes, which grew lively and turned inquiringly at him when there was no place for a question. He observed, too, that she might be a quiet despot, for when the mother began to talk too loudly, Panna Terka put her glasses to her eyes and looked at her attentively; and under the influence of that look the mother lowered her voice, or grew silent altogether. In general, Panna Terka annoyed him immensely; and if he occupied himself more with her than he ever had before, he did so from sheer desperation, to rouse at least a shade of jealousy in Marynia. Even people of sound sense grasp at such vain methods when the misery of their feelings presses them too keenly. These methods produce usually results opposite to those intended, for they increase the difficulty of subsequent approach and explanations; besides, they merely strengthen the feeling cherished in the heart of the person using them. Toward the end Pan Stanislav longed so much for Marynia that he would have agreed to listen even to an unpleasant word from her, if he could only approach her and speak; and still it seemed to him more difficult now than an hour before. He drew a deep breath when the visit was over, and the guests were preparing to go. Before that, however, Litka approached her mother, and, putting her arms around her neck, whispered. Pani Emilia nodded, and then approached Pan Stanislav, —

“Pan Stanislav,” said she, “if you do not think of spending the night here, ride with us. Marynia and I will take Litka between us, and there will be room enough.”

“Very well. I cannot pass the night here; and I am very thankful,” answered he; and, divining easily who the author of this plan was, he turned to Litka and said, —

“Thou, my best little kitten, thou.”

She, holding to her mother’s dress, raised to him her eyes, half sad, half delighted, asking quietly, —

“Is that good, Pan Stas?”

A few minutes later they started. After a fine day there came a night still finer, a little cool, but all bright and silvery from the moon. Pan Stanislav, for whom the day had passed grievously and in vain, breathed now with full breast, and felt almost happy, having before him two beings whom he loved very deeply, and one whom he loved beyond everything on earth. By the light of the moon he saw her face, and it seemed to him mild and peaceful. He thought that Marynia’s feelings must be like her face in that moment; that perhaps her dislike of him was softening amid that general quiet.

Litka dropped into the depth of the seat, and appeared to be sleeping. Pan Stanislav threw a shawl, taken from Pani Emilia, over her feet, and they rode on a while in silence.

Pani Emilia began to speak of Ploshovski, the news of whose death had impressed her deeply.

“There is hidden in all that some unusually sad drama,” said Pan Stanislav; “and Pani Kraslavski may be right in some small degree when she insists that these two deaths are connected.”

“There is in suicide,” said Marynia, “this ghastly thing, that one feels bound to condemn it; and while condemning there is an impression that there should be no sympathy for the misfortune.”

“Sympathy,” answered Pan Stanislav, “should be had for those who have feeling yet, — hence for the living.”

The conversation ceased, and they went on again for some time in silence. After a while Pan Stanislav pointed to the lights in the windows of a house standing in the depth of a forest park, and said, —

“That is Pani Kraslavski’s villa.”

“I cannot forgive her for what she said of that unfortunate Pani Krovitski,” said Pani Emilia.

“That is simply a cruel woman,” added Pan Stanislav; “but do you know why? It is because of her daughter. She looks on the whole world as a background which she would like to make as black as possible, so that Panna Terka might be reflected on it the more brightly. Perhaps the mother had designs sometime on Ploshovski; perhaps she considered Pani Krovitski a hindrance, — hence her hatred.”

“That is a nice young lady,” said Marynia.

“There are persons for whom behind the world of social forms begins another and far wider world; for her nothing begins there, or rather everything ends. She is simply an automaton, in whom the heart beats only when her mother winds it with a key. For that matter, there are in society very many such young ladies; and even those who give themselves out for something different are in reality just like her. It is the eternal history of Galatea. Would you believe, ladies, that a couple of years since an acquaintance of mine, a young doctor, fell in love to distraction with that puppet, that quenched candle. Twice he proposed, and twice he was rejected; for those ladies looked higher. He joined the Holland service afterwards, and died there somewhere, with the fever doubtless; for at first he wrote to me inquiring about his automaton, and later on those letters ceased to come.”

“Does she know of this?”

“She does; for as often as I see her, I speak of him. And what is characteristic is this, — that the memory of him does not ruffle her composure for an instant. She speaks of him as of any one else. If he expected from her even a posthumous sorrow, he was deceived in that also. I must show you, ladies, sometime, one of his letters. I strove to explain to him her feeling; he answered me, ‘I estimate her coolly, but I cannot tear my soul from her.’ He was a sceptic, a positive man, a child of the age; but it seems that feeling makes sport of all philosophies and tendencies. Everything passes; but feeling was, is, and will be. Besides, he said to me once, ‘I would rather be unhappy with her than happy with another.’ What is to be said in this case? The man looked at things soundly, but could not tear his soul away, — and that was the end of it.”

This conversation ended also. They came out now on to a road planted with chestnut-trees, the trunks of which seemed rosy in the light of the carriage lamps.

“But if any one has misfortune, he must endure it,” said Pan Stanislav, following evidently the course of his own thoughts.

Meanwhile Pani Emilia bent over Litka, —

“Art sleeping, child?” inquired she.

“No, mamma,” answered Litka.

CHAPTER XIV

"I have never run after wealth," said Plavitski; "but if Providence in its inscrutable decrees has directed that even a part of that great fortune should come to our hands, I shall not cross its path. Of this not much will come to me. Soon I shall need four planks and the silent tear of my child, for whom I have lived; but here it is a question of Marynia."

"I would turn your attention to this," said Mashko, coldly, — "that, first of all, those expectations are very uncertain."

"But is it right not to take them into consideration?"

"Secondly, that Panna Ploshovski is living yet."

"But sawdust is dropping out of the old woman. She is as shrivelled as a mushroom!"

"Thirdly, she may leave her property for public purposes."

"But is it not possible to dispute such a will?"

"Fourthly, your relationship is immensely distant. In the same way all people in Poland are related to one another."

"She has no nearer relatives."

"But Polanyetski is your relative."

"No. God knows he is not! He is a relative of my first wife, not mine."

"And Bukatski?"

"Give me peace! Bukatski is a cousin of my brother-in-law's wife."

"Have you no other relatives?"

"The Gantovskis claim us, as you know. People say that which flatters them. But there is no need of reckoning with the Gantovskis."

Mashko presented difficulties purposely, so as to show afterward a small margin of hope, therefore he said, —

"With us people are very greedy for inheritances; and let any inheritance be in sight, they fly together from all sides, as sparrows fly to wheat. Everything in such cases depends on this: who claims first, what he claims, and finally through whom he claims. Remember that an energetic man, acquainted with affairs, may make something out of nothing; while, on the other hand, a man without energy or acquaintance with business, even if he has a good basis of action, may effect nothing."

"I know this from experience. All my life I have had business up to this." Here Plavitski drew his hand across his throat.

"Besides, you may become the plaything of advocates," added Mashko, "and be exploited without limit."

"In such a case I could count on your personal friendship for us."

"And you would not be deceived," answered Mashko, with importance. "Both for you and Panna Marynia I have friendship as profound as if you belonged to my family."

"I thank you in the name of the orphan," answered Plavitski; and emotion did not let him speak further.

Mashko put on dignity, and said, "But if you wish me to defend your rights, both in this matter, which, as I said, may prove illusive, and in other matters, then give me those rights." Here the young advocate seized Plavitski's hand, —

"Respected sir," continued he, "you will divine that of which I wish to speak; therefore hear me to the end patiently."

He lowered his voice; and although there was no one in the room, he began to speak almost in a whisper. He spoke with force, with dignity, and at the same time with great self-command, as befitted a man who never forgot who he was nor what he offered. Plavitski closed his eyes at moments; at moments he pressed Mashko's hand; finally, at the end of the conference, he said, —

“Come to the drawing-room; I will send in Marynia. I know not what she will say to you; in every case, let that come which God wills. I have at all times known your value; now I esteem you still more – and here!”

The arms of Plavitski opened wide, and Mashko bent toward them, repeating, not without emotion, but always with lofty dignity, —

“I thank, I thank – ”

After a while he found himself in the drawing-room.

Marynia appeared with a face which had grown very pale; but she was calm. Mashko pushed a chair toward her, seated himself in another, and began, —

“I am here by the approval of your father. My words can tell you nothing beyond what my silence has told already, and which you have divined. But since the moment has come in which I should mention my feelings explicitly, I do this then with all confidence in your heart and character. I am a man who loves you, on whom you may lean; therefore I put in your hands my life, and I beg you from the bottom of my heart to consent to go with me.”

Marynia was silent for a moment, as if seeking words, then she said, —

“I ought to answer you clearly and sincerely. This confession is for me very difficult; but I do not wish such a man as you to deceive himself. I have not loved you; I do not love you, and I will not be your wife, even should it come to me never to be any one’s.”

Then a still more prolonged silence followed. The spots on Mashko’s face assumed a deeper hue, and his eyes cast cold steel gleams.

“This answer,” said he, “is as decided as it is painful to me and unexpected. But will you not give yourself a few days to consider, instead of rejecting me decisively at this moment?”

“You have said that I divined your feelings; I had time then to make my decision, and the answer which I gave you, I give after thorough reflection.”

Mashko’s voice became dry and sharp now, —

“Do you think that by virtue of your bearing with me, I had not the right to make such a proposal?”

And he was sure in that moment that Marynia would answer that he understood her bearing incorrectly, that there was nothing in it authorizing him to entertain any hope, – in one word, that she would seek the crooked road taken usually by coquettes who are forced to redeem their coquetry by lying; but she raised her eyes to him and said, —

“My conduct with you has not been at times what it should have been; I confess my fault, and with my whole soul I beg pardon for it.”

Mashko was silent. A woman who evades rouses contempt; a woman who recognizes her fault dashes the weapon from the hand of every opponent in whose nature, or even in whose education, there lies the least spark of knightly feeling. Besides this, there is one final method of moving the heart of a woman in such a ease, and that is to overlook her fault magnanimously. Mashko, though he saw before him a precipice, understood this, and determined to lay everything on this last card. Every nerve in him quivered from anger and offended self-love; but he mastered himself, took his hat, and, approaching Marynia, raised her hand to his lips.

“I knew that you loved Kremen,” said he; “and I bought it for one purpose only, to lay it at your feet. I see that I went by a mistaken road, and I withdraw, though I do so with endless sorrow; I beg you to remember that. Fault on your part there has not been, and is not. Your peace is dearer to me than my own happiness; I beg you, therefore, as an only favor, not to reproach yourself. And now farewell.”

And he went out.

She sat there motionless a long time, with a pale face and a feeling of oppression in her soul. She had not expected to find in him so many noble feelings. Besides, the following thought came to her head, “That one took Kremen from me to save his own; this one bought it to return it to me.” And

never before had Pan Stanislav been so ruined in her thoughts. At that moment she did not remember that Mashko had bought Kremen, not from Pan Stanislav, but from her father; second, that he had bought it profitably; third, that though he wished to return it, he intended to take it again with her hand, thus freeing himself from the payments which weighed on him; and finally, to take the matter as it was in reality, neither Pan Stanislav nor any one else had taken Kremen from her, – Plavitski had sold it because he was willing and found a purchaser. But at that moment she looked on the matter in woman fashion, and compared Mashko with Pan Stanislav, exalting the former beyond measure, and condemning the latter beyond his deserts. Mashko's action touched her so much that if she had not felt for him simply a repulsion, she would have called him back. For a while it seemed to her even that she ought to do so, but strength failed her.

She did not know either that Mashko went down the stairs with rage and despair in his soul; in fact, a precipice had opened before him. All his calculations had deceived him: the woman whom he loved really did not want him, and rejected him; and though she had striven to spare him in words, he felt humbled as never before. Whatever he had undertaken in life hitherto, he had carried through always with a feeling of his own power and reason, with an unshaken certainty of success. Marynia's refusal had taken that certainty from him. For the first time he doubted himself; for the first time he had a feeling that his star was beginning to pale, and that perhaps an epoch of defeats was beginning for him on all fields on which he had acted hitherto. That epoch had begun even. Mashko had bought Kremen on conditions exceptionally profitable, but it was too large an estate for his means. If Marynia had not rejected him, he would have been able to manage; he would not have needed to think of the life annuity for Plavitski, or the sum which, according to agreement, came to Marynia for Magyerovka. At present he had to pay Marynia, Pan Stanislav, and the debts on Kremen, which must be paid as soon as possible, for, by reason of usurious interest, they were increasing day by day, and threatening utter ruin. For all this he had only credit, hitherto unshaken, it is true, but strained like a chord; Mashko felt that, if that chord should ever snap, he would be ruined beyond remedy.

Hence at moments, besides sorrow for Marynia, besides the pain which a man feels after the loss of happiness, anger measureless, almost mad, bore him away, and also an unbridled desire for revenge. Therefore, when he was entering his residence, he muttered through his set teeth, —

“If thou do not become my wife, I'll not forgive thee for what thou hast done to me; if thou become my wife, I'll not forgive thee either.”

Meanwhile Plavitski entered the room in which Marynia was sitting, and said, —

“Thou hast refused him, or he would have come to me before going.”

“I have, papa.”

“Without hope for the future?”

“Without hope. I respect him as no one in the world, but I gave him no hope.”

“What did he answer?”

“Everything that such a high-minded person could answer.”

“A new misfortune. Who knows if thou hast not deprived me of a morsel of bread in my old age? But I knew that no thought of this would come to thee.”

“I could not act otherwise; I could not.”

“I have no wish to force thee; and I go to offer my sufferings there where every tear of an old man is counted.”

And he went to Lour's to look at men playing billiards. He would have consented to Mashko; but at the root of the matter he did not count him a very brilliant match, and, thinking that Marynia might do better, he did not trouble himself too much over what had happened.

Half an hour later Marynia ran in to Pani Emilia's.

“One weight at least has fallen from my heart,” began she. “I refused Pan Mashko to-day decisively. I am sorry for him; he acted with me as nobly and delicately as only such a man could act; and if I had for him even a small spark of feeling, I would return to him to-day.”

Here she repeated the whole conversation with Mashko. Even Pani Emilia could not reproach him with anything; she could not refuse a certain admiration, though she had blamed Mashko for a violent character, and had not expected that, in such a grievous moment for himself, he would be able to show such moderation and nobleness. But Marynia said, —

“My Emilka, I know thy friendship for Pan Stanislav, but judge these two men by their acts, not their words, and compare them.”

“Never shall I compare them,” answered Pani Emilia, “comparison is impossible in this case. For me, Pan Stanislav is a nature a hundred times loftier than Mashko, but thou judgest him unjustly. Thou, Marynia, hast no right to say, ‘One took Kremen from me; the other wished to give it back.’ Such was not the case. Pan Stanislav did not take it from thee at any time; but to-day, if he could, he would return it with all his heart. Prepossession is talking through thee.”

“Not prepossession, but reality, which nothing can change.”

Pani Emilia seated Marynia before her, and said, “By all means, Marynia, prepossession, and I will tell thee why. Thou art not indifferent to Pan Stanislav now.”

Marynia quivered as if some one had touched a wound which was paining her; and after a while she replied, with changed voice, —

“Pan Stanislav is not indifferent to me; thou art right. Everything which in me could be sympathy for him has turned to dislike; and hear, Emilka, what I will tell thee. If I had to choose between those two men, I should choose Mashko without hesitation.”

Pani Emilia dropped her head; after a while Marynia’s arms were around her neck.

“What suffering for me, that I cause thee such pain! but I must tell truth. I know that in the end thou, too, wilt cease to love me, and I shall be all alone in the world.”

And really something like that had begun. The young women parted with embraces and kisses; but still, when they found themselves far from each other, both felt that something between them had snapped, and that their mutual relations would not be so cordial as hitherto.

Pani Emilia hesitated for a number of days whether to repeat Marynia’s words to Pan Stanislav; but he begged her so urgently for the whole truth that at last she thought it necessary, and that she would better tell it. When all had been told, he said, —

“I thank you. If Panna Plavitski feels contempt for me, I must endure it; I cannot, however, endure this, — that I should begin to despise myself. As it is, I have gone too far. My dear lady, you know that if I have done her a wrong, I have tried to correct it, and gain her forgiveness. I do not feel bound to further duties. I shall have grievous moments; I do not hide that from you. But I have not been an imbecile, and am not; I shall be able to bring myself to this, — I shall throw all my feelings for Panna Plavitski through the window, as I would something not needed in my chamber, I promise that sacredly.”

He went home filled with will and energy. It seemed to him that he could take that feeling and break it as he might break a cane across his knee. This impulse lasted a number of days. During that time he did not show himself anywhere, except at his office, where he talked with Bigiel of business exclusively. He worked from morning till evening and did not permit himself even to think about Marynia in the daytime.

But he could not guard himself from sleepless nights. Then came to him the clear feeling that Marynia might love him, that she would be the best wife for him, that he would be happy with her as never with any one else, and that he would love her as his highest good. The regret born of these thoughts filled his whole existence, and did not leave him any more, so that sorrow was consuming his life and his health, as rust consumes iron. Pan Stanislav began to grow thin; he saw that the destruction of a feeling gives one sure result, — the destruction of happiness. Never had he seen such a void before him, and never had he felt, with equal force, that nothing would fill it. He saw, too, that it was possible to love a woman not as she is, but as she might be; therefore his heart-sickness was beyond measure.

But, having great power over himself, he avoided Marynia. He knew always when she was to be at Pani Emilia's, and then he confined himself at home.

It was only when Litka fell ill again that he began to visit Pani Emilia daily, passing hours with the sick child, whom Marynia attended also.

CHAPTER XV

But poor Litka, after a new attack, which was more terrible than any preceding it, could not recover. She spent days now lying on a long chair in the drawing-room; for at her request the doctor and Pani Emilia had agreed not to keep her in bed the whole time. She liked also to have Pan Stanislaw sitting near her; and she spoke to him and her mother about everything that passed through her mind. With Marynia she was silent usually; but at times she looked at her long, and then raised her eyes to the ceiling, as if wishing to think out a thought, and give herself an account of something. More than once these meditations took place when she was left alone with her mother. On a certain afternoon she woke as if from a dream, and turning to her mother, said, —

“Mamma, sit near me here on the sofa.”

Pani Emilia sat down; the child put her arms around her neck, and, resting her head on her shoulder, began to speak in a caressing voice, which was somewhat enfeebled.

“I wanted to ask mamma one thing, but I do not know how to ask it.”

“What is thy wish, my dear child?”

Litka was silent a moment, collecting her thoughts; then she said, —

“If we love some one, mamma, what is it?”

“If we love some one, Litus?”

Pani Emilia repeated the question, not understanding well at first what the little girl was asking, but she did not know how to inquire more precisely.

“Then what is it, mamma?”

“It is this, — we wish that one to be well, just as I wish thee to be well.”

“And what more?”

“And we want that person to be happy, want it to be pleasant in the world for that person, and are glad to suffer for that person when in trouble.”

“And what more?”

“To have that one always with us, as thou art with me; and we want that one to love us, as thou lovest me.”

“I understand now,” said Litka, after a moment’s thought; “and I think myself that that is true, — that it is that way.”

“How, kitten?”

“See, mamma, when I was in Reichenhall, mamma remembers? at Thumsee I heard that Pan Stas loves Panna Marynia; and now I know that he must be unhappy, though he never says so.”

Pani Emilia, fearing emotion for Litka, said, —

“Does not this talk make thee tired, kitten?”

“Oh, no, not a bit, not a bit! I understand now: he wants her to love him, and she does not love him; and he wants her to be near him always, but she lives with her father, and she will not marry him.”

“Marry him?”

“Marry him. And he is suffering from that, mamma; isn’t it true?”

“True, my child.”

“Yes, I know all that; and she would marry him if she loved him?”

“Certainly, kitten; he is such a kind man.”

“Now I know.”

The little girl closed her eyes, and Pani Emilia thought for a while that she was sleeping; but after a time she began to inquire again, —

“And if he married Marynia, would he cease to love us?”

“No, Litus; he would love us always just the same.”

“But would he love Marynia?”

“Marynia would be nearer to him than we. Why dost thou ask about this so, thou kitten?”

“Is it wrong?”

“No, there is nothing wrong in it, nothing at all; only I am afraid that thou wilt weary thyself.”

“Oh, no! I am always thinking of Pan Stas anyhow. But mamma mustn’t tell Marynia about this.”

With these words ended the conversation, after which Litka held silence for a number of days, only she looked more persistently than before at Marynia. Sometimes she took her hand and turned her eyes to the young woman, as if wishing to ask something. Sometimes when Marynia and Pan Stanislaw were near by, she gazed now on her, now on him, and then closed her lids. Often they came daily, sometimes a number of times in the day, wishing to relieve Pani Emilia, who permitted no one to take her place in the night at Litka’s bedside; for a week she had been without rest at night, sleeping only a little in the day, when Litka herself begged her to do so. Still Pani Emilia was not conscious of the whole danger which threatened the little girl; for the doctor, not knowing what that crisis of the disease would be, whether a step in advance merely, or the end, pacified the mother the more decisively because Pan Stanislaw begged him most urgently to do so.

She had a feeling, however, that Litka’s condition was not favorable, and, in spite of assurances from the doctor, her heart sank more than once from alarm. But to Litka she showed always a smiling and joyous face, just as did Pan Stanislaw and Marynia; but the little girl had learned already to observe everything, and Pani Emilia’s most carefully concealed alarm did not escape her.

Therefore on a certain morning, when there was no one in her room but Pan Stanislaw, who was occupied with inflating for her a great globe of silk, which he had brought as a present, the little girl said, —

“Pan Stas, I see sometimes that mamma is very anxious because I am sick.”

He stopped inflating the globe, and answered, —

“Ai! she doesn’t dream of it. What is working under thy hair? But it is natural for her to be anxious; she would rather have thee well.”

“Why are all other children well, and I alone always sick?”

“Nicely well! Weren’t the Bigiel children sick, one after another, with whooping-cough? For whole months the house was like a sheepfold. And didn’t Yozio have the measles? All children are eternally sick, and that is the one pleasure with them.”

“Pan Stas only talks that way, for children are sick and get well again.” Here she began to shake her head. “No; that is something different. And now I must lie this way all the time, for if I get up my heart beats right away; and the day before yesterday, when they began to sing on the street, and mamma wasn’t in the room, I went to the window a little while, and saw a funeral. I thought, ‘I, too, shall die surely.’”

“Nonsense, Litus!” cried Pan Stanislaw; and he began to inflate the globe quickly to hide his emotion, and to show the child how little her words meant. But she went on with her thought, —

“It is so stifling for me sometimes, and my heart beats so – mamma told me to say then ‘Under Thy protection,’ and I say it always, for I am terribly afraid to die! I know that it is nice in heaven, but I shouldn’t be with mamma, only alone in the graveyard; yes, in the night.”

Pan Stanislaw laid down the globe suddenly, sat near the long chair, and, taking Litka’s hand, said, —

“My Litus, if thou love mamma, if thou love me, do not think of such things. Nothing will happen to thee; but thy mother would suffer if she knew what her little girl’s head is filled with. Remember that thou art hurting thyself in this way.”

Litka joined her hands: “My Pan Stas, I ask only one thing, not more.”

He bent his head down to her: “Well, ask, kitten, only something sensible.”

“Would Pan Stas be very sorry for me?”

“Ah! but see what a bad girl!”

“My Pan Stas, tell me.”

“I? what an evil child, Litus! Know that I love thee, love thee immensely. God preserve us! there is no one in the world that I should be so sorry for. But be quiet at least for me, thou suffering fly! thou dearest creature!”

“I will be quiet, kind Pan Stas.”

And in the moment when Pani Emilia came, and he was preparing to go, she asked, —

“And Pan Stas is not angry with me?”

“No, Litus,” answered Pan Stanislaw.

When he had gone to the antechamber he heard a light knocking at the door; Pani Emilia had given orders to remove the bell. He opened it and saw Marynia, who came ordinarily in the evening. When she had greeted him, she asked, —

“How is Litka to-day?”

“As usual.”

“Has the doctor been here?”

“Yes. He found nothing new. Let me help you!”

Saying this, he wished to take her cloak, but she was unwilling to accept his services, and refused. Having his heart full of the previous talk with Litka, he attacked her most unexpectedly, —

“What I offer you is simple politeness, nothing more; and even if it were something more, you might leave your repugnance to me outside this threshold, for inside is a sick child, whom not only I, but you, profess to love. Your response lacks not merely kindness, but even courtesy. I would take in the same way the cloak of any other woman, and know that at present I am thinking of Litka, and of nothing else.”

He spoke with great passionateness, so that, attacked suddenly, Marynia was a little frightened; indeed, she lost her head somewhat, so that obediently she let her cloak be taken from her, and not only did not find in herself the force to be offended, but she felt that a man sincerely and deeply affected by alarm and suffering might talk so, therefore a man who was really full of feeling and was good at heart. Perhaps, too, that unexpected energy of his spoke to her feminine nature; it is enough that Pan Stanislaw gained on her more in that moment than at any time since their meeting at Kremen, and never till then was she so strongly reminded of that active young man whom she had conducted once through the garden. The impression, it is true, was a mere passing one, which could not decide their mutual relations; but she raised at once on him her eyes, somewhat astonished, but not angry, and said, —

“I beg your pardon.”

He had calmed himself, and was abashed now.

“No; I beg pardon of you. Just now Litka spoke of her death to me, and I am so excited that I cannot control myself; pray understand this, and forgive me.”

Then he pressed her hand firmly, and went home.

CHAPTER XVI

On the following day Marynia offered to stay at Pani Emilia's till Litka should recover perfectly. Litka supported this offer, which Pani Emilia, after a short opposition, was forced to accept. In fact, she was dropping down from weariness; the health of the sick girl demanded unceasing and exceptional watchfulness, for a new attack might come at any instant. It was difficult to calculate or be sure that a servant, even the most faithful, would not doze at the very moment in which speedy assistance might save the child's life; hence the presence of Marynia was a real aid to the anxious mother, and calmed her.

As to Plavitski, he preferred to eat at the restaurant, and made no trouble. Marynia, moreover, went in every day to inquire about his health and bring domestic accounts into order; then she returned to Pani Emilia to sit half the night by the little girl.

In this way Pan Stanislav, who passed at Pani Emilia's all the time free from occupation, and received, or rather dismissed with thanks, those who came to inquire for Litka's health, saw Marynia daily. And she in truth amazed him; Pani Emilia herself did not show more anxiety for the child, and could not nurse her more carefully. In a week Marynia's face had grown pale from watching and alarm; there were dark lines beneath her eyes; but her strength and energy seemed to grow hourly. There was in her also so much sweetness and kindness, something so calm and delicate in the services which she rendered Litka, that the child, despite the resentment which she cherished in her little soul, began to be kind to her; and when she went for some hours to her father, Litka looked for her with yearning.

Finally the little girl's health seemed to improve in the last hours. The doctor permitted her to walk in the chamber and sit in an armchair, which on sunny days was pushed to the door opening on the balcony, so that she might look at the street and amuse herself with the movement of people and carriages.

At such times Pan Stanislav, Pani Emilia, and Marynia stood near her frequently; their conversation related to what was passing on the street. Sometimes Litka was wearied, and, as it were, thoughtful; at other times, however, her child nature got the upper hand, and everything amused her, — hence the October sun, which covered the roofs, the walls, and the panes of the shop windows with a pale gold; the dresses of the passers-by; the calling of the hucksters. It seemed that those strong elements of life, pulsating in the whirl of the city, entered the child and enlivened her. At times wonderful thoughts came to her head; and once, when before the balcony a heavy wagon was pushing past which carried lemon-trees in tubs, and these, though tied with chains, moved with the motion of the wagon, she said, —

“Their hearts do not palpitate.” And then, raising her eyes to Pan Stanislav, she asked, —

“Pan Stas, do trees live long?”

“Very long; some of them live a thousand years.”

“Oh, I would like to be a tree. And which does mamma like best?”

“The birch.”

“Then I would like to be a little birch; and mamma would be a big birch, and we should grow together. And would Pan Stas like to be a birch?”

“If I could grow somewhere not far from the little birch.”

Litka looked at him shaking her head somewhat sadly, said, —

“Oh, no! I know all now; I know near what birch Pan Stas would like to grow.”

Marynia was confused, and dropped her eyes on her work; Pan Stanislav began to stroke lightly with his palm the little blond head, and said, —

“My dear little kitten, my dear, my — my — ”

Litka was silent; from under her long eyelids flowed two tears, and rolled down her cheeks. After a while, however, she raised her sweet face, radiant with a smile, —

“I love mamma very much,” said she, “and I love Pan Stas, and I love Marynia.”

CHAPTER XVII

Professor Vaskovski inquired every day about the health of the little one; and though most frequently they did not receive him, he sent her flowers. Pan Stanislav, meeting him somewhere at dinner, began thanking him in Pani Emilia's name.

"Asters, only asters!" said Vaskovski. "How is she to-day?"

"To-day not ill, but, in general, not well; worse than in Reichenhall. Fear for each coming day seizes one; and at the thought that the child may be missing – "

Here Pan Stanislav stopped, for further words failed him; at last he burst out, —

"What is the use in looking for mercy? There is nothing but logic, which says that whoso has a sick heart must die. And may thunderbolts split such existence!"

Now came Bukatski, who, when he had learned what the conversation was, attacked the professor; even he, as he loved Litka, rebelled in his soul at thought of that death which was threatening her.

"How is it possible to deceive oneself so many years, and proclaim principles which turn into nothing in view of blind predestination?"

But the old man answered mildly: "How, beloved friends, estimate with your own measure the wisdom of God and His mercy? A man under ground is surrounded by darkness, but he has no right to deny that above him are sky, sun, heat, and light."

"Here is consolation," interrupted Pan Stanislav; "a fly couldn't live on such doctrines. And what is a mother to do, whose only and beloved child is dying?"

But the blue eyes of the professor seemed to look beyond the world. For a time he gazed straightforward persistently; then he said, like a man who sees something, but is not sure that he sees it distinctly, "It appears to me that this child has fixed herself too deeply in people's hearts to pass away simply, and disappear without a trace. There is something in this, — something was predestined to her; she must accomplish something, and before that she will not die."

"Mysticism," said Bukatski.

But Pan Stanislav interrupted: "Oh, that it were so, mysticism or no mysticism! Oh, that it were so! A man in misfortune grasps even at a shadow of hope. It never found place in my head that she had to die."

But the professor added, "Who knows? she may survive all of us."

Polanyetski was in that phase of scepticism in which a man recognizes certainty in nothing, but considers everything possible, especially that everything which at the given time his heart yearns for; he breathed therefore more easily, and received certain consolation.

"May God have mercy on her and Pani Emilia!" said he. "I would give money for a hundred Masses if I knew they would help her."

"Give for one, if the intention be sincere."

"I will, I will! As to the sincerity of intention, I could not be more sincere if the question involved my own life."

Vaskovski smiled and said, "Thou art on the good road, for thou knowest how to love."

And all left relieved in some way. Bukatski, if he was thinking of something opposed to what Vaskovski had said, did not dare mention it; for when people in presence of real misfortune seek salvation in faith, scepticism, even when thoroughly rooted, pulls its cap over its ears, and is not only cowardly, but seems weak and small.

Bigiel, who came in at that moment, saw more cheerful faces, and said, —

"I see by you that the little one is not worse."

"No, no," said Pan Stanislav; "and the professor told us such wholesome things that he might be applied to a wound."

“Praise be to God! My wife gave money for a Mass to-day, and went then to Pani Emilia’s. I will dine with you, for I have leave; and, since Litka is better, I will tell you another glad news.”

“What is it?”

“Awhile ago I met Mashko, who, by the way, will be here soon; and when he comes, congratulate him, for he is going to marry.”

“Whom?” asked Pan Stanislaw.

“My neighbor’s daughter.”

“Panna Kraslavski?”

“Yes.”

“I understand,” said Bukatski; “he crushed those ladies into dust with his grandeur, his birth, his property, and out of that dust he formed a wife and a mother-in-law for himself.”

“Tell me one thing,” said the professor; “Mashko is a religious man – ”

“As a conservative,” interrupted Bukatski, “for appearance’ sake.”

“And those ladies, too,” continued Vaskovski.

“From habit – ”

“Why do they never think of a future life?”

“Mashko, why dost thou never think of a future life?” cried Bukatski, turning to the advocate, who was coming in at that moment.

Mashko approached them and asked, “What dost thou say?”

“I will say *Tu felix*, Mashko, nube!” (Thou, Mashko, art fortunate in marriage!)

Then all began to offer congratulations, which he received with full weight of dignity; at the end he said, —

“My dear friends, I thank you from my whole heart; and, since ye all know my betrothed, I have no doubt of the sincerity of your wishes.”

“Do not permit thyself one,” said Bukatski.

“But Kremen came to thee in season,” interjected Pan Stanislaw.

Indeed, Kremen had come to Mashko in season, for without it he might not have been accepted. But for that very cause the remark was not agreeable; hence he made a wry face, and answered, —

“Thou didst make that purchase easy; sometimes I am thankful to thee, and sometimes I curse thee.”

“Why so?”

“For thy dear Uncle Plavitski is the most annoying, the most unendurable figure on earth, omitting thy cousin, who is a charming young lady; but from morning till evening she rings changes on her never to be sufficiently regretted Kremen, through all the seven notes, adding at each one a tear. Thou art seldom at their house; but, believe me, to be there is uncommonly wearisome.”

Pan Stanislaw looked into his eyes and answered, “Listen, Mashko: against my uncle I have said everything that could hit him; but it does not follow, therefore, that I am to listen patiently if another attacks Plavitski, especially a man who has made profit by him. As to Panna Marynia, she is sorry, I know, for Kremen; but this proves that she is not an empty puppet, or a manikin, but a woman with a heart; dost understand me?”

A moment of silence followed. Mashko understood perfectly whom Pan Stanislaw had in mind when he mentioned the empty doll and manikin; hence the freckles on his face became brick-colored, and his lips began to quiver. But he restrained himself. He was in no sense a coward; but even the man who is most daring has usually some one with whom he has no wish to quarrel, and for Mashko Polanyetski was such a one. Therefore, shrugging his shoulders, he said, —

“Why art thou angry? If that is displeasing to thee – ”

But Pan Stanislaw interrupted, “I am not angry; but I advise thee to remember my words.” And he looked him in the eyes again.

Mashko thought, “If thou wilt have an adventure anyhow, thou canst have it.”

“Thy words,” said he, “I can remember; only do thou take counsel also from me. Permit not thyself to speak in that tone to me, else I might forget myself also, and call thee to reckoning.”

“What the deuce – ?” began Bukatski. “What is the matter with thee?”

But Pan Stanislav, in whom irritation against Mashko has been gathering for a long time, would beyond doubt have pushed matters to extremes had not Pani Emilia’s servant rushed into the room at that moment.

“I beg,” said he, with a panting voice; “the little lady is dying!”

Pan Stanislav grew pale, and, seizing his hat, sprang to the door. A long, dull silence followed, which Mashko interrupted at last.

“I forgot,” said he, “that everything should be forgiven him at present.”

Vaskovski, covering his eyes with his hands, began to pray. At length he raised his head and said, —

“God alone has bridled death, and has power to restrain it.”

A quarter of an hour later, Bigiel received a note from his wife with the words, “The attack has passed.”

CHAPTER XVIII

Pan Stanislaw hurried to Pani Emilia's, fearing that he would not find Litka living; for the servant told him on the way that the little lady was in convulsions, and dying. But when he arrived, Pani Emilia ran to meet him, and from the depth of her breast threw out in one breath the words, "Better! better!"

"Is the doctor here?"

"He is."

"But the little one?"

"Is sleeping."

On the face of Pani Emilia the remnants of fear were struggling with hope and joy. Pan Stanislaw noticed that her lips were almost white, her eyes dry and red, her face in blotches; she was mortally wearied, for she had not slept for twenty-four hours. But the doctor, a young man, and energetic, looked on the danger as passed for the time. Pani Emilia was strengthened by what he told her in presence of Pan Stanislaw, especially this: "We should not let it come to a second attack, and we will not."

There was real consolation in these words, for evidently the doctor considered that they were able to ward off another attack; still there was a warning that another attack might be fatal. But Pani Emilia grasped at every hope, as a man falling over a precipice grasps at the branches of trees growing out on the edge of it.

"We will not; we will not!" repeated she, pressing the doctor's hand feverishly.

Pan Stanislaw looked into his eyes unobserved, wishing to read in them whether he said this to pacify the mother, or on the basis of medical conviction, and asked as a test, —

"You will not leave her to-day?"

"I do not see the least need of staying," answered he. "The child is exhausted, and is like to sleep long and soundly. I will come to-morrow, but to-day I can go with perfect safety." Then he turned to Pani Emilia, —

"You must rest, too. All danger has passed; the patient should not see on your face any suffering or alarm, for she might be disturbed, and she is too weak to endure that."

"I could not fall asleep," said Pani Emilia.

The doctor turned his pale blue eyes to her, and, gazing into her face with a certain intensity, said slowly, —

"In an hour you will lie down, and will fall asleep directly; you will sleep unbrokenly for six or eight hours, — let us say eight. To-morrow you will be strong and refreshed. And now good-night."

"But drops to the little one, if she wakes?" asked Pani Emilia.

"Another will give the drops; you will sleep. Good-night." And he took farewell.

Pan Stanislaw wished to follow him to inquire alone about Litka, but he thought that a longer talk of that kind might alarm Pani Emilia; hence he preferred to omit it, promising himself that in the morning he would go to the doctor's house and talk there with him. After a while, when he was alone with Pani Emilia, he said, —

"Do as the doctor directed; you need rest. I promise to go to Litka's room now, and I will not leave her the whole night."

But Pani Emilia's thoughts were all with the little girl; so, instead of an answer, she said to him directly, —

"Do you know, after the attack, she asked several times for you before she fell asleep. And for Marynia too. She fell asleep with the question, 'Where is Pan Stas?'"

"My poor beloved child, I should have come anyhow right after dinner. I flew here barely alive. When did the attack begin?"

“In the forenoon. From the morning she was gloomy, as if foreboding something. You know that in my presence she says always that she is well; but she must have felt ill, for before the attack she sat near me and begged me to hold her hand. Yesterday, I forgot to tell you that she put such strange questions to me: ‘Is it true,’ inquired she, ‘that if a sick child asks for a thing it is never refused?’ I answered that it is not refused unless the child asks for something impossible. Some idea was passing through her head evidently, for in the evening, when Marynia ran in for a moment, she put like questions to us. She went to sleep in good humor, but this morning early she complained of stifling. It is lucky that I sent for the doctor before the attack, and that he came promptly.”

“It is the greatest luck that he went away with such certainty that the attack would not be repeated. I am perfectly sure that that is his conviction,” answered Pan Stanislaw.

Pani Emilia raised her eyes: “The Lord God is so merciful, so good, that – ”

In spite of all her efforts, she began to sob, for repressed alarm and despair were changed to joy in her, and she found relief in tears. In that noble and spiritualized nature, innate exaltation disturbed calm thought; by reason of this, Pani Emilia never gave an account to herself of the real state of affairs; now, for example, she had not the least doubt that Litka’s illness had ended once for all with this recent attack, and that thenceforth a time of perfect health would begin for the child.

Pan Stanislaw had neither the wish nor the heart to show her a middle road between delight and despair; his heart rose with great pity for her, and there came to him one of those moments in which he felt more clearly than usually how deeply, though disinterestedly, he was attached to that enthusiastic and idealistic woman. If she had been his sister, he would have embraced her and pressed her to his bosom; as it was, he kissed her delicate, thin hands, and said, —

“Praise be to God; praise be to God! Let the dear lady think now of herself, and I will go to the little one and not stir till she wakes.” And he went.

In Litka’s chamber there was darkness, for the window-blinds were closed, and the sun was going down. Only through the slats did some reddish rays force their way; these lighted the chamber imperfectly and vanished soon, for the sky began to grow cloudy. Litka was sleeping soundly. Pan Stanislaw, sitting near her, looked on her sleeping face, and at the first moment his heart was oppressed painfully. She was lying with her face toward the ceiling; her thin little hands were placed on the coverlid; her eyes were closed, and under them was a deep shadow from the lashes. Her pallor, which seemed waxen in that reddish half-gloom, and her open mouth, finally, the deep sleep, — gave her face the seeming of such rest as the faces of the dead have. But the movement of the ruffles on her nightdress showed that she was living and breathing. Her respiration was even calm and very regular. Pan Stanislaw looked for a long time at that sick face, and felt again, with full force, what he had felt often, when he thought of himself, — namely, that nature had made him to be a father; that, besides the woman of his choice, children might be the immense love of his life, the chief object and reason of his existence. He understood this, through the pity and love which he felt at that moment for Litka, who, a stranger to him by birth, was as dear to him then as would have been his own child.

“If she had been given to me,” thought he; “if she lacked a mother, — I would take her forever, and consider that I had something to live for.”

And he felt also that were it possible to make a bargain with death, he would have given himself without hesitation to redeem that little “kitten,” over whom death seemed then to be floating like a bird of prey over a dove. Such tenderness seized him as he had not felt till that hour; and that man, of a character rather quick and harsh, was ready to kiss the hands and head of that child, with a tenderness of which not even every woman’s heart is capable.

Meanwhile it had grown dark. Soon Pani Emilia came in, shading with her hand a blue night-lamp.

“She is sleeping?” asked she, in a low voice, placing the lamp on the table beyond Litka’s head.

“She is,” answered Pan Stanislaw, in an equally low voice.

Pani Emilia looked long at the sleeping child.

“See,” whispered Pan Stanislaw, “how regularly and calmly she breathes. To-morrow she will be healthier and stronger.”

“Yes,” answered the mother, with a smile.

“Now it is your turn. Sleep, sleep! otherwise I shall begin to command without pity.”

Her eyes continued to smile at him thankfully. In the mild blue light of the night-lamp she seemed like an apparition. She had a perfectly angelic face; and Pan Stanislaw thought in spite of himself that she and Litka looked really like forms from beyond the earth, which by pure chance had wandered into this world.

“Yes,” answered she; “I will rest now. Marynia has come, and Professor Vaskovski. Marynia wishes absolutely to remain.”

“So much the better. She manages so well near the little girl. Good-night.”

“Good-night.”

Pan Stanislaw was alone again, and began to think of Marynia. At the very intelligence that he would see her soon he could not think of aught else; and now he put the question to himself: “In what lies this wonderful secret of nature in virtue of which I, for example, did not fall in love with Pani Emilia, decidedly more beautiful than Marynia, likely better, sweeter, more capable of loving, – but with that girl whom I know incomparably less, and, justly or unjustly, honor less?” Still with every approach of his to Marynia there rose in him immediately all those impulses which a man may feel at sight of a chosen woman, while a real womanly form, like that of Pani Emilia, made no other impression on him than if she had been a painting or a carving. Why is this, and why, the more culture a man has, the more his nerves become subtle, and his sensitiveness keener, the greater difference does he make between woman and woman? Pan Stanislaw had no answer to this save the one which that doctor in love with Panna Kraslavski had given him: “I estimate her coolly, but I cannot tear my soul from her.” That was rather the description of a phenomenon than an answer, for which, moreover, he had not the time, since Marynia came in at that moment.

They nodded in salutation; he raised a chair then, and put it down softly at Litka’s bed, letting Marynia know by a sign that she was to sit there. She began to speak first, or rather, to whisper.

“Go to tea now. Professor Vaskovski is here.”

“And Pani Emilia?”

“She could not sit up. She said that it was a wonder to her, but she must sleep.”

“I know why: the doctor hypnotized her, and he did well. The little girl is indeed better.”

Marynia gazed into his eyes; but he repeated, —

“She is really better – if the attack will not return, and there is hope that it will not.”

“Ah! praise be to God! But go now and drink tea.”

He preferred, however, to whisper to her near by and confidentially, so he said, —

“I will, I will; but later. Let us arrange meanwhile so that you may rest. I have heard that your father is ill. Of course you have been watching over him.”

“Father is well now, and I wish to take Emilia’s place absolutely. She told me that the servants had not slept either all last night, for the child’s condition was alarming before the attack. It is needful now that some one be on the watch always. I should wish, therefore, so to arrange that we – that is, I, you, and Emilka – should follow in turn.”

“Very well; but to-day I will remain. If not here, I shall be at call in the next chamber. When did you hear of the attack?”

“I did not hear of it. I came as I do usually in the evening to learn what was to be heard.”

“Pani Emilia’s servant hurried to me while I was dining. You can imagine easily how I flew hither. I was not sure of finding her alive. What wonder, since during dinner I talked almost all the time of Litka with Bukatski and Vaskovski, till Mashko came with the announcement of his marriage.”

“Is Mashko going to marry?”

“Yes. The news has not gone around yet; but he announced it himself. He marries Panna Kraslavski; you remember her?”

“She who was at the Bigiels that evening. She is a good match for Mashko, Panna Kraslavski.”

There was silence for a moment. Marynia, who, not loving Mashko, had rejected his hand, but who more than once had reproached herself for her conduct with regard to him, thinking that she had exposed him to deception and suffering, could find only comfort in the news that the young advocate had borne the blow so easily. Still the news astonished her for the time, and also wounded her. Women, when they sympathize with some one, wish first that some one to be really unhappy, and, secondly, they wish to alleviate the misfortune themselves; when it turns out that another is able to do that, they undergo a certain disillusion. Marynia's self-love was wounded also doubly. She had not thought that it would be so easy to forget her; hence she had to confess that her idea of Mashko as an exceptional man had no basis. He had been for her hitherto a kind of ace in the game against Pan Stanislav; now he had ceased to be that. She felt, therefore, let matters be as they might, somewhat conquered. This did not prevent her, it is true, from informing Pan Stanislav, with a certain accent of truth, that his news caused her sincere and deep joy, but at bottom she felt in some sort offended by him because he had told her.

For a certain time Pan Stanislav had acted with her very reservedly, and in nothing had he betrayed what was happening within him. He did not feign to be too cool, for they had to meet; therefore, in meeting her he maintained even a certain kindly freedom, but for this very reason she judged that he had ceased to love her, and such is human nature, that though the old offence was existing yet, and had even increased in the soul of the young woman, though her first disillusion had changed as it were into a spring, giving forth new bitterness continually, still the thought that her repugnance was indifferent to him irritated Marynia. Now it seemed to her that Pan Stanislav must even triumph over her mistake as to Mashko; and at this, that in every case she, who shortly before had the choice between Mashko and him, has that choice no longer, and will fall, as it were, into a kind of neglect somewhat humiliating.

But he was far from such thoughts. He was glad, it is true, that Marynia should know that, by exalting Mashko above him, she had been mistaken fundamentally; but he had not dreamed even of taking pleasure in this or triumphing because of her isolation, for at every moment and at that time more than any other he was ready to open his arms to her, press her to his bosom, and love her. He was working, it is true, continually and even with stubbornness to break in himself those feelings; but he did this only because he saw no hope before him, and considered it an offence against his dignity as a man to put all the powers of his soul and heart into a feeling which was not returned. To use his own expression, he wished to avoid surrender, and he did avoid surrender, to the best of his power; but he understood perfectly that such a struggle exhausts, and that even if it ends with victory it brings a void, instead of happiness. Besides, he was far yet from victory. After all his efforts he had arrived at this only, – that his feeling was mingled with bitterness. Such a ferment dissolves love, it is true, for the simple reason that it poisons it; and in time this bitterness might have dissolved love in Pan Stanislav's heart. But what an empty result! Sitting then near Marynia and looking at her face and head, shone on by the light of the lamp, he said to himself, “If only she wished!” That thought made him angry; but since he wanted to be sincere with himself, he had to confess that if only she wished he would bend to her feet with the greatest readiness. What an empty result, then, and what a position without escape! For he felt that the misunderstanding between them had increased so much that even if Marynia desired a return of those moments passed in Kremen, self-love and fear of self-contradiction would close her lips. Their relations had become so entangled that they might fall in love more easily a second time than come to an understanding.

After a short conversation there was silence between them, interrupted only by the breathing of the sick child and the slight, but mournful, sounds of the window-panes, on which fine rain was striking. Outside, the night had grown wet; it was autumnal, bringing with it oppression, gloom,

pessimism, and discontent. Equally gloomy seemed that chamber, in whose dark corners death appeared to be lurking. Hour followed hour more slowly. All at once forebodings seized Pan Stanislaw. He looked at Litka on a sudden, and it seemed to him madness to suppose that she could recover. Vain was watching! vain were hopes and illusions! That child must die! she must all the more surely, the dearer she was. Pani Emilia will follow her; and then there will be a desert really hopeless. What a life! See, he, Polanyetski, has those two, the only beings in the world who love him, – beings for whom he is something; therefore it is clear that he must lose them. With them there would be something in life to which he could adhere; without them there will be only nothingness and a certain kind of future, blind, deaf, unreasoning, with the face of an idiot.

The most energetic man needs some one to love him. Otherwise he feels death within, and his energy turns against life. A moment like that had come now to Pan Stanislaw. “I do not know absolutely why I should not fire into my forehead,” thought he, “not from despair at losing them, but because of the nothing without them. If life must be senseless, there is no reason to permit this senselessness, unless through curiosity to learn how far it can go.” But this thought did not appear in him as a plan; it was rather the effort of a man writhing at the chain of misfortune, a burst of anger in a man seeking some one against whom to turn. In Pan Stanislaw this anger turned suddenly on Marynia. He did not know himself why; but it seemed to him at once that all the evil which had happened, had happened through her. She had brought into their circle a dislike not there before, suffering not there before, and had thrown, as it were, some stone into their smooth water; and now the wave, which was spreading more and more widely, covered not only him, but Pani Emilia and Litka. As a man governing himself by judgment, not by nerves, he understood how vain were reproaches of this sort; still he could not put down the remembrance that before Marynia came it was better in every way, and so much better even, that he might consider that as a happy period of his life. He loved then only Litka, with that untroubled, fatherly feeling, which did not and could not bring bitterness for a moment. Who knows, besides, if in time he might not have been able to love Pani Emilia? She, it is true, had not for him other feelings than those of friendship, but perhaps only because he did not desire other feelings. High-minded women frequently refuse themselves feelings which go beyond the boundary of friendship, so as not to render difficult and involved the life of some one who might, but does not wish to become dear. Meanwhile in the depth of the soul lies a calm secret melancholy; they find sweetness and consolation in the tenderness permitted by friendship.

Pan Stanislaw, by becoming acquainted with Marynia, gave her at once the best part of his feelings. Why? for what purpose? Only to give himself suffering. Now, to complete the misfortune, that Litka, the one ray of his life, had died, or might die any moment. Pan Stanislaw looked again at her, and said in his soul, —

“Remain even, thou dear child; thou knowst not how needful thou art to me and to thy mother. God guard thee; what a life there will be without thee!”

Suddenly he saw that the eyes of the child were looking at him. For a while he thought himself mistaken, and did not dare to stir; but the little maiden smiled, and finally she whispered, —

“Pan Stas.”

“It is I, Litus. How dost thou feel?”

“Well; but where is mamma?”

“She will come right away. We had a great struggle to make her go to bed to sleep, and we hardly persuaded her.”

Litka turned her head, and, seeing Marynia, said, —

“Ah! is that Aunt Marynia?”

For some time she had called her aunt.

Marynia rose, and, taking the vial which stood on the shelf, poured drop after drop into a spoon; then she gave them to Litka, who, when she had finished drinking, pressed her lips to Marynia’s forehead.

A moment of silence followed; then the child said, as if to herself, —

“There is no need of waking mamma.”

“No; no one will wake her,” answered Pan Stanislav. “All will be as Litus wishes.”

And he began to stroke her hand, which was lying on the coverlid. She looked at him, repeating, as was her wont, —

“Pan Stas, Pan Stas!”

For a while it seemed that she would fall asleep; but evidently the child was thinking of something with great effort, for her brows rose. At last, opening widely her eyes, she looked now at Pan Stanislav, and now at Marynia. In the room nothing was heard save the sound of rain on the windows.

“What is the matter with the child?” asked Marynia.

But she, clasping her hands, whispered in a voice barely audible, “I have a great, great prayer to Aunt Marynia, but — I am afraid to say it.”

Marynia bent her mild face toward the little girl.

“Speak, my love; I will do everything for thee.”

Then the little girl, seizing her hand, and pressing it to her lips, whispered, —

“I want Aunt Marynia to love Pan Stas.”

In the silence which followed after these words was to be heard only the somewhat increased breathing of the little girl. At last the calm voice of Marynia was heard, —

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