

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov

The House with the Mezzanine and Other Stories



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Chekhov Anton Pavlovich

The House with the Mezzanine and Other Stories

THE HOUSE WITH THE MEZZANINE

(A PAINTER'S STORY)

IT happened nigh on seven years ago, when I was living in one of the districts of the J. province, on the estate of Bielokurov, a landowner, a young man who used to get up early, dress himself in a long overcoat, drink beer in the evenings, and all the while complain to me that he could nowhere find any one in sympathy with his ideas. He lived in a little house in the orchard, and I lived in the old manor-house, in a huge pillared hall where there was no furniture except a large divan, on which I slept, and a table at which I used to play patience. Even in calm weather there was always a moaning in the chimney, and in a storm the whole house would rock and seem as though it must split, and it was quite terrifying, especially at night, when all the ten great windows

were suddenly lit up by a flash of lightning.

Doomed by fate to permanent idleness, I did positively nothing. For hours together I would sit and look through the windows at the sky, the birds, the trees and read my letters over and over again, and then for hours together I would sleep. Sometimes I would go out and wander aimlessly until evening.

Once on my way home I came unexpectedly on a strange farmhouse. The sun was already setting, and the lengthening shadows were thrown over the ripening corn. Two rows of closely planted tall fir-trees stood like two thick walls, forming a sombre, magnificent avenue. I climbed the fence and walked up the avenue, slipping on the fir needles which lay two inches thick on the ground. It was still, dark, and only here and there in the tops of the trees shimmered a bright gold light casting the colours of the rainbow on a spider's web. The smell of the firs was almost suffocating. Then I turned into an avenue of limes. And here too were desolation and decay; the dead leaves rustled mournfully beneath my feet, and there were lurking shadows among the trees. To the right, in an old orchard, a goldhammer sang a faint reluctant song, and he too must have been old. The lime-trees soon came to an end and I came to a white house with a terrace and a mezzanine, and suddenly a vista opened upon a farmyard with a pond and a bathing-shed, and a row of green willows, with a village beyond, and above it stood a tall, slender belfry, on which glowed a cross catching the light of the setting sun. For a moment I was possessed with a sense of enchantment, intimate,

particular, as though I had seen the scene before in my childhood.

By the white-stone gate surmounted with stone lions, which led from the yard into the field, stood two girls. One of them, the elder, thin, pale, very handsome, with masses of chestnut hair and a little stubborn mouth, looked rather prim and scarcely glanced at me; the other, who was quite young – seventeen or eighteen, no more, also thin and pale, with a big mouth and big eyes, looked at me in surprise, as I passed, said something in English and looked confused, and it seemed to me that I had always known their dear faces. And I returned home feeling as though I had awoke from a pleasant dream.

Soon after that, one afternoon, when Bielokurov and I were walking near the house, suddenly there came into the yard a spring-carriage in which sat one of the two girls, the elder. She had come to ask for subscriptions to a fund for those who had suffered in a recent fire. Without looking at us, she told us very seriously how many houses had been burned down in Sianov, how many men, women, and children had been left without shelter, and what had been done by the committee of which she was a member. She gave us the list for us to write our names, put it away, and began to say good-bye.

"You have completely forgotten us, Piotr Petrovich," she said to Bielokurov, as she gave him her hand. "Come and see us, and if Mr. N. (she said my name) would like to see how the admirers of his talent live and would care to come and see us, then mother and I would be very pleased."

I bowed.

When she had gone Piotr Petrovich began to tell me about her. The girl, he said, was of a good family and her name was Lydia Volchaninov, and the estate, on which she lived with her mother and sister, was called, like the village on the other side of the pond, Sholkovka. Her father had once occupied an eminent position in Moscow and died a privy councillor. Notwithstanding their large means, the Volchaninovs always lived in the village, summer and winter, and Lydia was a teacher in the Zemstvo School at Sholkovka and earned twenty-five roubles a month. She only spent what she earned on herself and was proud of her independence.

"They are an interesting family," said Bielokurov. "We ought to go and see them. They will be very glad to see you."

One afternoon, during a holiday, we remembered the Volchaninovs and went over to Sholkovka. They were all at home. The mother, Ekaterina Pavlovna, had obviously once been handsome, but now she was stouter than her age warranted, suffered from asthma, was melancholy and absent-minded as she tried to entertain me with talk about painting. When she heard from her daughter that I might perhaps come over to Sholkovka, she hurriedly called to mind a few of my landscapes which she had seen in exhibitions in Moscow, and now she asked what I had tried to express in them. Lydia, or as she was called at home, Lyda, talked more to Bielokurov than to me. Seriously and without a smile, she asked him why he did not work for the

Zemstvo and why up till now he had never been to a Zemstvo meeting.

"It is not right of you, Piotr Petrovich," she said reproachfully. "It is not right. It is a shame."

"True, Lyda, true," said her mother. "It is not right."

"All our district is in Balaguin's hands," Lyda went on, turning to me. "He is the chairman of the council and all the jobs in the district are given to his nephews and brothers-in-law, and he does exactly as he likes. We ought to fight him. The young people ought to form a strong party; but you see what our young men are like. It is a shame, Piotr Petrovich."

The younger sister, Genya, was silent during the conversation about the Zemstvo. She did not take part in serious conversations, for by the family she was not considered grown-up, and they gave her her baby-name, Missyuss, because as a child she used to call her English governess that. All the time she examined me curiously and when I looked at the photograph-album she explained: "This is my uncle... That is my godfather," and fingered the portraits, and at the same time touched me with her shoulder in a childlike way, and I could see her small, undeveloped bosom, her thin shoulders, her long, slim waist tightly drawn in by a belt.

We played croquet and lawn-tennis, walked in the garden, had tea, and then a large supper. After the huge pillared hall, I felt out of tune in the small cosy house, where there were no oleographs on the walls and the servants were treated considerately, and

everything seemed to me young and pure, through the presence of Lyda and Missyuss, and everything was decent and orderly. At supper Lyda again talked to Bielokurov about the Zemstvo, about Balaguin, about school libraries. She was a lively, sincere, serious girl, and it was interesting to listen to her, though she spoke at length and in a loud voice – perhaps because she was used to holding forth at school. On the other hand, Piotr Petrovich, who from his university days had retained the habit of reducing any conversation to a discussion, spoke tediously, slowly, and deliberately, with an obvious desire to be taken for a clever and progressive man. He gesticulated and upset the sauce with his sleeve and it made a large pool on the table-cloth, though nobody but myself seemed to notice it.

When we returned home the night was dark and still.

"I call it good breeding," said Bielokurov, with a sigh, "not so much not to upset the sauce on the table, as not to notice it when some one else has done it. Yes. An admirable intellectual family. I'm rather out of touch with nice people. Ah! terribly. And all through business, business, business!"

He went on to say what hard work being a good farmer meant. And I thought: What a stupid, lazy lout! When we talked seriously he would drag it out with his awful drawl – er, er, er – and he works just as he talks – slowly, always behindhand, never up to time; and as for his being businesslike, I don't believe it, for he often keeps letters given him to post for weeks in his pocket.

"The worst of it is," he murmured as he walked along by my

side, "the worst of it is that you go working away and never get any sympathy from anybody."

II

I began to frequent the Volchaninovs' house. Usually I sat on the bottom step of the veranda. I was filled with dissatisfaction, vague discontent with my life, which had passed so quickly and uninterestingly, and I thought all the while how good it would be to tear out of my breast my heart which had grown so weary. There would be talk going on on the terrace, the rustling of dresses, the fluttering of the pages of a book. I soon got used to Lyda receiving the sick all day long, and distributing books, and I used often to go with her to the village, bareheaded, under an umbrella. And in the evening she would hold forth about the Zemstvo and schools. She was very handsome, subtle, correct, and her lips were thin and sensitive, and whenever a serious conversation started she would say to me drily:

"This won't interest you."

I was not sympathetic to her. She did not like me because I was a landscape-painter, and in my pictures did not paint the suffering of the masses, and I seemed to her indifferent to what she believed in. I remember once driving along the shore of the Baikal and I met a Bouryat girl, in shirt and trousers of Chinese cotton, on horseback: I asked her if she would sell me her pipe and, while we were talking, she looked with scorn at my European face and hat, and in a moment she got bored with talking to me, whooped and galloped away. And in exactly the

same way Lyda despised me as a stranger. Outwardly she never showed her dislike of me, but I felt it, and, as I sat on the bottom step of the terrace, I had a certain irritation and said that treating the peasants without being a doctor meant deceiving them, and that it is easy to be a benefactor when one owns four thousand acres.

Her sister, Missyuss, had no such cares and spent her time in complete idleness, like myself. As soon as she got up in the morning she would take a book and read it on the terrace, sitting far back in a lounge chair so that her feet hardly touched the ground, or she would hide herself with her book in the lime-walk, or she would go through the gate into the field. She would read all day long, eagerly poring over the book, and only through her looking fatigued, dizzy, and pale sometimes, was it possible to guess how much her reading exhausted her. When she saw me come she would blush a little and leave her book, and, looking into my face with her big eyes, she would tell me of things that had happened, how the chimney in the servants' room had caught fire, or how the labourer had caught a large fish in the pond. On week-days she usually wore a bright-coloured blouse and a dark-blue skirt. We used to go out together and pluck cherries for jam, in the boat, and when she jumped to reach a cherry, or pulled the oars, her thin, round arms would shine through her wide sleeves. Or I would make a sketch and she would stand and watch me breathlessly.

One Sunday, at the end of June, I went over to the

Volchaninovs in the morning about nine o'clock. I walked through the park, avoiding the house, looking for mushrooms, which were very plentiful that summer, and marking them so as to pick them later with Genya. A warm wind was blowing. I met Genya and her mother, both in bright Sunday dresses, going home from church, and Genya was holding her hat against the wind. They told me they were going to have tea on the terrace.

As a man without a care in the world, seeking somehow to justify his constant idleness, I have always found such festive mornings in a country house universally attractive. When the green garden, still moist with dew, shines in the sun and seems happy, and when the terrace smells of mignonette and oleander, and the young people have just returned from church and drink tea in the garden, and when they are all so gaily dressed and so merry, and when you know that all these healthy, satisfied, beautiful people will do nothing all day long, then you long for all life to be like that. So I thought then as I walked through the garden, quite prepared to drift like that without occupation or purpose, all through the day, all through the summer.

Genya carried a basket and she looked as though she knew that she would find me there. We gathered mushrooms and talked, and whenever she asked me a question she stood in front of me to see my face.

"Yesterday," she said, "a miracle happened in our village. Pelagueya, the cripple, has been ill for a whole year, and no doctors or medicines were any good, but yesterday an old woman

muttered over her and she got better."

"That's nothing," I said. "One should not go to sick people and old women for miracles. Is not health a miracle? And life itself? A miracle is something incomprehensible."

"And you are not afraid of the incomprehensible?"

"No. I like to face things I do not understand and I do not submit to them. I am superior to them. Man must think himself higher than lions, tigers, stars, higher than anything in nature, even higher than that which seems incomprehensible and miraculous. Otherwise he is not a man, but a mouse which is afraid of everything."

Genya thought that I, as an artist, knew a great deal and could guess what I did not know. She wanted me to lead her into the region of the eternal and the beautiful, into the highest world, with which, as she thought, I was perfectly familiar, and she talked to me of God, of eternal life, of the miraculous. And I, who did not admit that I and my imagination would perish for ever, would reply: "Yes. Men are immortal. Yes, eternal life awaits us." And she would listen and believe me and never asked for proof.

As we approached the house she suddenly stopped and said:

"Our Lyda is a remarkable person, isn't she? I love her dearly and would gladly sacrifice my life for her at any time. But tell me" – Genya touched my sleeve with her finger – "but tell me, why do you argue with her all the time? Why are you so irritated?"

"Because she is not right."

Genya shook her head and tears came to her eyes.

"How incomprehensible!" she muttered.

At that moment Lyda came out, and she stood by the balcony with a riding-whip in her hand, and looked very fine and pretty in the sunlight as she gave some orders to a farm-hand. Bustling about and talking loudly, she tended two or three of her patients, and then with a businesslike, preoccupied look she walked through the house, opening one cupboard after another, and at last went off to the attic; it took some time to find her for dinner and she did not come until we had finished the soup. Somehow I remember all these, little details and love to dwell on them, and I remember the whole of that day vividly, though nothing particular happened. After dinner Genya read, lying in her lounge chair, and I sat on the bottom step of the terrace. We were silent. The sky was overcast and a thin fine rain began to fall. It was hot, the wind had dropped, and it seemed the day would never end. Ekaterina Pavlovna came out on to the terrace with a fan, looking very sleepy.

"O, mamma," said Genya, kissing her hand. "It is not good for you to sleep during the day."

They adored each other. When one went into the garden, the other would stand on the terrace and look at the trees and call: "Hello!" "Genya!" or "Mamma, dear, where are you?" They always prayed together and shared the same faith, and they understood each other very well, even when they were silent. And they treated other people in exactly the same way. Ekaterina

Pavlovna also soon got used to me and became attached to me, and when I did not turn up for a few days she would send to inquire if I was well. And she too used to look admiringly at my sketches, and with the same frank loquacity she would tell me things that happened, and she would confide her domestic secrets to me.

She revered her elder daughter. Lyda never came to her for caresses, and only talked about serious things: she went her own way and to her mother and sister she was as sacred and enigmatic as the admiral, sitting in his cabin, to his sailors.

"Our Lyda is a remarkable person," her mother would often say; "isn't she?"

And, now, as the soft rain fell, we spoke of Lyda:

"She is a remarkable woman," said her mother, and added in a low voice like a conspirator's as she looked round, "such as she have to be looked for with a lamp in broad daylight, though you know, I am beginning to be anxious. The school, pharmacies, books – all very well, but why go to such extremes? She is twenty-three and it is time for her to think seriously about herself. If she goes on with her books and her pharmacies she won't know how life has passed... She ought to marry."

Genya, pale with reading, and with her hair ruffled, looked up and said, as if to herself, as she glanced at her mother:

"Mamma, dear, everything depends on the will of God."

And once more she plunged into her book.

Bielokurov came over in a *poddiovka*, wearing an

embroidered shirt. We played croquet and lawn-tennis, and when it grew dark we had a long supper, and Lyda once more spoke of her schools and Balaguin, who had got the whole district into his own hands. As I left the Volchaninovs that night I carried away an impression of a long, long idle day, with a sad consciousness that everything ends, however long it may be. Genya took me to the gate, and perhaps, because she had spent the whole day with me from the beginning to end, I felt somehow lonely without her, and the whole kindly family was dear to me: and for the first time during the whole of that summer I had a desire to work.

"Tell me why you lead such a monotonous life," I asked Bielokurov, as we went home. "My life is tedious, dull, monotonous, because I am a painter, a queer fish, and have been worried all my life with envy, discontent, disbelief in my work: I am always poor, I am a vagabond, but you are a wealthy, normal man, a landowner, a gentleman – why do you live so tamely and take so little from life? Why, for instance, haven't you fallen in love with Lyda or Genya?"

"You forget that I love another woman," answered Bielokurov. He meant his mistress, Lyabor Ivanovna, who lived with him in the orchard house. I used to see the lady every day, very stout, podgy, pompous, like a fatted goose, walking in the garden in a Russian head-dress, always with a sunshade, and the servants used to call her to meals or tea. Three years ago she rented a part of his house for the summer, and stayed on to live with Bielokurov, apparently for ever. She was ten years older than

he and managed him very strictly, so that he had to ask her permission to go out. She would often sob and make horrible noises like a man with a cold, and then I used to send and tell her that I'm if she did not stop I would go away. Then she would stop.

When we reached home, Bielokurov sat down on the divan and frowned and brooded, and I began to pace up and down the hall, feeling a sweet stirring in me, exactly like the stirring of love. I wanted to talk about the Volchaninovs.

"Lyda could only fall in love with a Zemstvo worker like herself, some one who is run off his legs with hospitals and schools," I said. "For the sake of a girl like that a man might not only become a Zemstvo worker, but might even become worn out, like the tale of the iron boots. And Missyuss? How charming Missyuss is!"

Bielokurov began to talk at length and with his drawling er-er-ers of the disease of the century – pessimism. He spoke confidently and argumentatively. Hundreds of miles of deserted, monotonous, blackened steppe could not so forcibly depress the mind as a man like that, sitting and talking and showing no signs of going away.

"The point is neither pessimism nor optimism," I said irritably, "but that ninety-nine out of a hundred have no sense."

Bielokurov took this to mean himself, was offended, and went away.

III

"The Prince is on a visit to Malozyomov and sends you his regards," said Lyda to her mother, as she came in and took off her gloves. "He told me many interesting things. He promised to bring forward in the Zemstvo Council the question of a medical station at Malozyomov, but he says there is little hope." And turning to me, she said: "Forgive me, I keep forgetting that you are not interested."

I felt irritated.

"Why not?" I asked and shrugged my shoulders. "You don't care about my opinion, but I assure you, the question greatly interests me."

"Yes?"

"In my opinion there is absolutely no need for a medical station at Malozyomov."

My irritation affected her: she gave a glance at me, half closed her eyes and said:

"What is wanted then? Landscapes?"

"Not landscapes either. Nothing is wanted there."

She finished taking off her gloves and took up a newspaper which had just come by post; a moment later, she said quietly, apparently controlling herself:

"Last week Anna died in childbirth, and if a medical man had been available she would have lived. However, I suppose

landscape-painters are entitled to their opinions."

"I have a very definite opinion, I assure you," said I, and she took refuge behind the newspaper, as though she did not wish to listen. "In my opinion medical stations, schools, libraries, pharmacies, under existing conditions, only lead to slavery. The masses are caught in a vast chain: you do not cut it but only add new links to it. That is my opinion."

She looked at me and smiled mockingly, and I went on, striving to catch the thread of my ideas.

"It does not matter that Anna should die in childbirth, but it does matter that all these Annas, Mavras, Pelagueyas, from dawn to sunset should be grinding away, ill from overwork, all their lives worried about their starving sickly children; all their lives they are afraid of death and disease, and have to be looking after themselves; they fade in youth, grow old very early, and die in filth and dirt; their children as they grow up go the same way and hundreds of years slip by and millions of people live worse than animals – in constant dread of never having a crust to eat; but the horror of their position is that they have no time to think of their souls, no time to remember that they are made in the likeness of God; hunger, cold, animal fear, incessant work, like drifts of snow block all the ways to spiritual activity, to the very thing that distinguishes man from the animals, and is the only thing indeed that makes life worth living. You come to their assistance with hospitals and schools, but you do not free them from their fetters; on the contrary, you enslave them even

more, since by introducing new prejudices into their lives, you increase the number of their demands, not to mention the fact that they have to pay the Zemstvo for their drugs and pamphlets, and therefore, have to work harder than ever."

"I will not argue with you," said Lyda. "I have heard all that." She put down her paper. "I will only tell you one thing, it is no good sitting with folded hands. It is true, we do not save mankind, and perhaps we do make mistakes, but we do what we can and we are right. The highest and most sacred truth for an educated being – is to help his neighbours, and we do what we can to help. You do not like it, but it is impossible to please everybody."

"True, Lyda, true," said her mother.

In Lyda's presence her courage always failed her, and as she talked she would look timidly at her, for she was afraid of saying something foolish or out of place: and she never contradicted, but would always agree: "True, Lyda, true."

"Teaching peasants to read and write, giving them little moral pamphlets and medical assistance, cannot decrease either ignorance or mortality, just as the light from your windows cannot illuminate this huge garden," I said. "You give nothing by your interference in the lives of these people. You only create new demands, and a new compulsion to work."

"Ah! My God, but we must do something!" said Lyda exasperatedly, and I could tell by her voice that she thought my opinions negligible and despised me.

"It is necessary," I said, "to free people from hard physical

work. It is necessary to relieve them of their yoke, to give them breathing space, to save them from spending their whole lives in the kitchen or the byre, in the fields; they should have time to take thought of their souls, of God and to develop their spiritual capacities. Every human being's salvation lies in spiritual activity – in his continual search for truth and the meaning of life. Give them some relief from rough, animal labour, let them feel free, then you will see how ridiculous at bottom your pamphlets and pharmacies are. Once a human being is aware of his vocation, then he can only be satisfied with religion, service, art, and not with trifles like that."

"Free them from work?" Lyda gave a smile. "Is that possible?"

"Yes... Take upon yourself a part of their work. If we all, in town and country, without exception, agreed to share the work which is being spent by mankind in the satisfaction of physical demands, then none of us would have to work more than two or three hours a day. If all of us, rich and poor, worked three hours a day the rest of our time would be free. And then to be still less dependent on our bodies, we should invent machines to do the work and we should try to reduce our demands to the minimum. We should toughen ourselves and our children should not be afraid of hunger and cold, and we should not be anxious about their health, as Anna, Maria, Pelagueya were anxious. Then supposing we did not bother about doctors and pharmacies, and did away with tobacco factories and distilleries – what a lot of free time we should have! We should give our leisure to

service and the arts. Just as peasants all work together to repair the roads, so the whole community would work together to seek truth and the meaning of life, and, I am sure of it – truth would be found very soon, man would get rid of his continual, poignant, depressing fear of death and even of death itself."

"But you contradict yourself," said Lyda. "You talk about service and deny education."

"I deny the education of a man who can only use it to read the signs on the public houses and possibly a pamphlet which he is incapable of understanding – the kind of education we have had from the time of Riurik: and village life has remained exactly as it was then. Not education is wanted but freedom for the full development of spiritual capacities. Not schools are wanted but universities."

"You deny medicine too."

"Yes. It should only be used for the investigation of diseases, as natural phenomenon, not for their cure. It is no good curing diseases if you don't cure their causes. Remove the chief cause – physical labour, and there will be no diseases. I don't acknowledge the science which cures," I went on excitedly. "Science and art, when they are true, are directed not to temporary or private purposes, but to the eternal and the general – they seek the truth and the meaning of life, they seek God, the soul, and when they are harnessed to passing needs and activities, like pharmacies and libraries, then they only complicate and encumber life. We have any number of

doctors, pharmacists, lawyers, and highly educated people, but we have no biologists, mathematicians, philosophers, poets. All our intellectual and spiritual energy is wasted on temporary passing needs... Scientists, writers, painters work and work, and thanks to them the comforts of life grow greater every day, the demands of the body multiply, but we are still a long way from the truth and man still remains the most rapacious and unseemly of animals, and everything tends to make the majority of mankind degenerate and more and more lacking in vitality. Under such conditions the life of an artist has no meaning and the more talented he is, the more strange and incomprehensible his position is, since it only amounts to his working for the amusement of the predatory, disgusting animal, man, and supporting the existing state of things. And I don't want to work and will not... Nothing is wanted, so let the world go to hell."

"Missyuss, go away," said Lyda to her sister, evidently thinking my words dangerous to so young a girl.

Genya looked sadly at her sister and mother and went out.

"People generally talk like that," said Lyda, "when they want to excuse their indifference. It is easier to deny hospitals and schools than to come and teach."

"True, Lyda, true," her mother agreed.

"You say you will not work," Lyda went on. "Apparently you set a high price on your work, but do stop arguing. We shall never agree, since I value the most imperfect library or pharmacy,

of which you spoke so scornfully just now, more than all the landscapes in the world." And at once she turned to her mother and began to talk in quite a different tone: "The Prince has got very thin, and is much changed since the last time he was here. The doctors are sending him to Vichy."

She talked to her mother about the Prince to avoid talking to me. Her face was burning, and, in order to conceal her agitation, she bent over the table as if she were short-sighted and made a show of reading the newspaper. My presence was distasteful to her. I took my leave and went home.

IV

All was quiet outside: the village on the other side of the pond was already asleep, not a single light was to be seen, and on the pond there was only the faint reflection of the stars. By the gate with the stone lions stood Genya, waiting to accompany me.

"The village is asleep," I said, trying to see her face in the darkness, and I could see her dark sad eyes fixed on me. "The innkeeper and the horse-stealers are sleeping quietly, and decent people like ourselves quarrel and irritate each other."

It was a melancholy August night – melancholy because it already smelled of the autumn: the moon rose behind a purple cloud and hardly lighted the road and the dark fields of winter corn on either side. Stars fell frequently, Genya walked beside me on the road and tried not to look at the sky, to avoid seeing the falling stars, which somehow frightened her.

"I believe you are right," she said, trembling in the evening chill. "If people could give themselves to spiritual activity, they would soon burst everything."

"Certainly. We are superior beings, and if we really knew all the power of the human genius and lived only for higher purposes then we should become like gods. But this will never be. Mankind will degenerate and of their genius not a trace will be left."

When the gate was out of sight Genya stopped and hurriedly shook my hand.

"Good night," she said, trembling; her shoulders were covered only with a thin blouse and she was shivering with cold. "Come to-morrow."

I was filled with a sudden dread of being left alone with my inevitable dissatisfaction with myself and people, and I, too, tried not to see the falling stars.

"Stay with me a little longer," I said. "Please."

I loved Genya, and she must have loved me, because she used to meet me and walk with me, and because she looked at me with tender admiration. How thrillingly beautiful her pale face was, her thin nose, her arms, her slenderness, her idleness, her constant reading. And her mind? I suspected her of having an unusual intellect: I was fascinated by the breadth of her views, perhaps because she thought differently from the strong, handsome Lyda, who did not love me. Genya liked me as a painter, I had conquered her heart by my talent, and I longed passionately to paint only for her, and I dreamed of her as my little queen, who would one day possess with me the trees, the fields, the river, the dawn, all Nature, wonderful and fascinating, with whom, as with them, I have felt helpless and useless.

"Stay with me a moment longer," I called. "I implore you."

I took off my overcoat and covered her childish shoulders. Fearing that she would look queer and ugly in a man's coat, she began to laugh and threw it off, and as she did so, I embraced her and began to cover her face, her shoulders, her arms with kisses.

"Till to-morrow," she whispered timidly as though she was

afraid to break the stillness of the night. She embraced me: "We have no secrets from one another. I must tell mamma and my sister... Is it so terrible? Mamma will be pleased. Mamma loves you, but Lyda!"

She ran to the gates.

"Good-bye," she called out.

For a couple of minutes I stood and heard her running. I had no desire to go home, there was nothing there to go for. I stood for a while lost in thought, and then quietly dragged myself back, to have one more look at the house in which she lived, the dear, simple, old house, which seemed to look at me with the windows of the mezzanine for eyes, and to understand everything. I walked past the terrace, sat down on a bench by the lawn-tennis court, in the darkness under an old elm-tree, and looked at the house. In the windows of the mezzanine, where Missyuss had her room, shone a bright light, and then a faint green glow. The lamp had been covered with a shade. Shadows began to move... I was filled with tenderness and a calm satisfaction, to think that I could let myself be carried away and fall in love, and at the same time I felt uneasy at the thought that only a few yards away in one of the rooms of the house lay Lyda who did not love me, and perhaps hated me. I sat and waited to see if Genya would come out. I listened attentively and it seemed to me they were sitting in the mezzanine.

An hour passed. The green light went out, and the shadows were no longer visible. The moon hung high above the house and

lit the sleeping garden and the avenues: I could distinctly see the dahlias and roses in the flower-bed in front of the house, and all seemed to be of one colour. It was very cold. I left the garden, picked up my overcoat in the road, and walked slowly home.

Next day after dinner when I went to the Volchaninovs', the glass door was wide open. I sat down on the terrace expecting Genya to come from behind the flower-bed or from one of the avenues, or to hear her voice come from out of the rooms; then I went into the drawing-room and the dining-room. There was not a soul to be seen. From the dining-room I went down a long passage into the hall, and then back again. There were several doors in the passage and behind one of them I could hear Lyda's voice:

"To the crow somewhere ... God ..." – she spoke slowly and distinctly, and was probably dictating – " ... God sent a piece of cheese... To the crow ... somewhere... Who is there?" she called out suddenly as she heard my footsteps.

"It is I."

"Oh! excuse me. I can't come out just now. I am teaching Masha."

"Is Ekaterina Pavlovna in the garden?"

"No. She and my sister left to-day for my Aunt's in Penga, and in the winter they are probably going abroad." She added after a short silence: "To the crow somewhere God sent a pi-ece of cheese. Have you got that?"

I went out into the hall, and, without a thought in my head,

stood and looked out at the pond and the village, and still I heard:
"A piece of cheese... To the crow somewhere God sent a piece of cheese."

And I left the house by the way I had come the first time, only reversing the order, from the yard into the garden, past the house, then along the lime-walk. Here a boy overtook me and handed me a note: "I have told my sister everything and she insists on my parting from you," I read. "I could not hurt her by disobeying. God will give you happiness. If you knew how bitterly mamma and I have cried."

Then through the fir avenue and the rotten fence...Over the fields where the corn was ripening and the quails screamed, cows and shackled horses now were browsing. Here and there on the hills the winter corn was already showing green. A sober, workaday mood possessed me and I was ashamed of all I had said at the Volchaninovs', and once more it became tedious to go on living. I went home, packed my things, and left that evening for Petersburg.

I never saw the Volchaninovs again. Lately on my way to the Crimea I met Bielokurov at a station. As of old he was in a *poddiovka*, wearing an embroidered shirt, and when I asked after his health, he replied: "Quite well, thanks be to God." He began to talk. He had sold his estate and bought another, smaller one in the name of Lyabov Ivanovna. He told me a little about the Volchaninovs. Lyda, he said, still lived at Sholkovka and taught the children in the school; little by little she succeeded

in gathering round herself a circle of sympathetic people, who formed a strong party, and at the last Zemstvo election they drove out Balaguin, who up till then had had the whole district in his hands. Of Genya Bielokurov said that she did not live at home and he did not know where she was.

I have already begun to forget about the house with the mezzanine, and only now and then, when I am working or reading, suddenly – without rhyme or reason – I remember the green light in the window, and the sound of my own footsteps as I walked through the fields that night, when I was in love, rubbing my hands to keep them warm. And even more rarely, when I am sad and lonely, I begin already to recollect and it seems to me that I, too, am being remembered and waited for, and that we shall meet...

Missyuss, where are you?

TYPHUS

IN a smoking-compartment of the mail-train from Petrograd to Moscow sat a young lieutenant, Klimov by name. Opposite him sat an elderly man with a clean-shaven, shipmaster's face, to all appearances a well-to-do Finn or Swede, who all through the journey smoked a pipe and talked round and round the same subject.

"Ha! you are an officer! My brother is also an officer, but he is a sailor. He is a sailor and is stationed at Kronstadt. Why are you going to Moscow?"

"I am stationed there."

"Ha! Are you married?"

"No. I live with my aunt and sister."

"My brother is also an officer, but he is married and has a wife and three children. Ha!"

The Finn looked surprised at something, smiled broadly and fatuously as he exclaimed, "Ha," and every now and then blew through the stem of his pipe. Klimov, who was feeling rather unwell, and not at all inclined to answer questions, hated him with all his heart. He thought how good it would be to snatch his gurgling pipe out of his hands and throw it under the seat and to order the Finn himself into another car.

"They are awful people, these Finns and ... Greeks," he thought. "Useless, good-for-nothing, disgusting people. They

only cumber the earth. What is the good of them?"

And the thought of Finns and Greeks filled him with a kind of nausea. He tried to compare them with the French and the Italians, but the idea of those races somehow roused in him the notion of organ-grinders, naked women, and the foreign oleographs which hung over the chest of drawers in his aunt's house.

The young officer felt generally out of sorts. There seemed to be no room for his arms and legs, though he had the whole seat to himself; his mouth was dry and sticky, his head was heavy and his clouded thoughts seemed to wander at random, not only in his head, but also outside it among the seats and the people looming in the darkness. Through the turmoil in his brain, as through a dream, he heard the murmur of voices, the rattle of the wheels, the slamming of doors. Bells, whistles, conductors, the tramp of the people on the platforms came oftener than usual. The time slipped by quickly, imperceptibly, and it seemed that the train stopped every minute at a station as now and then there would come up the sound of metallic voices:

"Is the post ready?"

"Ready."

It seemed to him that the stove-neater came in too often to look at the thermometer, and that trains never stopped passing and his own train was always roaring over bridges. The noise, the whistle, the Finn, the tobacco smoke – all mixed with the ominous shifting of misty shapes, weighed on Klimov like an

intolerable nightmare. In terrible anguish he lifted up his aching head, looked at the lamp whose light was encircled with shadows and misty spots; he wanted to ask for water, but his dry tongue would hardly move, and he had hardly strength enough to answer the Finn's questions. He tried to lie down more comfortably and sleep, but he could not succeed; the Finn fell asleep several times, woke up and lighted his pipe, talked to him with his "Ha!" and went to sleep again; and the lieutenant could still not find room for his legs on the seat, and all the while the ominous figures shifted before his eyes.

At Spirov he got out to have a drink of water. He saw some people sitting at a table eating hurriedly.

"How can they eat?" he thought, trying to avoid the smell of roast meat in the air and seeing the chewing mouths, for both seemed to him utterly disgusting and made him feel sick.

A handsome lady was talking to a military man in a red cap, and she showed magnificent white teeth when she smiled; her smile, her teeth, the lady herself produced in Klimov the same impression of disgust as the ham and the fried cutlets. He could not understand how the military man in the red cap could bear to sit near her and look at her healthy smiling face.

After he had drunk some water, he went back to his place. The Finn sat and smoked. His pipe gurgled and sucked like a galoché full of holes in dirty weather.

"Ha!" he said with some surprise. "What station is this?"

"I don't know," said Klimov, lying down and shutting his

mouth to keep out the acrid tobacco smoke.

"When do we get to Tver."

"I don't know. I am sorry, I ... I can't talk. I am not well. I have a cold."

The Finn knocked out his pipe against the window-frame and began to talk of his brother, the sailor. Klimov paid no more attention to him and thought in agony of his soft, comfortable bed, of the bottle of cold water, of his sister Katy, who knew so well how to tuck him up and cosset him. He even smiled when there flashed across his mind his soldier-servant Pavel, taking off his heavy, close-fitting boots and putting water on the table. It seemed to him that he would only have to lie on his bed and drink some water and his nightmare would give way to a sound, healthy sleep.

"Is the post ready?" came a dull voice from a distance.

"Ready," answered a loud, bass voice almost by the very window.

It was the second or third station from Spirov.

Time passed quickly, seemed to gallop along, and there would be no end to the bells, whistles, and stops. In despair Klimov pressed his face into the corner of the cushion, held his head in his hands, and again began to think of his sister Katy and his orderly Pavel; but his sister and his orderly got mixed up with the looming figures and whirled about and disappeared. His breath, thrown back from the cushion, burned his face, and his legs ached and a draught from the window poured into his back,

but, painful though it was, he refused to change his position... A heavy, drugging torpor crept over him and chained his limbs.

When at length he raised his head, the car was quite light. The passengers were putting on their overcoats and moving about. The train stopped. Porters in white aprons and number-plates bustled about the passengers and seized their boxes. Klimov put on his greatcoat mechanically and left the train, and he felt as though it were not himself walking, but some one else, a stranger, and he felt that he was accompanied by the heat of the train, his thirst, and the ominous, lowering figures which all night long had prevented his sleeping. Mechanically he got his luggage and took a cab. The cabman charged him one rouble and twenty-five copecks for driving him to Povarska Street, but he did not haggle and submissively took his seat in the sledge. He could still grasp the difference in numbers, but money had no value to him whatever.

At home Klimov was met by his aunt and his sister Katy, a girl of eighteen. Katy had a copy-book and a pencil in her hands as she greeted him, and he remembered that she was preparing for a teacher's examination. He took no notice of their greetings and questions, but gasped from the heat, and walked aimlessly through the rooms until he reached his own, and then he fell prone on the bed. The Finn, the red cap, the lady with the white teeth, the smell of roast meat, the shifting spot in the lamp, filled his mind and he lost consciousness and did not hear the frightened voices near him.

When he came to himself he found himself in bed, undressed, and noticed the water-bottle and Pavel, but it did not make him any more comfortable nor easy. His legs and arms, as before, felt cramped, his tongue clove to his palate, and he could hear the chuckle of the Finn's pipe... By the bed, growing out of Pavel's broad back, a stout, black-bearded doctor was bustling.

"All right, all right, my lad," he murmured. "Excellent, excellent... Jist so, jist so..."

The doctor called Klimov "my lad." Instead of "just so," he said "jist saow," and instead of "yes," "yies."

"Yies, yies, yies," he said. "Jist saow, jist saow... Don't be downhearted!"

The doctor's quick, careless way of speaking, his well-fed face, and the condescending tone in which he said "my lad" exasperated Klimov.

"Why do you call me 'my lad'?" he moaned. "Why this familiarity, damn it all?"

And he was frightened by the sound of his own voice. It was so dry, weak, and hollow that he could hardly recognise it.

"Excellent, excellent," murmured the doctor, not at all offended. "Yies, yies. You mustn't be cross."

And at home the time galloped away as alarmingly quickly as in the train... The light of day in his bedroom was every now and then changed to the dim light of evening... The doctor never seemed to leave the bedside, and his "Yies, yies, yies," could be heard at every moment. Through the room stretched

an endless row of faces; Pavel, the Finn, Captain Taroshevich, Sergeant Maximenko, the red cap, the lady with the white teeth, the doctor. All of them talked, waved their hands, smoked, ate. Once in broad daylight Klimov saw his regimental priest, Father Alexander, in his stole and with the host in his hands, standing by the bedside and muttering something with such a serious expression as Klimov had never seen him wear before. The lieutenant remembered that Father Alexander used to call all the Catholic officers Poles, and wishing to make the priest laugh, he exclaimed:

"Father Taroshevich, the Poles have fled to the woods."

But Father Alexander, usually a gay, light-hearted man, did not laugh and looked even more serious, and made the sign of the cross over Klimov. At night, one after the other, there would come slowly creeping in and out two shadows. They were his aunt and his sister. The shadow of his sister would kneel down and pray; she would bow to the ikon, and her grey shadow on the wall would bow, too, so that two shadows prayed to God. And all the time there was a smell of roast meat and of the Finn's pipe, but once Klimov could detect a distinct smell of incense. He nearly vomited and cried:

"Incense! Take it away."

There was no reply. He could only hear priests chanting in an undertone and some one running on the stairs.

When Klimov recovered from his delirium there was not a soul in the bedroom. The morning sun flared through the window

and the drawn curtains, and a trembling beam, thin and keen as a sword, played on the water-bottle. He could hear the rattle of wheels – that meant there was no more snow in the streets. The lieutenant looked at the sunbeam, at the familiar furniture and the door, and his first inclination was to laugh. His chest and stomach trembled with a sweet, happy, tickling laughter. From head to foot his whole body was filled with a feeling of infinite happiness, like that which the first man must have felt when he stood erect and beheld the world for the first time. Klimov had a passionate longing for people, movement, talk. His body lay motionless; he could only move his hands, but he hardly noticed it, for his whole attention was fixed on little things. He was delighted with his breathing and with his laughter; he was delighted with the existence of the water-bottle, the ceiling, the sunbeam, the ribbon on the curtain. God's world, even in such a narrow corner as his bedroom, seemed to him beautiful, varied, great. When the doctor appeared the lieutenant thought how nice his medicine was, how nice and sympathetic the doctor was, how nice and interesting people were, on the whole.

"Yies, yies, yies," said the doctor. "Excellent, excellent. Now we are well again. Jist saow. Jist saow."

The lieutenant listened and laughed gleefully. He remembered the Finn, the lady with the white teeth, the train, and he wanted to eat and smoke.

"Doctor," he said, "tell them to bring me a slice of rye bread and salt, and some sardines..."

The doctor refused. Pavel did not obey his order and refused to go for bread. The lieutenant could not bear it and began to cry like a thwarted child.

"Ba-by," the doctor laughed. "Mamma! Hush-aby!"

Klimov also began to laugh, and when the doctor had gone, he fell sound asleep. He woke up with the same feeling of joy and happiness. His aunt was sitting by his bed.

"Oh, aunty!" He was very happy. "What has been the matter with me?"

"Typhus."

"I say! And now I am well, quite well! Where is Katy?"

"She is not at home. She has probably gone to see some one after her examination."

The old woman bent over her stocking as she said this; her lips began to tremble; she turned her face away and suddenly began to sob. In her grief, she forgot the doctor's orders and cried:

"Oh! Katy! Katy! Our angel is gone from us! She is gone!"

She dropped her stocking and stooped down for it, and her cap fell off her head. Klimov stared at her grey hair, could not understand, was alarmed for Katy, and asked:

"But where is she, aunty?"

The old woman, who had already forgotten Klimov and remembered only her grief, said:

"She caught typhus from you and ... and died. She was buried the day before yesterday."

This sudden appalling piece of news came home to Klimov's

mind, but dreadful and shocking though it was it could not subdue the animal joy which thrilled through the convalescent lieutenant. He cried, laughed, and soon began to complain that he was given nothing to eat.

Only a week later, when, supported by Pavel, he walked in a dressing-gown to the window, and saw the grey spring sky and heard the horrible rattle of some old rails being carried by on a lorry, then his heart ached with sorrow and he began to weep and pressed his forehead against the window-frame.

"How unhappy I am!" he murmured. "My God, how unhappy I am!"

And joy gave way to his habitual weariness and a sense of his irreparable loss.

GOOSEBERRIES

FROM early morning the sky had been overcast with clouds; the day was still, cool, and wearisome, as usual on grey, dull days when the clouds hang low over the fields and it looks like rain, which never comes. Ivan Ivanich, the veterinary surgeon, and Bourkin, the schoolmaster, were tired of walking and the fields seemed endless to them. Far ahead they could just see the windmills of the village of Mirousky, to the right stretched away to disappear behind the village a line of hills, and they knew that it was the bank of the river; meadows, green willows, farmhouses; and from one of the hills there could be seen a field as endless, telegraph-posts, and the train, looking from a distance like a crawling caterpillar, and in clear weather even the town. In the calm weather when all Nature seemed gentle and melancholy, Ivan Ivanich and Bourkin were filled with love for the fields and thought how grand and beautiful the country was.

"Last time, when we stopped in Prokofyi's shed," said Bourkin, "you were going to tell me a story."

"Yes. I wanted to tell you about my brother."

Ivan Ivanich took a deep breath and lighted his pipe before beginning his story, but just then the rain began to fall. And in about five minutes it came pelting down and showed no signs of stopping. Ivan Ivanich stopped and hesitated; the dogs, wet through, stood with their tails between their legs and looked at

them mournfully.

"We ought to take shelter," said Bourkin. "Let us go to Aliokhin. It is close by."

"Very well."

They took a short cut over a stubble-field and then bore to the right, until they came to the road. Soon there appeared poplars, a garden, the red roofs of granaries; the river began to glimmer and they came to a wide road with a mill and a white bathing-shed. It was Sophino, where Aliokhin lived.

The mill was working, drowning the sound of the rain, and the dam shook. Round the carts stood wet horses, hanging their heads, and men were walking about with their heads covered with sacks. It was wet, muddy, and unpleasant, and the river looked cold and sullen. Ivan Ivanich and Bourkin felt wet and uncomfortable through and through; their feet were tired with walking in the mud, and they walked past the dam to the barn in silence as though they were angry with each other.

In one of the barns a winnowing-machine was working, sending out clouds of dust. On the threshold stood Aliokhin himself, a man of about forty, tall and stout, with long hair, more like a professor or a painter than a farmer. He was wearing a grimy white shirt and rope belt, and pants instead of trousers; and his boots were covered with mud and straw. His nose and eyes were black with dust. He recognised Ivan Ivanich and was apparently very pleased.

"Please, gentlemen," he said, "go to the house. I'll be with you

in a minute."

The house was large and two-storied. Aliokhin lived downstairs in two vaulted rooms with little windows designed for the farm-hands; the farmhouse was plain, and the place smelled of rye bread and vodka, and leather. He rarely used the reception-rooms, only when guests arrived. Ivan Ivanich and Bourkin were received by a chambermaid; such a pretty young woman that both of them stopped and exchanged glances.

"You cannot imagine how glad I am to see you, gentlemen," said Aliokhin, coming after them into the hall. "I never expected you. Pelagueya," he said to the maid, "give my friends a change of clothes. And I will change, too. But I must have a bath. I haven't had one since the spring. Wouldn't you like to come to the bathing-shed? And meanwhile our things will be got ready."

Pretty Pelagueya, dainty and sweet, brought towels and soap, and Aliokhin led his guests to the bathing-shed.

"Yes," he said, "it is a long time since I had a bath. My bathing-shed is all right, as you see. My father and I put it up, but somehow I have no time to bathe."

He sat down on the step and lathered his long hair and neck, and the water round him became brown.

"Yes. I see," said Ivan Ivanich heavily, looking at his head.

"It is a long time since I bathed," said Aliokhin shyly, as he soaped himself again, and the water round him became dark blue, like ink.

Ivan Ivanich came out of the shed, plunged into the water

with a splash, and swam about in the rain, flapping his arms, and sending waves back, and on the waves tossed white lilies; he swam out to the middle of the pool and dived, and in a minute came up again in another place and kept on swimming and diving, trying to reach the bottom. "Ah! how delicious!" he shouted in his glee. "How delicious!" He swam to the mill, spoke to the peasants, and came back, and in the middle of the pool he lay on his back to let the rain fall on his face. Bourkin and Aliokhin were already dressed and ready to go, but he kept on swimming and diving.

"Delicious," he said. "Too delicious!"

"You've had enough," shouted Bourkin.

They went to the house. And only when the lamp was lit in the large drawing-room up-stairs, and Bourkin and Ivan Ivanich, dressed in silk dressing-gowns and warm slippers, lounged in chairs, and Aliokhin himself, washed and brushed, in a new frock coat, paced up and down evidently delighting in the warmth and cleanliness and dry clothes and slippers, and pretty Pelagueya, noiselessly tripping over the carpet and smiling sweetly, brought in tea and jam on a tray, only then did Ivan Ivanich begin his story, and it was as though he was being listened to not only by Bourkin and Aliokhin, but also by the old and young ladies and the officer who looked down so staidly and tranquilly from the golden frames.

"We are two brothers," he began, "I, Ivan Ivanich, and Nicholai Ivanich, two years younger. I went in for study

and became a veterinary surgeon, while Nicholai was at the Exchequer Court when he was nineteen. Our father, Tchimasha-Himalaysky, was a cantonist, but he died with an officer's rank and left us his title of nobility and a small estate. After his death the estate went to pay his debts. However, we spent our childhood there in the country. We were just like peasant's children, spent days and nights in the fields and the woods, minded the house, barked the lime-trees, fished, and so on... And you know once a man has fished, or watched the thrushes hovering in flocks over the village in the bright, cool, autumn days, he can never really be a townsman, and to the day of his death he will be drawn to the country. My brother pined away in the Exchequer. Years passed and he sat in the same place, wrote out the same documents, and thought of one thing, how to get back to the country. And little by little his distress became a definite disorder, a fixed idea – to buy a small farm somewhere by the bank of a river or a lake.

"He was a good fellow and I loved him, but I never sympathised with the desire to shut oneself up on one's own farm. It is a common saying that a man needs only six feet of land. But surely a corpse wants that, not a man. And I hear that our intellectuals have a longing for the land and want to acquire farms. But it all comes down to the six feet of land. To leave town, and the struggle and the swim of life, and go and hide yourself in a farmhouse is not life – it is egoism, laziness; it is a kind of monasticism, but monasticism without action. A man needs, not six feet of land, not a farm, but the whole earth, all Nature, where

in full liberty he can display all the properties and qualities of the free spirit.

"My brother Nicholai, sitting in his office, would dream of eating his own *schì*, with its savoury smell floating across the farmyard; and of eating out in the open air, and of sleeping in the sun, and of sitting for hours together on a seat by the gate and gazing at the field and the forest. Books on agriculture and the hints in almanacs were his joy, his favourite spiritual food; and he liked reading newspapers, but only the advertisements of land to be sold, so many acres of arable and grass land, with a farmhouse, river, garden, mill, and mill-pond. And he would dream of garden-walls, flowers, fruits, nests, carp in the pond, don't you know, and all the rest of it. These fantasies of his used to vary according to the advertisements he found, but somehow there was always a gooseberry-bush in every one. Not a house, not a romantic spot could he imagine without its gooseberry-bush.

"'Country life has its advantages,' he used to say. 'You sit on the veranda drinking tea and your ducklings swim on the pond, and everything smells good ... and there are gooseberries.'

"He used to draw out a plan of his estate and always the same things were shown on it: (a) Farmhouse, (b) cottage, (c) vegetable garden, (d) gooseberry-bush. He used to live meagrely and never had enough to eat and drink, dressed God knows how, exactly like a beggar, and always saved and put his money into the bank. He was terribly stingy. It used to hurt me to see him, and I used

to give him money to go away for a holiday, but he would put that away, too. Once a man gets a fixed idea, there's nothing to be done.

"Years passed; he was transferred to another province. He completed his fortieth year and was still reading advertisements in the papers and saving up his money. Then I heard he was married. Still with the same idea of buying a farmhouse with a gooseberry-bush, he married an elderly, ugly widow, not out of any feeling for her, but because she had money. With her he still lived stingily, kept her half-starved, and put the money into the bank in his own name. She had been the wife of a postmaster and was used to good living, but with her second husband she did not even have enough black bread; she pined away in her new life, and in three years or so gave up her soul to God. And my brother never for a moment thought himself to blame for her death. Money, like vodka, can play queer tricks with a man. Once in our town a merchant lay dying. Before his death he asked for some honey, and he ate all his notes and scrip with the honey so that nobody should get it. Once I was examining a herd of cattle at a station and a horse-jobber fell under the engine, and his foot was cut off. We carried him into the waiting-room, with the blood pouring down – a terrible business – and all the while he kept on asking anxiously for his foot; he had twenty-five roubles in his boot and did not want to lose them."

"Keep to your story," said Bourkin.

"After the death of his wife," Ivan Ivanich continued, after

a long pause, "my brother began to look out for an estate. Of course you may search for five years, and even then buy a pig in a poke. Through an agent my brother Nicholai raised a mortgage and bought three hundred acres with a farmhouse, a cottage, and a park, but there was no orchard, no gooseberry-bush, no duck-pond; there was a river but the water in it was coffee-coloured because the estate lay between a brick-yard and a gelatine factory. But my brother Nicholai was not worried about that; he ordered twenty gooseberry-bushes and settled down to a country life.

"Last year I paid him a visit. I thought I'd go and see how things were with him. In his letters my brother called his estate Tchimarshov Corner, or Himalayskoe. I arrived at Himalayskoe in the afternoon. It was hot. There were ditches, fences, hedges, rows of young fir-trees, trees everywhere, and there was no telling how to cross the yard or where to put your horse. I went to the house and was met by a red-haired dog, as fat as a pig. He tried to bark but felt too lazy. Out of the kitchen came the cook, barefooted, and also as fat as a pig, and said that the master was having his afternoon rest. I went in to my brother and found him sitting on his bed with his knees covered with a blanket; he looked old, stout, flabby; his cheeks, nose, and lips were pendulous. I half expected him to grunt like a pig.

"We embraced and shed a tear of joy and also of sadness to think that we had once been young, but were now both going grey and nearing death. He dressed and took me to see his estate.

"Well? How are you getting on?" I asked.

"All right, thank God. I am doing very well."

"He was no longer the poor, tired official, but a real landowner and a person of consequence. He had got used to the place and liked it, ate a great deal, took Russian baths, was growing fat, had already gone to law with the parish and the two factories, and was much offended if the peasants did not call him 'Your Lordship.' And, like a good landowner, he looked after his soul and did good works pompously, never simply. What good works? He cured the peasants of all kinds of diseases with soda and castor-oil, and on his birthday he would have a thanksgiving service held in the middle of the village, and would treat the peasants to half a bucket of vodka, which he thought the right thing to do. Ah! Those horrible buckets of vodka. One day a greasy landowner will drag the peasants before the Zembro Court for trespass, and the next, if it's a holiday, he will give them a bucket of vodka, and they drink and shout Hooray! and lick his boots in their drunkenness. A change to good eating and idleness always fills a Russian with the most preposterous self-conceit. Nicholai Ivanich who, when he was in the Exchequer, was terrified to have an opinion of his own, now imagined that what he said was law. 'Education is necessary for the masses, but they are not fit for it.' 'Corporal punishment is generally harmful, but in certain cases it is useful and indispensable.'

"I know the people and I know how to treat them," he would say. "The people love me. I have only to raise my finger and they

will do as I wish.'

"And all this, mark you, was said with a kindly smile of wisdom. He was constantly saying: 'We noblemen,' or 'I, as a nobleman.' Apparently he had forgotten that our grandfather was a peasant and our father a common soldier. Even our family name, Tchimacha-Himalaysky, which is really an absurd one, seemed to him full-sounding, distinguished, and very pleasing.

"But my point does not concern him so much as myself. I want to tell you what a change took place in me in those few hours while I was in his house. In the evening, while we were having tea, the cook laid a plateful of gooseberries on the table. They had not been bought, but were his own gooseberries, plucked for the first time since the bushes were planted. Nicholai Ivanich laughed with joy and for a minute or two he looked in silence at the gooseberries with tears in his eyes. He could not speak for excitement, then put one into his mouth, glanced at me in triumph, like a child at last being given its favourite toy, and said:

"How good they are!"

"He went on eating greedily, and saying all the while:

"How good they are! Do try one!"

"It was hard and sour, but, as Poushkin said, the illusion which exalts us is dearer to us than ten thousand truths. I saw a happy man, one whose dearest dream had come true, who had attained his goal in life, who had got what he wanted, and was pleased with his destiny and with himself. In my idea of human life there is always some alloy of sadness, but now at the

sight of a happy man I was filled with something like despair. And at night it grew on me. A bed was made up for me in the room near my brother's and I could hear him, unable to sleep, going again and again to the plate of gooseberries. I thought: 'After all, what a lot of contented, happy people there must be! What an overwhelming power that means! I look at this life and see the arrogance and the idleness of the strong, the ignorance and bestiality of the weak, the horrible poverty everywhere, overcrowding, drunkenness, hypocrisy, falsehood... Meanwhile in all the houses, all the streets, there is peace; out of fifty thousand people who live in our town there is not one to kick against it all. Think of the people who go to the market for food: during the day they eat; at night they sleep, talk nonsense, marry, grow old, piously follow their dead to the cemetery; one never sees or hears those who suffer, and all the horror of life goes on somewhere behind the scenes. Everything is quiet, peaceful, and against it all there is only the silent protest of statistics; so many go mad, so many gallons are drunk, so many children die of starvation... And such a state of things is obviously what we want; apparently a happy man only feels so because the unhappy bear their burden in silence, but for which happiness would be impossible. It is a general hypnosis. Every happy man should have some one with a little hammer at his door to knock and remind him that there are unhappy people, and that, however happy he may be, life will sooner or later show its claws, and some misfortune will befall him – illness, poverty, loss, and then

no one will see or hear him, just as he now neither sees nor hears others. But there is no man with a hammer, and the happy go on living, just a little fluttered with the petty cares of every day, like an aspen-tree in the wind – and everything is all right.'

"That night I was able to understand how I, too, had been content and happy," Ivan Ivanich went on, getting up. "I, too, at meals or out hunting, used to lay down the law about living, and religion, and governing the masses. I, too, used to say that teaching is light, that education is necessary, but that for simple folk reading and writing is enough for the present. Freedom is a boon, I used to say, as essential as the air we breathe, but we must wait. Yes – I used to say so, but now I ask: 'Why do we wait?'" Ivan Ivanich glanced angrily at Bourkin. "Why do we wait, I ask you? What considerations keep us fast? I am told that we cannot have everything at once, and that every idea is realised in time. But who says so? Where is the proof that it is so? You refer me to the natural order of things, to the law of cause and effect, but is there order or natural law in that I, a living, thinking creature, should stand by a ditch until it fills up, or is narrowed, when I could jump it or throw a bridge over it? Tell me, I say, why should we wait? Wait, when we have no strength to live, and yet must live and are full of the desire to live!

"I left my brother early the next morning, and from that time on I found it impossible to live in town. The peace and the quiet of it oppress me. I dare not look in at the windows, for nothing is more dreadful to see than the sight of a happy family, sitting

round a table, having tea. I am an old man now and am no good for the struggle. I commenced late. I can only grieve within my soul, and fret and sulk. At night my head buzzes with the rush of my thoughts and I cannot sleep... Ah! If I were young!"

Ivan Ivanich walked excitedly up and down the room and repeated:

"If I were young."

He suddenly walked up to Aliokhin and shook him first by one hand and then by the other.

"Pavel Konstantinich," he said in a voice of entreaty, "don't be satisfied, don't let yourself be lulled to sleep! While you are young, strong, wealthy, do not cease to do good! Happiness does not exist, nor should it, and if there is any meaning or purpose in life, they are not in our peddling little happiness, but in something reasonable and grand. Do good!"

Ivan Ivanich said this with a piteous supplicating smile, as though he were asking a personal favour.

Then they all three sat in different corners of the drawing-room and were silent. Ivan Ivanich's story had satisfied neither Bourkin nor Aliokhin. With the generals and ladies looking down from their gilt frames, seeming alive in the firelight, it was tedious to hear the story of a miserable official who ate gooseberries... Somehow they had a longing to hear and to speak of charming people, and of women. And the mere fact of sitting in the drawing-room where everything – the lamp with its coloured shade, the chairs, and the carpet under their feet – told

how the very people who now looked down at them from their frames once walked, and sat and had tea there, and the fact that pretty Pelagueya was near – was much better than any story.

Aliokhin wanted very much to go to bed; he had to get up for his work very early, about two in the morning, and now his eyes were closing, but he was afraid of his guests saying something interesting without his hearing it, so he would not go. He did not trouble to think whether what Ivan Ivanich had been saying was clever or right; his guests were talking of neither groats, nor hay, nor tar, but of something which had no bearing on his life, and he liked it and wanted them to go on...

"However, it's time to go to bed," said Bourkin, getting up. "I will wish you good night."

Aliokhin said good night and went down-stairs, and left his guests. Each had a large room with an old wooden bed and carved ornaments; in the corner was an ivory crucifix; and their wide, cool beds, made by pretty Pelagueya, smelled sweetly of clean linen.

Ivan Ivanich undressed in silence and lay down.

"God forgive me, a wicked sinner," he murmured, as he drew the clothes over his head.

A smell of burning tobacco came from his pipe which lay on the table, and Bourkin could not sleep for a long time and was worried because he could not make out where the unpleasant smell came from.

The rain beat against the windows all night long.

IN EXILE

OLD Simeon, whose nickname was Brains, and a young Tartar, whose name nobody knew, were sitting on the bank of the river by a wood-fire. The other three ferrymen were in the hut. Simeon who was an old man of about sixty, skinny and toothless, but broad-shouldered and healthy, was drunk. He would long ago have gone to bed, but he had a bottle in his pocket and was afraid of his comrades asking him for vodka. The Tartar was ill and miserable, and, pulling his rags about him, he went on talking about the good things in the province of Simbirsk, and what a beautiful and clever wife he had left at home. He was not more than twenty-five, and now, by the light of the wood-fire, with his pale, sorrowful, sickly face, he looked a mere boy.

"Of course, it is not a paradise here," said Brains, "you see, water, the bare bushes by the river, clay everywhere – nothing else... It is long past Easter and there is still ice on the water and this morning there was snow..."

"Bad! Bad!" said the Tartar with a frightened look.

A few yards away flowed the dark, cold river, muttering, dashing against the holes in the clayey banks as it tore along to the distant sea. By the bank they were sitting on, loomed a great barge, which the ferrymen call a *karbass*. Far away and away, flashing out, flaring up, were fires crawling like snakes – last year's grass being burned. And behind the water again was

darkness. Little banks of ice could be heard knocking against the barge... It was very damp and cold...

The Tartar glanced at the sky. There were as many stars as at home, and the darkness was the same, but something was missing. At home in the Simbirsk province the stars and the sky were altogether different.

"Bad! Bad!" he repeated.

"You will get used to it," said Brains with a laugh. "You are young yet and foolish; the milk is hardly dry on your lips, and in your folly you imagine that there is no one unhappier than you, but there will come a time when you will say: God give every one such a life! Just look at me. In a week's time the floods will be gone, and we will fix the ferry here, and all of you will go away into Siberia and I shall stay here, going to and fro. I have been living thus for the last two-and-twenty years, but, thank God, I want nothing. God give everybody such a life."

The Tartar threw some branches onto the fire, crawled near to it and said:

"My father is sick. When he dies, my mother and my wife have promised to come here."

"What do you want your mother and your wife for?" asked Brains. "Just foolishness, my friend. It's the devil tempting you, plague take him. Don't listen to the Evil One. Don't give way to him. When he talks to you about women you should answer him sharply: 'I don't want them!' When he talks of freedom, you should stick to it and say: 'I don't want it. I want nothing! No

father, no mother, no wife, no freedom, no home, no love! I want nothing.' Plague take 'em all."

Brains took a swig at his bottle and went on:

"My brother, I am not an ordinary peasant. I don't come from the servile masses. I am the son of a deacon, and when I was a free man at Rursk, I used to wear a frock coat, and now I have brought myself to such a point that I can sleep naked on the ground and eat grass. God give such a life to everybody. I want nothing. I am afraid of nobody and I think there is no man richer or freer than I. When they sent me here from Russia I set my teeth at once and said: 'I want nothing!' The devil whispers to me about my wife and my kindred, and about freedom and I say to him: 'I want nothing!' I stuck to it, and, you see, I live happily and have nothing to grumble at. If a man gives the devil the least opportunity and listens to him just once, then he is lost and has no hope of salvation: he will be over ears in the mire and will never get out. Not only peasants the like of you are lost, but the nobly born and the educated also. About fifteen years ago a certain nobleman was sent here from Russia. He had had some trouble with his brothers and had made a forgery in a will. People said he was a prince or a baron, but perhaps he was only a high official – who knows? Well, he came here and at once bought a house and land in Moukhzyink. 'I want to live by my own work,' said he, 'in the sweat of my brow, because I am no longer a nobleman but an exile.' 'Why,' said I. 'God help you, for that is good.' He was a young man then, ardent and eager; he used to mow and go

fishing, and he would ride sixty miles on horseback. Only one thing was wrong; from the very beginning he was always driving to the post-office at Guyrin. He used to sit in my boat and sigh: 'Ah! Simeon, it is a long time since they sent me any money from home.' 'You are better without money, Vassili Sergnevich,' said I. 'What's the good of it? You just throw away the past, as though it had never happened, as though it were only a dream, and start life afresh. Don't listen to the devil,' I said, 'he won't do you any good, and he will only tighten the noose. You want money now, but in a little while you will want something else, and then more and more. If,' said I, 'you want to be happy you must want nothing. Exactly... If,' I said, 'fate has been hard on you and me, it is no good asking her for charity and falling at her feet. We must ignore her and laugh at her.' That's what I said to him... Two years later I ferried him over and he rubbed his hands and laughed. 'I'm going,' said he, 'to Guyrin to meet my wife. She has taken pity on me, she says, and she is coming here. She is very kind and good.' And he gave a gasp of joy. Then one day he came with his wife, a beautiful young lady with a little girl in her arms and a lot of luggage. And Vassili Andreich kept turning and looking at her and could not look at her or praise her enough. 'Yes, Simeon, my friend, even in Siberia people live.' Well, thought I, all right, you won't be content. And from that time on, mark you, he used to go to Guyrin every week to find out if money had been sent from Russia. A terrible lot of money was wasted. 'She stays here,' said he, 'for my sake, and her youth and

beauty wither away here in Siberia. She shares my bitter lot with me,' said he, 'and I must give her all the pleasure I can for it...' To make his wife happier he took up with the officials and any kind of rubbish. And they couldn't have company without giving food and drink, and they must have a piano and a fluffy little dog on the sofa – bad cess to it... Luxury, in a word, all kinds of tricks. My lady did not stay with him long. How could she? Clay, water, cold, no vegetables, no fruit; uneducated people and drunkards, with no manners, and she was a pretty pampered young lady from the metropolis... Of course she got bored. And her husband was no longer a gentleman, but an exile – quite a different matter. Three years later, I remember, on the eve of the Assumption, I heard shouts from the other bank. I went over in the ferry and saw my lady, all wrapped up, with a young gentleman, a government official, in a troika... I ferried them across, they got into the carriage and disappeared, and I saw no more of them. Toward the morning Vassili Andreich came racing up in a coach and pair. 'Has my wife been across, Simeon, with a gentleman in spectacles?' 'She has,' said I, 'but you might as well look for the wind in the fields.' He raced after them and kept it up for five days and nights. When he came back he jumped on to the ferry and began to knock his head against the side and to cry aloud. 'You see,' said I, 'there you are.' And I laughed and reminded him: 'Even in Siberia people live.' But he went on beating his head harder than ever... Then he got the desire for freedom. His wife had gone to Russia and he longed to go there to see her and

take her away from her lover. And he began to go to the post-office every day, and then to the authorities of the town. He was always sending applications or personally handing them to the authorities, asking to have his term remitted and to be allowed to go, and he told me that he had spent over two hundred roubles on telegrams. He sold his land and mortgaged his house to the money-lenders. His hair went grey, he grew round-shouldered, and his face got yellow and consumptive-looking. He used to cough whenever he spoke and tears used to come to his eyes. He spent eight years on his applications, and at last he became happy again and lively: he had thought of a new dodge. His daughter, you see, had grown up. He doted on her and could never take his eyes off her. And, indeed, she was very pretty, dark and clever. Every Sunday he used to go to church with her at Guyrin. They would stand side by side on the ferry, and she would smile and he would devour her with his eyes. 'Yes, Simeon,' he would say. 'Even in Siberia people live. Even in Siberia there is happiness. Look what a fine daughter I have. You wouldn't find one like her in a thousand miles' journey.' 'She's a nice girl,' said I. 'Oh, yes.' ... And I thought to myself: 'You wait... She is young. Young blood will have its way; she wants to live and what life is there here?' And she began to pine away... Wasting, wasting away, she withered away, fell ill and had to keep to her bed... Consumption. That's Siberian happiness, plague take it; that's Siberian life... He rushed all over the place after the doctors and dragged them home with him. If he heard of a doctor or a quack

three hundred miles off he would rush off after him. He spent a terrific amount of money on doctors and I think it would have been much better spent on drink. All the same she had to die. No help for it. Then it was all up with him. He thought of hanging himself, and of trying to escape to Russia. That would be the end of him. He would try to escape: he would be caught, tried, penal servitude, flogging."

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